The ALSJ Young Scholar Award for 2013
Kumiko KOBAYASHI

"Only the Flat Irons": Counter-monuments in The Sound and the Fury

As a postwar southerner who did not actually experience the Civil War, William Faulkner had only second-hand access to that epic event, forming a certain kind of memory which Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory," the experiences of those who grow up "dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (22). In a 1958 interview, Faulkner revealed how his own childhood memory was intertwined with the memories of the Civil War that aged veterans and female survivors occasionally conveyed via commemorative ceremonies and casual reminiscences:

I was five-six-seven years old around 1904-5-6 and 7, old enough to understand to listen. [The veterans] didn't talk so much about that war, I had got that from the maiden spinster aunts which had never surrendered. But I can remember the old men, and they would get out the old shabby grey uniforms and get out the old battle-flag on Decoration, Memorial Day. Yes, I remember any number of them. But it was the aunts, the women, that had never given up. (Faulkner in the University 249)

By being constantly exposed to oral and visual witnessing of the Civil War, Faulkner found himself thoroughly embedded within the culture of the Lost Cause, an ideology prevalent in the New South that elevated Confederate soldiers...
Kumiko KOBAYASHI

2 to the status of self-sacrificing heroes who sought to protect the white paternalism and plantation economy of the antebellum South. As Charles Wilson argues, the Lost Cause movement was essentially a religious phenomenon, “a cult of the dead,” which celebrated the noble deaths of General Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and many nameless soldiers who died for the holy cause (36). The campaign for the Lost Cause was a “civil religion,” a spiritual movement arising out of mass culture and spreading across various denominations, in which people made commemorative rituals into everyday routines, as Faulkner’s aforementioned episode suggests.

Having lived in the postwar South and through the two major international conflicts that followed the Civil War, Faulkner employed Civil War monuments as important memory-work in his fiction. His interest in the monuments did not lie in depicting them faithfully but in problematizing the notion of monumentality per se. Faulkner’s idiosyncrasy as a southern modernist writer can be explored through his peculiar use of monuments in The Sound and the Fury. The text treats monuments in ways disruptive of the traditional concept of monumentality, which aims to glorify lost heroes in timeless statues, made of durable materials such as marble and bronze.

Of all the numerous studies of the novel, surprisingly few have attempted to probe the issue of monuments. In Richard King’s A Southern Renaissance, monumentality functions as a key concept, but rather than analyzing the material monuments appearing in the narrative, King utilizes monumentality as a purely abstract term suggesting the overbearing shadow cast by the historical power of the ancestors. Cynthia Dobbs explicitly deals with monumentality in The Sound and the Fury through a reading of various black bodies in the novel as a kind of memory-work, framed by “certain reified, dehumanizing views” which mythologize black bodies and turn them into an outlet for racialist nostalgia (3). Dobbs therefore views monumentality as a potentially debilitating concept for the marginalized, for it renders them as ahistorical embodiments cut off from the painful ramifications of their history.

As we shall see later in this essay, the negative treatment of monumentality is not at all a gesture distinctive to our time; it was already a dynamic feature of Faulkner’s contemporary art scene. The challenge for Faulkner was thus how to position himself both as a postwar southerner and a consummate modernist at the same time, and he seems to place monuments at the nexus of those two contrasting
perspectives. While monuments of the Lost Cause were predicated on the vindication of the territorial claims of white planters, the same objects in The Sound and the Fury point to a sense of sitelessness, a feeling that resists conventional monumentalization. In other words, the novel touches upon a certain kind of monumentalization that is directly at odds with the conventional public sculptures that postwar Southerners enshrined.

In this essay, I discuss how the process of monumentalization is at work in The Sound and the Fury, with a view to investigating Faulkner's subversive use of monuments. Rather than commemorating the holy deaths of Civil War heroes, the monuments in the novel signify the material traces of non-heroic people whose lives are incessantly driven toward radical self-effacement, including death. First, I discuss Faulkner's upbringing as it led him to conceive a unique kind of monumentality in his fiction. Second, I want to put Faulkner's treatment of monuments in the context of modernist art, in which the idea of monumentality was considered obsolete, a blind craving for the grandiose. By placing The Sound and the Fury in these two contexts, I aim to investigate Faulkner's response to the two milieus that he felt closest to—the postwar South and authentic modernist art—as this response shaped the quintessential modernist novel.

* * *

The story begins with a curious history of the Falkner/Faulkner family, which revolved around the (mis)location of monuments; that history led Faulkner to cultivate a keen awareness of both the allure and the problems inherent in the notion of monumentality. Asked to write a brief biography of his own in 1945, Faulkner gave a telling account of his great-grandfather, Colonel William Falkner, whom he described as "a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu" (Selected Letters 211). This ancestor was so prominent in his home environment, Faulkner goes on to claim, that "the county raised a marble effigy which still stands in Tippah County" (212). As the footnote attached to this passage points out, Faulkner's account of the history of this marble semblance of his great-grandfather is rather misleading; it was in fact a self-commissioned monument placed within his cemetery plot, a purely private enterprise that had nothing to do with county planning or commemoration (213). Whether Faulkner intentionally revised the monument's history to enhance the nobility of his great-grandfather
remains a mystery, but the episode does highlight a particular kind of mindset that engages itself in monument-building. Whether people erect monuments to celebrate the feats of others or their own, they usually do it to vindicate their own interpretation of the past. The two key figures who inspired Faulkner to incorporate monumental objects in his fictional writings, W. C. Murry Falkner and Sallie Murry Falkner, his paternal grandmother, exemplify such monument-building as a form of self-vindication.

As I have noted, Faulkner specified the beginning of the twentieth century as the period when his initial encounter with Civil War memories took place. This was also a signal moment in the cultural history of the South, one when Confederate monuments began to crowd its landscape. The year 1907 in particular marked a telling event that made a lasting impact on Faulkner’s novelistic imagination; it was the year when a Confederate monument was unveiled on the courthouse square of his hometown, Oxford. This monument would become a key landmark in his Yoknapatawpha Saga, most memorably featured in The Sound and the Fury.

For Faulkner, this monument carried not only public memories of the war but also ones very intimate for him, namely, the unfailing effort and commitment of his paternal grandmother to erect a monument in the square. As an ex-president of the Albert Sidney Johnston Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Sallie Murry engaged herself in the conservation of Confederate history (Blotner 96). As Karen Cox argues, the UDC was the driving force of the Lost Cause movement, aiming at the resurrection of “an idyllic Old South” by erecting monuments in local southern towns. The monuments were generic in form, modeled on a white Confederate soldier, and purportedly served to “educate coming generations of white southerners” (1). Eager to build a kind of monument that would commemorate all the soldiers from Lafayette County, Sallie insisted on erecting a monument in the square of the county-seat town rather than placing it within the University of Mississippi campus, as the committee had planned.¹ Sallie’s wish was partially fulfilled: although the monument was erected on the university campus, another sculpture honoring common soldiers was placed in front of the courthouse. Her death in 1906 was somewhat untimely, for the unveiling of the courthouse monument took place the following year. When Faulkner specifically referred to the years 1904–7 as his formative period for learning of the Confederacy, he may very well have had in mind Sallie’s
unyielding commitment to the place on which to erect the monument until the
very end of her life. So when Faulkner, in mapping out the fictional town of
Jefferson, decided to relocate the original statue from the university campus to the
Jefferson town square, he was clearly carrying out his grandmother's original
wish.

If Sallie Murry represented postwar southern white women's preoccupation
with the manipulation of their past through the monumentalization of their male
compatriots in the form of marble figures, the novelist's great-grandfather W. C.
Falkner embodied a more direct impulse for self-monumentalization, an option
still available for those nineteenth-century southerners who did not live long
enough to witness the real demise of the South that began around the century's
turn. As an ambitious self-made man and a southern patriarch seemingly free of
self-doubt, W. C. Falkner commissioned a Carrara marble statue of himself,
adorned in the Confederate uniform, and attempted to have it placed in the main
square of Ripley, his hometown. The town was reluctant to accede to Falkner's
rather ostentatious plan; the statue ended up being placed in his own plot in the
town's cemetery (Williamson 62).²

Although both W. C. Falkner and Sallie Murry were involved in monument-
building, we can see a signal difference between the two. While W. C. Falkner
wanted to place his marble image on the town's square to honor a personal success
that he considered the pride of the entire community, Sallie Murry worked hard to
place a Confederate soldier monument on Oxford's town square so as to
reconfigure the shameful past of defeat into a symbol of the Lost Cause. The
semiotic difference between the two—the former a mimetic embodiment of
triumphant success, the latter an iconic transmutation of the once defeated into a
self-abnegating hero—captures the conceptual shift in the desire for
monumentality that took place at the century's turn. As James Young notes,
monuments of the nineteenth century can be characterized as "heroic, self-
aggrandizing figurative icons" that celebrated "national ideals and triumphs"
(Memory's Edge 93). W. C. Falkner's act of self-monumentalization exemplifies
nineteenth-century optimism concerning monument-building, based upon the
assumption that a successful individual should be commemorated as a
community's treasure. Such straightforward optimism was no longer available to
Sallie Murry: she lived in the Reconstruction South and experienced the
significant rehabilitation that ensued after the South's defeat. As Charles Aiken
points out, most Confederate monuments were erected between 1900 and 1917, about half a century after the war (124). Such a belated upsurge in the production of Confederate monuments reveals the intense degree of anxiety Southerners suffered and from which they sought to escape, as John Winberry succinctly argues: "At that time, the present and the future held, it seemed, empty promises and the Southern mind retreated into the past and a memorialization of the Southern cause" (116). White southerners' infatuation with the remote past, materialized in monuments for Confederate soldiers, reveals the crucial absence of any spiritual bulwark within their reach. Michael North claims that the cardinal rule for monuments is "that they should make reference to something" (25). Monuments in the New South exhibit a stunning referential anachronism; they highlight the signal loss of an objective correlative for faith among postwar southerners.

The referential obsolescence that figured in the monuments of the Lost Cause movement became an object of harsh attack by modernist artists and critics. Their skepticism could most notably be seen in Lewis Mumford's 1937 essay, tellingly titled "The Death of the Monument." In it, Mumford takes a quintessentially modern standpoint, claiming that contemporary people were "oriented toward life and change" rather than "toward death and fixity" (264). Amidst the cultural atmosphere that gave precedence to change and progress, the concept of monumentality—what Mumford defined as "the notion of material survival by means of the monument"—went against a modern transient lifestyle that was not unlike the lifestyle of "the nomad" who "travelled light" (264). Hence the incompatibility of monuments and modernity: "The very notion of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument" (264). Modernist art, according to Mumford, should be art that "represents the deeper impulses of our civilization," which are the impulses for transience and renovation (264). So long as monuments signified permanence and fixity, they never reached the state of modernist art, but merely remained outmoded obelisks whose hackneyed logic had no place in a social milieu that furiously pushed toward innovation and progression.

Andreas Huyssen describes modernists' repugnance toward the monumental as "anti-monumental," suggesting the surprising persistence of this stance; it becomes, he argues, an aesthetic consensus reaching from "the modernisms of the earlier twentieth century all the way to the various postmodernisms of our own
time” (195). Huyssen goes on to list the various reasons why the monumental came under attack from both modernists and postmodernists:

The monumental is aesthetically suspect because it is tied to nineteenth-century bad taste, to kitsch, and to mass culture. It is politically suspect because it is seen as representative of nineteenth-century nationalisms and of twentieth-century totalitarianisms. It is socially suspect because it is the privileged mode of expression of mass movements and mass politics. It is ethically suspect because in its preference for bigness it indulges in the larger-than-human, in the attempt to overwhelm the individual spectator. It is psychoanalytically suspect because it is tied to narcissistic delusions of grandeur and to imaginary wholeness. (195)

What Huyssen seems above all to emphasize in this passage is the embeddedness of monuments within mass culture, especially of the populist kind, which seeks to use monuments to buttress dominant ideologies.

Put in this context, the commemorative zeal of the Reconstruction South may appear to epitomize all the negative traits of the monumental that both modernists and postmodernists rejected. As mentioned above, the Lost Cause movement was a certain kind of civil religion, spread widely across various denominations, including Methodist and Baptist, and the Confederate soldier monuments were the very materialization of evangelical fervor through which various evangelicals enshrined the defeat of the Confederacy as the martyrdom of the South. No wonder that H. L. Mencken, in his vehement attack against “the Baptist and Methodist barbarism” which he considered the source of the cultural decay of the postwar South, included a public monument as one of the exemplary figures of “the Sahara of the Bozart”: “In all that gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate there is not a single picture gallery worth going into . . . or a single public monument that is worth looking at, or a single workshop devoted to the making of beautiful things” (158–9). Because of their association with mass religion, Confederate monuments appeared to Mencken as the sordid embodiments of the superstitious South, whose feigned grandiosity he and contemporary art critics granted no aesthetic value.

With respect to Faulkner, all the available biographical details point to the fact that he was in his apprenticeship one of the many ambitious young writers who
tried to master various mannerisms and accrue the knowledge required to become a consummate modernist. He must, then, have been well aware of the inherent problem that the various monuments in his native region posed, namely, postwar white southerners' penchant for concretizing their past in a highly nostalgic and manipulative manner. Responding both to the modernist aesthetic trend toward anti-monumentalism and his own postmemory as it was interwoven with the meaning of the Confederate monuments, Faulkner attempted to carve out, as it were, an alternative kind of monument in his definitively modernist fiction, The Sound and the Fury. The following section will closely look at how monuments function in the novel, and how Faulkner's treatment of them sheds light on those things and people whose marginalized positions in the South made them into the most unmonumental.

* * *

Although The Sound and the Fury is cluttered with monumental objects that supposedly commemorate lost ones, Faulkner makes clear that the most meaningful monuments for the Compson children utterly lack the luster of those Confederate monuments that dominated the New South. Contrary to the overtly white-supremacist tendency of the Lost Cause movement, Civil War commemoration in The Sound and the Fury most prominently emerges in the figure of a black ex-soldier. As Kirk Savage points out, the Civil War soldier monuments built in profusion at the beginning of the twentieth century were always modeled on white soldiers. Since the monuments were intended to arouse national pride rather than immortalize a "brotherhood" of race, erecting a black soldier monument was considered harmful for a nation which sought to repress the newly emergent voices of African Americans (188). In the case of The Sound and the Fury, however, the initial afterimage of the Civil War is not a white Confederate soldier monument, but a black veteran costumed in a Union uniform. A tricksterish figure who has a magical talent for discerning southern-born Harvard students, the black man named "Deacon" is explicitly linked to the commemorative act of the Civil War, the Decoration Day parade, in which he participates as a Union veteran. Since the Decoration Day parade is the ritualized form of visiting the gravesites of the Civil War dead and decorating them with flowers, Deacon is closely associated with Civil War monuments. More
specifically, he becomes the living monument of a black soldier, as Quentin describes him: "[Deacon] hadn't quite recovered from the parade, for he gave me a salute, a very superior-officerish kind" (97).

Many critics have considered Quentin's search for Deacon as indicative of a racialist nostalgia that seizes him ever so forcefully at the end of his life. For instance, Thadious Davis views Deacon as "a projection of Quentin's cultural past," since Deacon's arresting eyes remind Quentin of those of Roskus, a black caretaker of the Compson family, whose eyes expressed the same sadness as Deacon's (71). In addition, Davis cogently suggests the likeness of Quentin's grandfather, "General" Compson, to Deacon as a G. A. R. reenactor whom Quentin compliments as fine-looking as "a general" (71). Similar as they may appear, however, it is still important to note the fundamental differences between General Compson and Deacon; after all, Deacon is not a white ex-Confederate but a black ex-Union soldier, and he has never been a landowner, but works as a mere street cleaner.

The occupational difference between the two is crucial in understanding the significance of Deacon's role as a Civil War reenactor, for his main role in the parade is that, as a street cleaner, he has to follow the parade and clean up after the horses. Like the litter of the parade, Deacon's reenactment can be seen as an untoward relic of the past; the image of Deacon giving a military salute at the Decoration Day parade represents a memorial act that can only be momentarily embodied through reenactment, never fully materialized in durable stone. Bound up with the litter of the Decoration parade, framed by the text as the unrecorded image of a black soldier whose commemorative statue has never officially been sanctioned, Deacon represents the antithesis of monumentality. That is, what James Young terms the "counter-monument" (Texture 48), challenging the traditional notion of monumentality that postwar southerners embodied.

Deacon's counter-monumental reenactment is connected with the family legacy of the Compsons, a kind of heritage which Mr. Compson tries to bequeath to Quentin, as André Bleikasten succinctly puts it:

Through his father, he is heir to the Southern tradition, to its code of honor with all the aristocratic and puritanical standards it implies. When this pattern of values is passed on, however, it has already lost its authority, the more so in this case as the appointed transmitter of the Southern creed is an inveterate
Kumiko KOBAYASHI

skeptic. (110)

What Mr. Compson passes on to his son is a renewed version of the Old South, the romanticized image of the Confederacy envisioned by the Lost Cause movement. But as "an inveterate skeptic," Mr. Compson refuses to adopt the redemptive theory that the movement proposes, namely, the belief that the Lost Tradition will eventually be recovered by God's grace. And, whereas in the Lost Cause movement, monuments function as a token of ultimate redemption, what Mr. Compson confers to Quentin in the form of monument is loss itself, as is clearly seen in the way he presents General Compson's watch to Quentin:

It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. (76)

This family heirloom, which once belonged to the Civil War hero, turns into a monument of all dead hope and desire through Mr. Compson's words, which convey a sense of utter loss. Having turned the watch into a monument, Mr. Compson goes on to assign to it the exact opposite of those attributes associated with normative Confederate monuments. While they usually serve as mnemonic devices for remembering countless soldiers killed in the war, Compson's watch registers forgetfulness and a momentary retreat from the battle against "time," the Southern tradition. The watch therefore undoes itself, functioning against its own assigned role as a conveyor of past southern glory.

The watch becomes counter-monumental through Mr. Compson's worldview, which duly influences his children; it is a sort of in-between vision that can neither be contained within the self-aggrandizing celebration of the Old South that Colonel Falkner aimed at, nor within the nostalgic recourse to the past in the New South that Sallie Murry so fervently pursued. As a result, Quentin inevitably feels oppressed by the air of monumentality permeating his surroundings, as Bleikasten suggests: "To Quentin the Ancestor is a mute and massive transcendence, crushing him with all his invisible weight, fating him to helpless paralysis" (113). Although
Bleikasten quite aptly employs monumental imagery—such as “a mute and massive transcendence”—he does not point to the important fact that such imagery is the very means through which the Compson family members perceive and indicate their own situation. Just as Mr. Compson turns the watch into “a mausoleum,” Quentin frequently utilizes monumental images as he tries to express the discrepancy between actual and ideal images of himself, a gesture which seems to be the novelist’s own projection. James Watson points out the profound extent to which Faulkner’s lack of actual experience in the First World War influenced the novelist’s treatments of military figures in his fiction. Watson suggests that, for Faulkner, “the men of [his] generation who had been in the army and killed men” remained “larger than life” (“Faulkner” 30). As is well known, Faulkner once made a false claim that he had participated in the Great War, a crucial fabrication which he never retracted throughout his life. According to Watson, this imposture remained such a mental burden for Faulkner that he projected his anguish onto Quentin, a character who never enlists as a soldier and intensely envies Caddy’s ex-lover Dalton Ames, a belligerent drifter who once—as Quentin stresses in his interior monologue—“had been in the army had killed men” (“Faulkner” 30).

I want to further argue that Faulkner’s impulse to monumentalize soldiers is also transposed onto Quentin’s peculiar way of associating Ames with sculptural materials:

Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Shirts. I thought all the time they were khaki, army issue khaki, until I saw they were of heavy Chinese silk or finest flannel because they made his face so brown his eyes so blue. Dalton Ames. It just missed gentility. Theatrical fixture. Just papier-mâché, then touch. Oh. Asbestos. Not quite bronze. (92)

Quentin’s obsessive repetitions of his rival’s name modulate into “army issue khaki,” suggesting his keen awareness of Dalton’s war experience. Quentin then goes on to use sculptural metaphors to downplay Ames’s career. Falling short of becoming a soldier monument, Ames, Quentin reckons, is “just papier-mâché,” “[n]ot quite bronze.” Later when Quentin recalls the crucial moment as he tried to warn Ames against approaching Caddy, Quentin returns to the same sculptural metaphor, but in this case he straightforwardly connects Ames to the image of a
bronze soldier: "he looked like he was made out of bronze his khaki shirt." The fragmentary style highlights Quentin's trepidation at directly facing Ames, an ex-soldier whose overwhelming presence smothers him to such a degree that Ames appears to him a larger-than-life statue "made out of bronze" armored with his uniform. Just as Faulkner projected colossal images onto the soldiers of both the Civil War and the Great War, Quentin monumentalizes Ames to suggest the latter's affinity to General Compson, a Confederate hero whose afterlife achieves monumentality in a postwar southern imagination that both Quentin and his father share.

Quentin and Mr. Compson's way of monumentalizing veterans can therefore be regarded as a typical gesture of the postwar southern craze for a heroic past, but when such a monumentalizing impulse is directed toward themselves, they come to conceive a certain kind of counter-monumentality that goes against the nineteenth-century triumphalism that the Lost Cause movement embodied. This imagery figures in the way Quentin envisions his own death. As Quentin carries around "the flat irons" which he plans to use for drowning himself, he constantly imagines what will happen to his body after he jumps into the river:

And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come floating up. (80)

Quentin visualizes the total decomposition of his body as it commingles with the sand. What eventually remains is "only the flat-iron," not his own body; God resurrects not a human being but a nonhuman, everyday commodity. This image occasionally comes into Quentin's mind, each time with slight revisions:

That's where the water would be, healing out to the sea and the peaceful grottoes. Tumbling peacefully they would, and when He said Rise only the flat irons. (112)

Quentin's body becomes a part of "the peaceful grottoes," a negligible object that embodies the antithesis of the monumental. The repeated phrase, "only the flat irons," suggests Quentin's refusal of resurrection, for what he imagines to arise is
not his body but "only" the flat irons. While traditional monuments—as material signifiers of the historical embeddedness of lost ones—lean toward site specificity, Quentin's flat irons—with their floating, nonsite quality—signify his wish for the total erasure of himself, an antiredemptive rejection of the facile salvation from the past misdeeds that conventional public monuments tend to uncritically relish.

Quentin's obsessive recalling of his previous dialogue with Mr. Compson reveals that these recurrent images of flat irons and his decomposing body originate from his father's worldview, which does not fully subscribe to an anachronistic recourse to the past. Rather, Mr. Compson chooses to countenance the lack of an objective correlative within the New South, the unavailability of the self-reliant optimism that his antebellum predecessors embraced:

Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what would in what side that not for me died not. (175)

Just as Mr. Compson envisions human beings as dolls made of sawdust, Quentin equates his own body with a leaf and grains of sand. Ultimately, Quentin inherits the penchant for figuration from his father, expressed most powerfully as shared inclination toward monumentalizing their ancestors and counter-monumentalizing themselves.

Quentin contrasts his self-image with that of Ames whom Quentin sees as a monumental bronze soldier. The material which Quentin conceives as appropriate for his own monument sharply differs from the one that he applies to Dalton Ames. If bronze and marble have traditionally functioned as suitable materials for monuments, flat iron is the least appropriate material. But it is precisely flat iron's unabashedly prosaic quality, its stout resistance to the magisterial that Quentin finds most appropriate to himself. Quentin's impulse for self-monumentalization might be the projection of Faulkner's great-grandfather, but unlike Colonel Falkner who created his semblance of Carrara marble, Quentin chooses an inconspicuous industrial material for his monument, the flat irons whose obvious dullness signifies nothing but the unmonumental. Quentin grafts the antebellum southerners' self-aggrandization into a self-consciously diminishing vision of the
postemancipation South, a view originating from Mr. Compson, which turns a human being into a figure made of detritus and dust, not of marble and bronze.

It is this countermonumental impulse that leads Quentin to meet Deacon, the only person with whom he feels eager to communicate. Quentin's final remark to Deacon—"I hope you'll always find as many friends as you've made" (100)—may be seen as a quintessentially white southern gesture of paternalistic condescension, but if we consider the fact that both are deeply tied to the act of commemoration, Quentin's message can be taken as the expression of his sense of allegiance to Deacon. If Quentin's imagining of his own flat-iron monument deviates from the traditional form of commemorative statuary, Deacon's reenactment of the Union soldier at the Decoration Day parade is engaged to an alternative kind of commemorative activity, fully embodying the process of monumentalizing what could not be fixed in stone, namely, the black soldiers of the Civil War. If Quentin counts himself as one of the "dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps"—an aphorism which he recalls at the last moment of his life—Deacon's occupation as a street sweeper who cleans up the litter of the Decoration Day parade complements Quentin's self-monumentalizing project. That is to say, if Quentin's recurrent daydreaming about the afterimage of his suicide is essentially counter-monumental in its anti-heroic, trash-oriented quality, Deacon as a street cleaner seems to be the most appropriate figure to look after Quentin's death, the belated death of a postwar southerner who fails to be memorialized in marble or bronze. It also envisions an alternative kind of reunion that sharply differs from the actual historical reunion that the Lost Cause movement sought to achieve. Contrary to the reunion envisioned by the public memory of the Civil War shared by the white veterans, Quentin and Deacon engage themselves in a historically unsanctioned reunion between the black Yankee who cannot be monumentalized and the white southerner who failed to participate in the war. Quentin's suicide and Deacon's reenactment can therefore be regarded as challenges to the Civil War commemorative practices rampant in turn-of-the-century southern culture.

* * *

It has often been suggested that a monument is a link between past and present. As Michael North puts it, "the monument is a perfect embodiment of [the]
mediation between future and past" (38). Faulkner explores this temporal aspect of monuments by rendering monument-building an intergenerational enterprise, involving both parents and their children. Donald Kartiganer claims that the act of inheritance in Faulkner’s fiction is largely a “male, white, 'aristocratic'” engagement, allowing no space for female protagonists to experience such “pressures of inheritance” (“Quentin” 399–400), and his observation seems correct if the pressures of inheritance are limited to the traditions of southern chivalry. But the most important thing Quentin inherits from Mr. Compson is the counter-monumental impulse directed toward self-effacement. The impulse to monumentalize in the most self-diminutive style becomes a kind of a family legacy, and it can be seen in the mother-daughter relationship as well. In the only scene in which Caddy appears in the narrative present (unlike the other parts of the novel in which she functions as a mere object of remembrance), she makes a desperate plea to Jason, asking him to use her money for her daughter, Miss Quentin:

"Just promise that she'll—that she—You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I can't, they won't let. . . . if sometimes she needs things—If I send checks for her to you, other ones besides those, you'll give them to her? You won't tell? You'll see that she has things like other girls?" (209–10)

Caddy sends checks to Jason to equip her daughter with the “little things,” things that make Miss Quentin just like “other girls,” who are untroubled by their familial background. “Little things” may refer to perfume (like the one Caddy wore in her youth), accessories, or some other items meant for young women, and Caddy's emphasis on their littleness suggests that they do not have to be conspicuous; rather, those objects should be as inconspicuous as possible, so that her daughter, arrayed with “little things,” would look like a typical southern belle with a normal upbringing. Such little things will later become the material trace of Miss Quentin as she elopes with a nameless stranger, taking away all the money Jason hoarded. As Jason and other family members rush into Miss Quentin’s room, what they discover is nothing but the “little things”:

It was not a girl’s room. It was not anybody’s room, and the faint scent of
cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of
crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it
that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation house. . . . [Mrs.
Compson] went to the bureau and began to turn over the scattered objects
there—scent bottles, a box of powder, a chewed pencil, a pair of scissors
with one broken blade lying upon a darned scarf dusted with powder and
stained with rouge. (282–3)

Scattered with little "feminine objects," Miss Quentin's deserted room shows the
occupant's desperate attempt to create a room of her own, an attempt which ends
up turning "little things" into a series of broken objects, such as "a broken blade"
and "a darned scarf." Associated as they are with the image of death, Miss
Quentin's trashy feminine objects can be seen as a certain kind of monument.
Contrary to the traditional funereal monument intended to leave an indelible trace
of a particular person, Miss Quentin's discarded little things become the material
emanation of anonymity and transience. Rather than signifying the rootedness of a
particular individual in a specific place, they embody a sense of displacement and
sitelessness which she inherits from her mother by means of the "little things."

Just as Quentin's suicide becomes a certain kind of self-monumentalization that
goes utterly against conventional ideas of monumentality, Miss Quentin's little
things embody counter-monumentality, reaching the state of modernist art with the
pronounced transience that Mumford designates as the definitive characteristic of
modernity. And, just as Quentin puts into practice his father's teachings by
willfully imagining himself in the image of a most unmonumental monument,
Miss Quentin fills her room with the sorts of trivial items that her mother
presumably wanted her to possess, turning them into her own monument through
elopement, the same kind of self-effacing act as Quentin's suicide.

Both Quentin and Miss Quentin erect counter-monuments made of trash to
commemorate their sense of dislodgement, and such a counter-monumental
im impulse drives the entire section of Benjy's narrative. Virtually all of his actions
are related to some kind of commemorative practice: his habitual errands to the
cemetery via the Confederate soldier monument in the town's square, and his
constant craving for Caddy's slippers, for instance. Because of his mental and
physical impairment, Benjy has long been considered "an emblem of
subhumanity" (Broughton 189), "merely a filter" (Polk 144), and simply a
character who "cannot create" (Kartiganer, *Meaning* 329). However, Benjy also engages in monument-building, an explicit act of creation that can be seen in his assiduous maintenance of what Dilsey calls "Benjy’s graveyard," which he decorates with jimson weeds. Benjy’s graveyard is a most primitive kind of monument, a small mound with two blue bottles in which he puts these flowers. Benjy recycles the discarded bottles and decorates the monument with the most common and readily available flowers. The monument consists entirely of found objects, far removed from the marble Confederate soldier monument that W. C. Falkner built to commemorate his own glory. Benjy’s monument is aligned with Quentin’s flat irons and Miss Quentin’s broken feminine objects, making a triad of counter-monuments which materialize the intergenerational act of self-effacement.

*The Sound and the Fury* reveals Faulkner’s exploration into the possibility of the monument, which he reframes as an object of modernist experimentation. As a postwar southerner brought up during the era of the Lost Cause movement, Faulkner could not but cultivate a keen awareness of the ever-proliferating Confederate soldier monuments to which his grandmother had become devoted. He incorporated his family’s passion for monuments into *The Sound and the Fury*, expressing and inverting it through the Compson family’s counter-monumental impulse, sharply at odds with the traditional nineteenth-century enshrinement of the past. Unlike marble and bronze monuments which signify permanence and rootedness, the Compson monuments are made up of discarded objects, signifying transience and displacement. In this way Faulkner developed a radical form of monumentality which aspires to commemorate what is otherwise remembered as unspeakable, unusable as a past.

**Notes**

1 On Sallie Murry and her campaign for the soldier monument, see Doyle, especially Chapter 10 (327-72).

2 This monument is reincarnated as the statue of Colonel John Sartoris in *Flags in the Dust*, the first novel of the Yoknapatawpha series. Faulkner intimates that it is evocative of the insolent personality of his ancestor: "He stood on a stone pedestal... His head was lifted a little in that gesture of haughty arrogance" (427). This language suggests Faulkner’s own act of remembering his great-grandfather, replicating not only the model’s physical appearance, but also the will to power crystallized in his deathbed.
act of self-monumentalization.

3 On Faulkner's self-fashioning strategies, see Watson, William Faulkner.

Works Cited


"Only the Flat Irons" 19


