2006

The scent of a new world novel: translating the olfactory language of Faulkner and García Márquez

Terri Smith Ruckel
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, trucke1@lsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/331

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
THE SCENT OF A NEW WORLD NOVEL:
TRANSLATING THE OLFATORY LANGUAGE
OF FAULKNER AND GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Terri Smith Ruckel
B.A. University of Southern Mississippi, 1998
M.A., University of Southern Mississippi, 2001
December 2006
Acknowledgments

No matter how solitary the scholar might feel in braving the sacrifices of time and energy necessary to complete a work of this scope, debts to those who sacrificed on the scholar’s behalf are always incurred. The first debt of gratitude that I owe is to my husband and then to my family. My work has taken a great deal of time and focus away from them all, and I will never be able to repay them for their support and understanding. Thank you, Ryan, for your constant friendship, love, and encouragement. Thank you, Gary Smith, for being the kind of father and man who makes the word “hero” still relevant. Thank you, Tony, Traci, Taryn, Tiffany, Tricia, Emili, Lane, Raegan, and Lauren – you all were the impetus for me to begin, but more importantly, for me to complete, this academic journey. I also want to acknowledge the support of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Bainard Cowan, whose contagious passion for the liberal arts has only been surpassed by his patience as my mentor. The committee of scholars assembled to help me complete my academic goals could not have been more collegial and accessible: Dr. John Wharton Lowe, Dr. Katherine Henninger, and Dr. Brannon Costello have all earned my gratitude and respect. Finally, I thank God with whom all things are possible.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments...........................................................................................................................ii

Abstract...........................................................................................................................................iv

Chapter

One  Introduction: The Nexus of Smell in the Novels
      of Faulkner and García Márquez ...............................................................1

Two  The Life of the Nose: Philosophical Perceptions of Smell’s Intimacy with
      Knowledge, Pleasure, and the Imagination...............................................11

Three  Smell and the New World Novel: Contemplating
       Being in Redolent Metaphors....................................................................38

Four  Eidolons and Smells, Like Souls: The Site of Memory and the Past
       in Absalom, Absalom! and Leaf Storm.......................................................57

Five  The Quintessence and Puissance of Allure: Aromas of Sexuality
       in Faulkner and García Márquez.............................................................100

Six   An Ethics of Smell: Revelations of the Other in Faulkner’s Light In August
       and García Márquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera...............................131

Seven  Conclusion: Rejoining the Intimacy of the Physical
       with Intimacy of the Universal.................................................................155

Works Cited.................................................................................................................................158

Vita...............................................................................................................................................174
Abstract

Both William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez introduce the olfactory as a focal element in their writing, producing works that challenge the singular primacy of sight as the unrivaled means by which the New World might be understood. As they translate experiences of the New World into language, both writers record the power of olfactory perception to reflect memory and history, to shape identity, to mark unmistakably certain crisis moments of ethical action, and to delineate a form of knowledge crucial to their New World poetics of the novel. Observing and analyzing the olfactory language particular to the cultural spaces in and around Yoknapatawpha County and the village of Macondo, respectively, provides a means to enter the imaginary landscapes not only of these major novelists but of Plantation America and the New World in general.

In line with those studies that examine tropes, issues, and themes common to U.S. and Spanish American literature, this study comprises an analysis of how the olfactory environment serves Faulkner and García Márquez as symbol and subject in the heroic diachronic sweeps of their respective Yoknapatawpha and Macondo narratives. Both authors use smells in order to get at truth—to get closer to knowledge, and smell becomes the intersection between the structure of experience and the structure of knowledge. Their olfactory passageways mark out the South and the Caribbean, leading to a rooted, complex, nuanced understanding of truth in a world that modern civilization has paved over. In this way, their fictional olfactory situations and language establish a critique of the modern era, of an all-too-Cartesian modernity in the world, and point to a new poetics specifically for the New World, where there might still be hope for the memory and the promise of a land that is “fresh from the hand of God.”
Chapter One
Introduction: The Nexus of Smell in the Novels of Faulkner and García Márquez

Smells are surer than sights or sounds
To make your heart-strings crack –
– Rudyard Kipling, “Lichtenburg”

In his essay, “Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” Alejo Carpentier discusses the dilemma faced by those American writers who would translate experiences of the New World into language, and he argues for the necessity not only of a “new vocabulary” but also a “new optic” to be used in depicting the New World. Both William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez have produced works that accomplish such translations, though, significantly, their novels reformulate the notion of a “new optic” by introducing the olfactory as a focal element in their writing. Thereby, they challenge the singular primacy of sight as the unrivaled means by which the New World might be understood. In uncounted passages throughout their novels, both writers record the power of olfactory perception to reflect memory and history, and, as I intend to demonstrate in exploring their works, to shape identity, to mark unmistakably certain crisis moments of ethical action, and to delineate a form of knowledge crucial to their New World poetics of the novel. Observing and analyzing the olfactory language particular to the cultural spaces in and around Yoknapatawpha County and the village of Macondo, respectively, provides a means to enter the imaginary landscapes not only of these major novelists but of Plantation America and the New World in general.

Throughout the *Sound and the Fury*, for instance, Faulkner reiterates both Quentin’s and Benjy’s sensitivity to odors. Quentin associates his memories of Caddy with the odor of honeysuckle, and Benjy can “smell” Caddy’s sickness (75). Attention to “a wistaria vine
blooming for the second time” sets *Absalom, Absalom!* in motion in the dark parlor of an antebellum home where “the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall” resuscitates a dead time back to life (1-4). Having wielded his natural endowment of “sensory remembering” in Chapter One, Quentin begins Chapter Two of *Absalom* in the “strange iron New England snow,” where he remembers “that dead summer twilight- -the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies- -attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room” (141). Similarly, in the *Unvanquished* Faulkner frames numerous scenes as well as the final chapter (“An Odor of Verbena”) with sprigs of verbena, a “material” close at hand to him as a Southerner, and particularly suitable because, as Drusilla claims, it has an odor “above the smell of horses and courage” (253). These are odors that Drusilla, Bayard’s stepmother, should know about: she concurrently wore verbena in her hair while cross-dressing in a male soldier’s uniform in order to ride with a regiment of Confederate soldiers into battle.

García Márquez’s first novella, *Leaf Storm*, unfolds likewise with special attention given to olfactory perception: “The whirlwind . . . contaminated everything with its swirling crowd smell, the smell of skin secretion and hidden death” (1). As the novel progresses, García Márquez depicts the singular significance of smell to the unnamed grandson who bases his familiarity with place on his nose:

There’s no smell at home that I can’t recognize. When they leave me alone on the veranda I close my eyes, stick out my arms, and walk . . . when I get the smell of camphorated rum I’ll be in my grandfather’s room. I keep on walking with my eyes closed and my arms stretched out. I think *Now I’ve gone past my mother’s room, because it smells like new playing cards. Then it will smell of pitch and mothballs*. I keep on walking and I get the smell of new playing cards at the exact moment I hear my mother’s voice singing in her room.”(45)
Besides the grandson’s penchant for smell, in this pre-\textit{Cien Años de Soledad} depiction of Macondo, García Márquez describes a community whose only desire “is to smell the odor of organic decomposition behind the doors of the foreigner” (14). In this “New World” landscape, jasmine gives “off its insistent breath . . . because in a certain way that smell was a prolongation of [a] mother” (67). General Simón Bolívar, the protagonist of \textit{The General in His Labyrinth}, succumbs to the intoxicating aroma of a guava that he “swallows little by little with a long sigh of memory” (110). One guava followed by another leads to an overindulgence that is misinterpreted by the Santanderist press as indisputable proof of the general’s “nocturnal excesses,” all of which usher press reports “intended to diminish his glory” (113). \textit{Love in the Time of Cholera}’s opening lines also declare García Márquez’s occupation with the olfactory: “It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love . . . The Antillean refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, disabled war veteran, photographer of children, and his most sympathetic opponent in chess, had escaped the torments of memory with the aromatic fumes of gold cyanide” (3).

In these passages and many others throughout the prose of Faulkner and García Márquez, the olfactory persists undisguised, yet curiously undiscussed. There is in fact, throughout the criticism of either author, a puzzling imbalance between the attention given to the visual and that given to the olfactory. This imbalance exists though both so clearly pay homage to the significance of odors and to the sense of smell. Indeed, relatively nothing has been done concerning either author’s great interest in smell as symbol and metaphor of larger issues, attitudes, and moods.
Understanding the nexus of smell in the novels of Faulkner and García Márquez adds something paramount to the conversation about each novelist, but more so to the ongoing conversation about “them”...the comparative studies that link the two. Individually, each offers a challenge to any student or scholar who wants to research or write about the author. Combined, the challenge is even more complex and multifaceted. Many have mentioned that the two are connected by Marquez’s fascination with Faulkner, his “maestro” (teacher). More recently, as transnational studies have come forth linking North and South America, and specifically the South and the Caribbean, the two have been connected as having similar cultural experiences. My discussion, while attending to both Faulkner as “influence” as well as to certain similarities between the two cultures, moves beyond the conventional sense of either reception or influence in that it provides a reading of Faulkner, followed by a reading of García Márquez, in the context that he himself is reading Faulkner from the outside. Such a comparative reading echoes Roberto González Echevarría’s call for “criticism by fiction” (“Latin American and Comparative Literatures” 57), which occurs when “marginal” literatures that read and rewrite, “mobilize elements in the hegemonic texts that were previously inert, beyond the reach of criticism and theory” (57).

Critical considerations of the olfactory element at work in the fiction of Faulkner and García Márquez have indeed been inert, though studies in the field of comparative literature have acknowledged other affinities connecting their texts. The most recent of these studies cite the parallel histories of Hispanic America and the Deep South as well as cultural similarities between the two regions. As Louise Cowan has remarked,
The correspondences between the South and Latin America are very obvious: physically, spiritually, and historically. Both regions are warm, lush regions, with similar vegetation; both have retained traces of medieval culture, with spiritual values playing a definite part in their everyday lives and the essential comedy of existence flavoring everything in life; and both have had similar histories of being a traditional, agrarian society suddenly and roughly taken over by industrial progress. (“The Influence of William Faulkner in Latin-America”) ¹

In her seminal work, Writing the Apocalypse, Lois Parkinson Zamora asserts that writers from these two areas have “a shared comprehension of America and a shared mode of narrating its history” (34). Again acknowledging the similarities of the two regions in her essay, “The Animate Earth,” Zamora offers a summation of the histories of the two regions. The U.S. South and Latin America share similar chronicles of colonization and exploitation of the land; feudal systems of land tenure with their accompanying aristocracies and enslaved or indentured peoples of color; the burden of defeat by invading armies from the North (Yankees/yanquis); belated and abrupt modernization that masked (and sometimes exacerbated) long histories of political and racial and economic inequity [as well as] intersections of Southern Protestant and Hispanic Catholic attitudes. (63)

Citing the similar personalities of the neighboring spaces, Deborah N. Cohn avows in History and Memory in the Two Souths that “parallels in regional history and social organization” (2) lead to recurrent narrative themes in the literature of the two regions. An even more recent collection of essays, Look Away: The U.S. South in New World Studies, edited by Jon Smith and Cohn, focuses on factors that “make the South exceptional within the context of the United States” and so “familiar within broader categories of AmeriCaness and postcoloniality” (3). Acknowledgments like these sustain as well as serve to strengthen an antecedent discussion that began nearly seventy-five years ago when Lino Novás Calvo’s 1934 translation of Sanctuary

¹ The transcript of Louise Cowan’s lecture has been an invaluable resource, and I am indebted to her for inspiration and information beyond specific references here.
initiated the translation of William Faulkner’s work into Spanish, and Latin American writers first espoused their attraction to Faulkner and their interest in a region with a past that seemed a counterpart to their own. With a style that seemed meant for import and with observations about the U.S.’s double history as not only slave masters but as a conquered people, Faulkner attracted the Latin American “boom” writers. One such writer who often acknowledged his debt to Faulkner is Carlos Fuentes, who once told an American audience that Sinclair Lewis “is yours, and as such, interesting and important to us. William Faulkner is both yours and ours, and as such essential to us. For in him we see what has always lived with us and rarely with you: the haunting face of defeat” (“Central and Eccentric Writing” 110).

Much attention has been given to Faulkner’s influence on Latin American boom writers like Fuentes, Carlos Onetti, Juan Rulfo, and Mario Vargas Llosa, but the critical attention given to Faulkner’s relationship to Gabriel García Márquez transcends all others. Indeed, commentators have often compared García Márquez with Faulkner, likening for example, *One Hundred Years of Solitude’s* Macondo village and its “richly imagined locale and colorful characters” to Faulkner's own, mythical Yoknapatawpha County (Wood 24). García Márquez, according to Zamora, “has insisted on the pairing, citing the primary influence of Faulkner” (“Teaching One Hundred Years” 27) in his work, and on the occasion of his acceptance of the 1982 Nobel Prize, he called Faulkner his teacher. García Márquez has “described his affinity for Faulkner’s world view, actually redrawing the map of the Caribbean to reflect that affinity”

---

2In a more recent article, “Of the Same Blood as This America and Its History,” Cohn analyzes Faulkner’s continuing influence over a new generation of writers, in particular, Rosario Ferré. See *South to A New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*. Ed. Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 2002.
Referring to Faulkner’s Mississippi, he says, “Yoknapatawpha County has Caribbean shores; thus in some sense Faulkner is a Caribbean writer, in some sense a Latin American Writer” (qtd. in “Teaching One Hundred Years” 27).

García Márquez made further claim that through his initial experience with the Yoknapatawpha saga, *Absalom, Absalom!* he had discovered his own proclivity for writing. Such admissions have triggered numerous articles about the influence of Faulkner in García Márquez’s novels. To begin with, the two author’s biographies bear numerous similarities: they are both Nobel Prize-winning authors; they were also raised in traditional rural communities – communities distinguished by their nostalgia for times gone by, communities diminished by war and economic ruin. Some of these similarities are in turn reflected in parallels between the histories and social organization of Yoknapatawpha County and Macondo – the fictional microcosms created respectively by Faulkner and García Márquez.

Many of the current inter American comparative studies linking Faulkner and Latin American writers (including but not limited to García Márquez) might be divided into two categories: analyses of Faulkner’s influence on individual authors and those which take a much more general approach, examining issues and themes common to U.S. and Spanish American literature. James Irby’s 1956 master’s thesis, “La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispano-americanos” is often the first work cited in studies of Faulkner’s legacy. In this pioneering work, Irby attributes Faulkner’s influence to his use of “the writer’s own little postage stamp of native soil” (Faulkner, “Interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuvel” 255).

Cohn notes that “few studies since Irby’s have followed up on these suggestions as to why Faulkner has been so important to Spanish American authors” (*History and Memory* 9). In
her study, *El espejo hablado: Un estudio de “cien anos de soledad,”* Suzanne Jill Levine speaks to many of the cultural affinities already noted in comparing García Márquez’s work to Faulkner’s. She asserts that both Macondo and Jefferson are “imaginary microcosms of the authors’ respective feudal societies, structured around a central tribe or family” which serves to create as well as to destroy their own communities (87-88). Both Cowan and Cohn note the work of Octavio Corvalan, “Faulkner y García Marquez: Una Aproximacion,” and its discussion of racial conflicts in the South. Corvalan asserts that “the U.S. South – the Deep South of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia – exhibits social and cultural characteristics that are not much different from those of our South American World” (qtd. in Cohn, *History and Memory* 11).

Harley Oberhelman’s article length study, “Garcia Marquez and the American South,” contends that general stylistic and thematic similarities might be seen in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s narratives. In a more recent work, *In Search of the Latin American Faulkner,* Tanya Fayen argues that “Boom” writers shaped Faulknerian literary innovations and techniques that had entered their cultural repertory to fit their own needs. Both Zamora (*Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction*) and José David Saldivar (*The Dialectics of Our America*) identify commonalities in the literary traditions of both regions. Zamora asserts that the “fiction of both regions reflects a late and sudden entrance of progress into traditional societies and conveys the sense of having reached a turning point” (122).  

---

My project builds on the work of Irby, Zamora, Saldivar, and Cohn, accepting that a common core of experience underlies not only the appeal of Faulkner’s works, subject matter, and style to Spanish American authors, but the commonality of the experiences in the two cultures explains affinities as well. In line with those studies that examine tropes, issues, and themes common to U.S. and Spanish American literature, this study comprises an analysis of how the olfactory environment serves Faulkner and García Márquez as symbol and subject in the heroic diachronic sweeps of their respective Yoknapatawpha and Macondo narratives.

The following study does not attempt to cover every reference to smell in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s novels and stories, but rather to explore how such an emphasis might best be interpreted in the light of literary and intellectual history. It links ideas to specific examples from such major works as Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying, Light in August,* and *The Unvanquished* and García Márquez’s *Leaf Storm,* *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* *The General in His Labyrinth,* *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* and *Love in the Time of Cholera.* These works document the primacy of smell in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s thinking as a whole in each author’s peculiar cosmos and consciousness.

Chapter One is a general overview of the epistemology of the olfactory. Chapter Two reviews Faulkner’s tendency to resist European ways of knowing and articulates key conceptual issues about the “New World” novel. Both chapters detail how both authors’ persistent attention to sensory perception moves away from an Enlightenment stance, eluding Cartesian rational systems in favor of “other” perceptions that are tied to depictions of realities in the New World. Together these opening sorties set the stage for the comparative textual analysis that will follow.
Chapter Three focuses on the significance of smell as a means by which Faulkner and García Márquez approach the nature of time and memory—an issue central to the work of both authors. For both Faulkner and García Márquez, smells haunt the present, and like disembodied souls, they call forth visual apparitions from the past, aligning history and memory with the body.

In Chapter Four, close readings provide a connection between Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s privileging of the sense of smell and sexual difference and repression. Faulkner and García Márquez invent characters obsessed with smell, characters who seem to affirm the existence of a close and reciprocal relationship between the nose and the genitalia, between the perception of smell and sexual power or powerlessness. Finally, I will closely read Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s texts in Chapter Five to locate the ways odor and the perceptions of odor function to inform ethical responses.

Both authors use smells in order to get at truth—to get closer to knowledge, and smell becomes the intersection between the structure of experience and the structure of knowledge. Their olfactory passageways mark out the South and the Caribbean, leading to a rooted, complex, nuanced understanding of truth in a world that modern civilization has paved over. In this way, their fictional olfactory situations and language establish a critique of the modern era, of an all-too-Cartesian modernity in the world, and point to a new poetics specifically for the New World, where there might still be hope for the memory and the promise of a land that is “fresh from the hand of God.”
Chapter Two
The Life of the Nose: Philosophical Perceptions of Smell’s Intimacy with Knowledge, Pleasure, and the Imagination

The communication of pure insight is comparable to a silent expansion or to the diffusion . . . of a perfume in the unresisting atmosphere.

– Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit (331)

I am a real being, a feeling being; yes, my body in its totality is my selfhood, my very essence.

– Feuerbach, Principles of the Philosophy of the Future (196)

In “An Odor of Verbena,” the last section of The Unvanquished, Faulkner establishes a fragrance as a focal element in his writing. Beyond its cardinal spot in the story’s title, the odor of verbena repeatedly overcomes Bayard Sartoris, one of the novel’s central characters, who has grown from a boy of twelve at the novel’s beginning to become a young law student of twenty-four by the novel’s end. In his position as the chapter’s narrator, Bayard effectively enumerates the odor’s significance throughout his account. At the story’s opening, following the news that his father has been shot, Bayard rides to Jefferson with Ringo, his mind filled with reminiscences about his father and Drusilla, his father’s wife; his thoughts are also fixed on the odor of verbena, which intertwines itself with the memories of his experiences with both people. Bayard notes the

month is October, and “there [is] plenty of time for verbena yet from the garden” (218). Riding
toward his father’s house, he sees images of his father “lying in the parlor now, in his
regimentals (sabre too),” and Drusilla, “waiting for [him] . . . the sprig of verbena in her hair”
(219). His thoughts take him back in time to another afternoon when Drusilla waited for him,
“the sprig of verbena in her hair” while “holding the two loaded pistols,” when he thinks of her
as “the Greek amphora priestess of succinct and formal violence” (252).

From this garden scene, Bayard’s thoughts drift to another olfactory event that took place
in the same garden. As Drusilla and Bayard walk in the garden at twilight, she commands him to
kiss her, and “the scent of the verbena in her hair seemed to have increased a hundred times, to
have got a hundred times stronger, to be everywhere in the dusk in which something was about to
happen which [he] had never dreamed of” (227). Bayard, having associated the odor of verbena
with guns and violence as well as with kisses and sensual desire—in this situation, a desire
bordering on incest, since Drusilla is his stepmother—also notes in this early section of the story
that Drusilla’s fragrant supply is the produce of Aunt Jenny’s garden. There, Drusilla plucks the
fragrant blooms that she wears behind her ears—and has worn since her covert experiences in the
Civil War when she dressed herself in men’s clothes to participate in the fighting. In Drusilla’s
olfactory register, verbena persists as “the only scent you could wear above the smell of horses
and courage and so it was the only one that was worth wearing” (220). Time after time, the odor
of verbena is encountered in this story, seeming first to represent violence, then love, then
ultimately the South itself.

Commentators who have noted the material significance of Faulkner’s use of verbena in
this story have paid sufficient attention to the fact the flowering variety of verbena used by
Faulkner in the text has no odor, and they have mused over Faulkner’s choice of verbena, all of which underscores Faulkner’s knowledge of indigenous Southern flowering plants. Winifred Frazer proposes that Faulkner makes use of a poetic license to create a composite flower, combining three varieties of verbena: the flowering plant with no significant odor, the pungently fragrant lemon variety of verbena, and blue vervain, the wild bush variety of verbena, which has no odor and insignificant blossoms. The poetic hybrid provides Faulkner with a fictional verbena plant of the right bloom, with the pervasive odor, and also with the probability of appearing on the battlefield. Another critic of Faulkner’s use of verbena in the story, Jane Isbell Haynes, maintains that the story demonstrate’s Faulkner’s knowledge of the different species and hybrid varieties of plants in the South, claiming that earlier varieties of the plant did give off a distinct fragrance.

Following up on these previous commentators, Robert W. Witt claims that Haynes’ and Frazer’s speculations about Faulkner’s choice of verbena varieties “miss the point . . . .Faulkner chose verbena because it has no odor” (74). Recognizing verbena as a complex symbol that must be respected and understood in order to “miss some levels of reading,” Witt asserts that verbena represents courage and “something more at the end of the story,” it symbolizes “the will to endure . . . the will of the South to endure, but a new South, the South represented by Bayard” (83). Witt also notes Hyatt Waggoner’s assertion about the “wealth of symbolic meanings”

---

5 I am indebted to Witt’s article which suggested an initial list of resources for me to seek and which does supply several details as cited in this material.

which might have influenced Faulkner rather than the odor itself, and that William Walker
delineates the symbolism by citing ancient Greek and Roman folklore which recognized verbena
as “an emblem for peace, good fortune, love, and enchantment” (qtd. in Witt 74). 7

What is at best tenuously discussed and most often curiously missing from the
commentary about the odor of verbena, however, is Faulkner’s focus on the olfactory, which is
curious all the more in the light of Faulkner’s concession that “smell is one of my sharper senses,
maybe it’s sharper than sight . . . [Smell] to me is as noticeable as the ear which hears the turns
of speech which could be simply because that’s a sharper sense with me than maybe sight or
hearing” (qtd. in Gwynn 253). Neither these commentators nor any others consider Faulkner’s
olfactory mode of imagination, a mode such as Allen Tate embraces in his essay, “The Symbolic
Imagination,” an imagination that writes the body. Tate distinguishes between an angelic
imagination which “tries to disintegrate or to circumvent the image in the illusory pursuit of
essence” (37), and the symbolic imagination which “conducts an action through analogy, of the
human to the divine, of the natural to the supernatural, of the low to the high, of time to eternity”
(36). Tate declares that writing should begin with the body: “It never begins at the top; it carries
the bottom along with it, however high it may climb” (55). Faulkner’s use of the odor of verbena
interjects a pervasive bodily feeling into his often discussed psychologically interior milieu. Read

7Joan M. Serafin, notes in Faulkner’s Uses of the Classics (Ann Arbor: UMI Research
Press, 1983) that verbena was worn by Roman priests who served as “guardians of the public
faith” (176). Considered an herb of both Mars, the Roman god of war, and Venus, the goddess of
love, verbena was used at weddings and symbolic of love and enchantment.
in this way, his fiction suggests a unity of the body and the mind, resisting the mind-body
dichotomy that pervades Western European-Anglo American cultural traditions and
philosophical thought.

Though it would be impossible to present all of the arguments and counter-arguments that
have been made by philosophers and the historians of philosophers in the epistemology of the
senses, an assessment of those ideas most central to traditional as well as to alternative
philosophical approaches to sensory perception, in particular to olfactory perception, deters one
from missing a significant point being made in the fiction of Faulkner – that the body, as the
locus of sensory perception, is a provider of knowledge – of what man can be sure about.8
Moreover, and in particular, the olfactory imagination at work in Faulkner’s fiction provides a
significant nexus between the material and the rational; the olfactory imagination is a sense-
oriented way of thinking that connects sense perception and reason. Indisputably, the Western
intellectual climate privileges cognitive data over sensory perception, and in The Smell of Books:
A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature, Hans J. Rindisbacher notes
the Western idea that one should be “out of one’s senses” to be “in one’s right mind” (24).
“Western society,” warrants Rindisbacher, “has a history of distrust for the senses” (1). As do the
other senses, the olfactory supplies a completely personal and therefore, subjective, experience.

8 In Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel calls this “sinnliche Gewissheit,” sense-certainty,
though he transitions from this first step, which “immediately appears as the richest kind of
knowledge” (58) to his claim that to be conscious of an outside object requires for one to be self
reflexive, in a move that proves sense-certainty “to be the most abstract and poorest truth” (58),
and thus begins Hegel’s intellectualization of the senses.
On the other hand, the senses provide raw information about the object world. Along with sight, sound, taste and touch, smell is an essential first step from perception to cognition.

The origins of this sensory, and in particular, of this olfactory distrust date back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle, who engendered the epistemology of the senses while forging the substance of Western thought from the ancient world up to contemporary times. In part, their epistemological discussions attempt to solve Meno’s paradox, to answer the question posed in the dialogue between Meno and Plato in Plato’s *Meno*: “And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?” In other words, how is one to know when one has arrived at the truth when one does not know what the truth is? How does one acquire knowledge? Socrates responds that the acquisition of knowledge is a matter of anamnesis, of recalling what the soul already knows prior to incarnation. Plato develops this theory of anamnesis further in his *Phaedo*, asserting that the body and the senses are the source of error; knowledge can only be acquired by reason. Emphasizing the dyad of perception and cognition in his theory of Forms, Plato, who extols cognition, shifts focus from the concreteness of physical experience to the abstract of thought. In the *Timaeus*, he

---

For classical discussions concerning the senses and sensory perception see Plato’s “*Timaeus,*” and “*The Republic;*” see Aristotle’s *Problemata, De Anima, Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Metaphysics,* and Lucretius’ *The Nature of Things.* The epistemological discussion here draws from these primary sources and others as cited and also synthesizes information from more contemporary sources as cited, though I am particularly indebted to Annick Le Guérer’s examination of Western philosophy in *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell,* tr. Richard Miller (New York: Random House, 1992) beyond specific references here.

According to Plato’s theory, the world as it is known via the senses is only an imitation of the eternal and unchanging world of the Forms.
sets forth his ideas regarding the five senses, and smell in Plato’s estimation is the most ambiguous, an assessment derived from several observations: the inferiority of the human nose, the evanescent nature of odors themselves, and smell’s link to the emotions. Both Plato and Aristotle think the human nose insufficient to the task of smelling, both blaming the small size of the olfactory channels. Aside from the physiological problems with the nose, both raise issues with the instability of odors and the difficulty of classifying smells, which Plato reports might only be organized into a binary split between good and bad. Francis M. Cornford, in *Plato’s Cosmology: The “Timaeus” of Plato with a Running Commentary*, reports Plato’s conclusion that smells

lack names because they do not consist of a definite number of simple types. The only clear distinction to be drawn here is twofold: the pleasant and the unpleasant. The unpleasant roughens and does violence to the whole cavity lying between the crown of the head and the navel; the pleasant soothes this region and restores it with contentment to its natural state. (273)

It is interesting to note that Plato is reasoning from an analogy, using an illustration to support his argument. Of course, the time had not yet come for the kind of scientific experiment that might have verified his claims, and so Plato, himself, approaches the truth through experiences that he fuses with his idealistic dreams. Anomalous to other declarations, in the *Philebus*, Plato does confess that pleasant odors “induce” him “to class them as cognate,” (51e), since like the pleasures of learning, the pleasures of smelling “are unmixed with pain” (52b).

\[11\] In his introduction of the Timaeus in his *Plato’s Cosmology* (1937), Cornford remarks that “The Republic had dwelt on the structural analogy between the state and the human soul.”
In the opening lines of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle acknowledges the senses’ potential for both knowledge and pleasure, professing his esteem for the sense of sight based on its usefulness: “We prefer sight, generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason of this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions” (I.2-3). Sight along with sound has the most potential for knowledge, but smell, according to Aristotle, “is by no means so clear” (*De Anima* 421a 7). In his discussion, which divides the senses into scientific versus hedonistic realms, the sense of smell might fit into either category. Smell might lead to noble pleasures, those pleasures akin to wisdom and the intellect, or to carnal indulgences which distract from contemplation. The status of the sense of smell depends on the pleasure that various smells provide. Smells are positive when they encourage aesthetic pleasures and negative when they encourage corporeal lusts. However, Aristotle meets with some confusion when describing the sense perception at work in the olfactory:

> But smelling is more than such an affection by what is odorous – what more? Is not the answer that, while the air owing to the momentary duration of the action upon it of what is odorous does itself become perceptible to the sense of smell, smelling is an observing of the result produced? (*De Anima* 424b 16-19)

Here, Aristotle claims a different awareness associated with the sense of smell. Smelling moves beyond a physiological process and constitutes a way of knowing.

While Plato and Aristotle contemplated smell’s place in the universe of ideas, ancient poets were developing an olfactory aesthetics. Not content with wearing one perfume, ancient Greeks fashioned wardrobes of odor, wearing different perfumes and odorous concoctions on different body parts. Antiphanes describes a wealthy Greek who

> . . . steeps his feet And legs in rich Egyptian unguents;
His jaws and breasts he rubs with thick palm oil,
And both his arms with extract sweet of mint;
His eyebrows and his hair with marjoram,
His knees and neck with essence of ground thyme.

Such fragrant indulgences to sensual appetites illustrate Aristotle’s point about corporeal lusts,
and yet the temples were filled not only with the more contemplative man but with the smells of
perfume and incense which motivated the mind to higher thoughts. Greek dramatist Sophocles, a
near-contemporary of Aristotle, imagines the city of Thebes as being “heavy with a mingled
burden of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense” (qtd. in Clausen 26).

Whether inciting lust or prayer, both experiences underscore smell’s dual nature, and,
according to Aristotle might explain the imprecision of the sense of smell, and demonstrate his
notion that the sense of smell is the unstable point at which the pure and impure senses meet,
stabilized only when it causes a certain type of sensation. The nose is the pivotal point between
the outer senses of sight and hearing which, comments Annick Le Guérer in *Scent: The
Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell*, “rely on some outside stimulation and the ‘inner’
senses (taste and touch), which react in conjunction with the body” (142). In other words, the
sense of smell is neither one nor quite the other, and so “occupies a dual sensory register” (142).
His judgment about smell’s ambivalent nature provides the impetus for smell’s imminent
reproach. “It is Aristotle,” claims Rindisbacher, “who, by acknowledging the senses’ potential for
both knowledge and pleasure, places them at the beginning of a road that will soon bifurcate into
the cognitive scientific and the hedonistic-aesthetic realms” (5). Indeed, these early philosophical
and scientific categorizations regarding the olfactory coincide with the essential and instinctual good/bad dichotomy of everyday life.

In his philosophical epic, *On the Nature of the Universe,* Lucretius approaches a discussion of the olfactory through the use of analogies between smell and the body. Noting the correspondence between smells and the soul and their burial place within the body, Lucretius, in the same breath, so to speak, accounts for the fleeting qualities of scents as well as souls. Le Guérer addresses Lucretius’ olfactory concepts, mentioning Lucretius’ use of analogies:

He goes on to draw analogies between smell and the soul. Both are buried and hidden within the body, and both consist of tiny atoms whose loss does not result in any change in a body’s weight or shape. The soul’s departure from its fleshy envelope is like the process of exhalation: It mounts from the depths following the meanderings of the body’s interior channels until it reaches the surface pores. Once outside, it then floats in the atmosphere like a vapor. Once in the outer air, however, the life span of both soul and odor is distressingly brief. (143)

Lucretius’ analogous style may be similar to Plato’s, but his polemics offer a sharp departure from Platonic thought by maintaining the senses’ unity if not prominence over the mind, beginning by stressing the corporeal nature of the intellect:

First I say that the mind, which we often call The intelligence, in which is situated The understanding and the government Of life, is a part of man, no less than the hands and feet and eyes are part of the living being. (4:95-99,72)

---

12 Presented in six books, *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of the Universe*) is Lucretius’ comprehensive account of an optimistic and naturalistic Epicurean world-view which celebrates intellectual pleasure and stresses a physics of atomism and an ethics of hedonism that emphasizes the avoidance of physical pain. It is also a poem, didactic in nature, and contains 7400 lines of Latin hexameters.
Living and writing during one of the Roman Republic’s most difficult times, Lucretius saw civil wars, gangs in the streets of Rome, and political and legal disorder and corruption. Ronald Melville notes that within “a decade of the publication of On the Nature of the Universe, the republic would be at an end”(xi). In his turbulent world, when neither men nor Republic seemed trustworthy, Lucretius sought for knowledge in the body:

You will find that it is from the senses
In the first place that the concept of truth has come,
And that the senses cannot be refuted. (4: 478-480,114)

As for his opinion on smell, Lucretius yielded equity to each of the senses:

The taste in our mouth has its separate power, and smells
Have separate birth, and sounds. So it must be
That one sense never can refute another
Nor can they possibly convict themselves.
Since each must always equally be trusted. (4:495-498,115).

Drawing from Epicurus’s atomist theory, Lucretius explains that the specific and individual differences in odor perceptions were caused by the shape of an odor’s atoms and how those atoms affected the nose. Smooth atoms belonging to pleasant smells penetrated the nose gently; the rough or sharp atoms of unpleasant odors acted abrasively on olfactory tissue. His notions include an observation concerning olfactory biases:

There must be many things from all of which
Flows rolling out a varied stream of odors

13Sources list Lucretius as living c. 99 -c. 55, BCE; Melville notes in the introduction to his translation of On the Nature of the Universe, Clarendon Press, 1997, that the only exact date known is February 54 B.C. which appears in a letter from Cicero to his brother Quentis, in which he praises Lucretius’s poem.
Which flow and are sped and scattered everywhere
But different scents suit different animals
Because of their different shapes. Bees are attracted
Over great distances by the smell of honey
Vultures by carcasses. A pack of hounds
Leads where the cloven hoof of game has gone
And from afar the scent of man is caught
By the white goose that saved Rome’s citadel. ¹⁴ (4: 675-684, 120)

In these lines, Lucretius devotes his literary/philosophical renderings to an approbation of smell in a rich and organic world where knowledge comes from a melding of the mind/body, of the material and the immaterial.

...
line between the disembodied, spiritual, and transcendental realm on the one hand and the
corporeal, sensual, and immanent on the other” (4). Of course, Augustine’s quest for knowledge
is more focused on acquiring a greater knowledge of God. As for the individual senses
themselves, Augustine denounces his sense of sight as “the eye of the flesh,” which causes him to
yield to the “bold-faced woman” (43). Conversely, Augustine praises God using olfactory terms:
“You were fragrant, and I drew my breath and now pant after you” (201). Stemming from his
olfactory sense, Augustine’s imaginings of God, his divine fantasy, or “phantasia” --to use
Plato’s word from the Republic-- connects an external sensation of smell with his internal
thoughts of God. According to Gerard Watson, phantasia in Plato’s middle dialogues is “the
combination of doxa and aisthesis in thinking. In other words, it is not pure sensation but
sensation combined with thought . . . alerting the readers of the Theaetetus not to take the senses
for granted” (qtd. in Lyons 1). So, though Augustine abstains from pleasures of the body, his
spiritual fantasies connect the lowly olfactory sense with the divine.

As part of his crusade to reconcile Aristotelianism and Christianity, and in contrast to
Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas reiterates sight as the highest sense. Delineating his concepts by
“the mode of modification,” he draws up a hierarchy of the senses based on how both the sense
organ and the object being perceived are affected during the sensory process. Sight is the most
perfect sense because the eye itself is not changed by nor does it change what it beholds – a
phenomenon which also renders it the most spiritual of the senses. Hearing and smell are next in
the list, since for both, the perceived object externalizes some physical change while the organ
goes unchanged. Taste and touch are the material, “lower” senses because they mark a change in
both organ and object. “For Aquinas,” notes Le Guérer, the sense of smell is “halfway between
the noble senses and the base . . . and has a status very similar to its position in Aristotelian philosophy” (153).

Located in a pivotal position, the sense of smell might access not only those higher pleasures that were not merely aesthetic, as previously explained by Aristotle, but might move beyond rationality to the spiritual and “immaterial.” For example, the elect of God might exude the “odor of sanctity” – a special perfume, a mystical fragrance that signaled the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell, Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott identify the “odor of sanctity” as “the most potent olfactory concept to arise from the new Christian world order” (52). Aquinas described the perfume of the elect as “neither gaseous or corrupt . . . it has lost its usual sensual substratum” (Le Guérer 153). Consequently, only those noses possessing a “spiritual” perception are able to apprehend a smell that “produces in the atmosphere and in the organ only an immaterial impression, without emanation” (Aquinas, “The Resurrection”). Aquinas offers his own thoughts on the olfactory in Summa Theologica:

Some have considered smell to be merely a volatile evaporation. But this opinion cannot be true; which is evident from the fact that vultures hasten to a corpse on perceiving the odor from a very great distance, whereas it would be impossible for an evaporation to travel from the corpse to a place so remote, even though the whole corpse were to be dissolved into vapor. This is confirmed by the fact that sensible objects at an equal distance exercise their influence in all directions: so that smell affects the medium sometimes, and the instrument of sensation with a spiritual alteration, without any evaporation reaching the organ. That some evaporation should be necessary is due to the fact that smell in bodies is mixed with humidity; wherefore it is necessary for dissolution to take place in order for the smell to be perceived. But in the glorified bodies odor will be in its ultimate perfection, being no wise hampered by humidity: wherefore it will affect the organ with a spiritual alteration, like the odor of a volatile evaporation. Such will be the sense of smell in the saints, because it will not be hindered by any humidity: and it will take cognizance not only of the excellences of odors, as happens with us now on account of the very great humidity of the brain, but also of the minutest differences of odors. (“The Resurrection”)
In glorified bodies, Aquinas stresses, “odor will be in its ultimate perfection,” though the ultimate odor for Aquinas and other Christian fathers, however, belongs to Christ, who “offered himself . . . a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness,” as Paul points out in his letter to the Ephesians. The sense of smell is redeemed when what it perceives is itself redeemed and made spiritual.

The advent of the bubonic plague in the West from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century inhibited philosophical considerations about the status of smell. Le Guérer notes that the few writings on smell that did appear throughout this period primarily associated the olfactory with the epidemic which recurred in waves of devastation from Italy throughout the whole of Europe. Perhaps due to the odors associated with sickness and death, many believed that the disease itself was carried by odor particles through the air, and people used all manner of scents and fragrances in an effort to ward off the disease. Desperate to avoid the danse macabre, people burned incense made from juniper, laurel, pine, lemon leaves, and rosemary, and dipped handkerchiefs in camphor and other aromatic oils to use as a covering for their faces when leaving their homes.

One sixteenth century writer, however, circumvents smell’s connection with the Black Death. Affirming the oneness of the human person, Michel de Montaigne eschews classical attempts to separate mind and body. Montaigne sees himself as “d’une constitution mixte,” of a mixed constitution of both mind and body, and Richard Regosin notes that Montaigne articulates the equilibrium and interdependence of the body and the mind, preferring a “general human law” that is “intellectually sensual, sensually intellectual” (48). Refuting man’s inclination to over-esteem the mind, Montaigne asserts: “To what purpose do we dismember by divorce a structure made up of such close and brotherly correspondence. On the contrary, let us bind it together
again by mutual services. Let the mind arouse and quicken the heaviness of the body, and the
body check and make fast the lightness of the mind” (qtd. in Regosin 55). Montaigne further
claims that the senses

are our masters . . . . Knowledge begins through them and is resolved in them. After all, we would know no more than a stone, if we did not know that there is sound, smell, light, taste, measure . . . . The senses are the beginning and the end of human knowledge. (56)

Seeking knowledge through experience, Montaigne balances sensual pleasures and spiritual
delights. About smells, Montaigne says: “I have often noticed that they make a change in me and
work upon my spirits according to their properties”(56). He thought that doctors should make use
of smells, and he encouraged the use of incense and perfumes in the church, feeling that they
might function to lead man to spiritual contemplation. To fully explore what it meant to be
human, Montaigne advised, one should purpose to “smell as much as one can” (qtd. in Le
Guérer 159).

Philosophical thought in the seventeenth century sustains the practice of antiquity,
allotting an in-between spot to the sense of smell. Though not as vulgar as the senses of touch
and taste, smell is appraised as less valuable than the senses of hearing and of sight. Descartes
notes that the nose functions best when acting as an index of unsanitary, unhygienic conditions
that need to be corrected, sanitized, and eliminated. Descartes’s rationalized and mechanical
model of the human body, which provides classical modern understanding, posits a perceiving
subject interacting with an object world, though the senses are unreliable. Using the “Wax
Argument,” Descartes concludes that even though he may perceive his body through the use of
his senses, the only undoubtable knowledge is that he is a thinking being. Descartes asserts that a
piece of wax, an analogy for the human body, has certain characteristics that might be perceived by the senses: shape, texture, size, color, smell. These characteristics undergo a complete physiological change when they come into contact with fire. Even so, the piece of wax is still a piece of wax, regardless of the fact that the characteristics may have changed. Descartes concludes that to understand the nature of wax, one cannot trust the senses, and must rely on the mind: “Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind” (*Meditations*). Cartesian dualism denotes the mind and matter as the two fundamental types of entities. The physical body exists in space which might be measured by height, width, and breadth. The mind is immaterial and nonspatial, and is the I of the famous “cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am). For Descartes, the “I” does not represent the physical “I” in a body, but the immaterial “I” of the mind.

Eighteenth-century philosophers respond to Cartesian Dualism and intellectualist philosophies with arguments focused on reestablishing the importance of the senses. The philosopher Helvetius answers Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum” with his own expression, “Juger est sentir – to think is to feel” (qtd. in Le Guérer 164). Concluding that the complexity of man as a machine made man impossible to define, Julian Offray de La Mettrie claims that all thought is based on the senses:

For this reason, all the investigations have been vain, which the greatest philosophers have made à priori, that is to say, in so far as they use, as it were, the wings of the spirit. Thus it is only à posteriori or by trying to disentangle the soul from the organs of the body, so to speak, that one can reach the highest probability concerning man's own nature, even though one cannot discover with certainty what his nature is. (345)

In other words, for this materialist thinker, the soul depends on the body by which “it is shaped, grows and declines” (347). Other Enlightenment philosophers like Condillac and Denis Diderot
also reevaluate the body as the branch of knowledge, making changes to the hierarchy of the senses. During the eighteenth century, sight fell from its position as the most intellectual sense. Touch, the most concrete of the senses, gained highest sense position, with the sense of smell also rising from its classically lowly status. Diderot, the editor-in-chief of the now famous *Encyclopédie*, argues in both *Lettre sur les aveugles* and *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, that man’s reason and ideas were dependent on the five senses. He defends his revised hierarchy of the senses noting that “of all the senses the eye was the most superficial, the ear the most arrogant, smell the most voluptuous, taste the most superstitious and capricious and touch the most profound, the most philosophical” (qtd. in Le Guérer 166). Diderot explains that impressions produced by physical objects that have acted on the senses produce human understanding which deals with the perceptions according to understanding’s three faculties: memory, reason, and imagination. He sorts the general distribution of knowledge into history, which relates to memory; philosophy, which emanates from reason; and poetry, which originates from imagination.

Though he held an equal appreciation for all of the senses, Rousseau acknowledges the sense of smell as “the sense of the imagination.” Stressing wholeness and harmony as well as regard for the body of the learner, Rousseau put together a comprehensive system for learning which included emphasis on training the body. His suggestions for successful education and training in *Emile: or, On Education*, perhaps the most important book on education after Plato’s *Republic*, included sensory education as essential.

In learning to think we must exercise our members, our senses and our organs, all instruments of our intelligence; to derive all possible benefits from these instruments, the body that contains them must be strong and healthy. Thus, man’s
true mind is not formed independently of his body—far from it: in fact, a good physical constitution facilitates the mental processes. (371)

Dividing the development of a person into five stages, Rousseau prescribes that the first two stages in an education be reserved for the training of the senses. In particular, the second stage, from two to ten or twelve, is “the age of Nature.” During this time, the child receives no moral instruction, no verbal learning. The educational design for this stages is the development of the senses: “The mind should be left undisturbed till its faculties have developed” (371). In the latter part of Book II, Rousseau describes the cultivation of each of Emile's five senses in turn, and the nose’s primacy is affirmed as being comparable to “our feet, our hands, our eyes” and which functions as one our “earliest teachers of philosophy” (372).

Both Condillac and the naturalist Buffon heavily influenced Rousseau’s sensual rationalism, and especially Buffon who clearly distinguishes between animal and human smell. The animal sense of smell is “an admirable sense” which functions as “a universal organ of feeling . . . an eye that can see objects, not only where they are, but even where they might have been” (Le Guërer 331). In man, however, the sense of smell occupies the lowest position of Buffon’s sensory hierarchy, which begins with touch and is followed by taste, sight, and hearing. Adhering to Buffon’s theories, Rousseau also differentiates between a primitive sense of smell that is common to both animal and the untamed man, and a more refined sense of smell, an attribute of civilized man. The primitive man is deprived of the aesthetic enjoyment of odors: “Our otiose sensations— the wafted fragrance of a bed of flowers—must be hardly perceptible to men who walk too much to enjoy strolling and who do not work enough to enjoy the delights of
repose. People who are always hungry cannot take great pleasure in odors that do not represent something to eat” (Emile 416).

In Rousseau’s assessment, the civilized man alone can cultivate his sense of smell, even though he dulls it in the process. The natural man may depend on smell to guide him intuitively, while the civilized man, guided through the world by reason, might expand his sense of smell through his imagination. Rousseau posits that while “odors in and of themselves are but weak sensations,” they can “move the imagination more than the senses, and their effect is due not so much to what they offer as to the anticipation they create” (416). Rousseau intellectualizes the sense of smell as the source of dreams and fantasies, thereby echoing Plato’s delineations of phantasia and accounting for Augustine’s fragrant imaginings of a divine being he has not seen.

Philosophies of the Age of Enlightenment which established the importance of the mind’s reliance of the body and which brought new focus on the sense of smell did not go uncontested. Immanuel Kant argued that knowledge could not be accounted for by the accumulation of sense perceptions, and instead, the mind itself, contributes to experience. In his Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, Kant posits a sense hierarchy based on both empirical and rationalist concepts that has the sense of smell in an ambiguous position. As a contact sense, functioning chemically within the body to affect the subject directly, smell plays a greater role in pleasure than in the acquisition of knowledge. Smell, in its primarily subjective role, relates little about the true nature of external objects. Kant asks, “To which organic sense do we owe the least and which seems to be the most dispensable?” (46). His qualified answer is “the sense of smell” (46). Kant expresses his aversion to the sense of smell, the intrusive sense in Kant’s estimation, that cannot be avoided nor rejected: “Smell [interferes] with individual freedom,” as “others are
forced to share in it” (46). Kant adds that “it is no use cultivating it or tampering with it to make it more pleasant” (47), though “As a negative condition of well-being, when it prevents us from breathing in unhealthy air (emanations from furnaces, the stench of swamps and corpses) or from eating spoiled food, the sense is not wholly without importance” (46).

Concurring with Kant, Hegel also asserts the mind’s primacy in the acquisition of knowledge; knowledge is not based on pure input from the senses; knowledge is not knowledge of “things in themselves.” Hegel’s rejection of smell in Aesthetics, however, is more complete than Kant’s. He concludes, notes LeGuerer, that the sense of smell is a “sense of desire linked to consumption, and in which the mind plays no part” (176). Kant excludes smell from his aesthetics, denouncing the position of the nose on the face in relation to its other features. The nose is positioned between the “theoretic or spiritual” zone of the face, a space which includes the forehead, eyes, and ears and which serves as the mind’s residence, and the “practical” zone of the face, the physical space which includes the mouth and the lips which are primarily designed for nutrition. Hegel claims that the nose might belong to either of these zones at any given moment. It may belong to the speculative and spiritual zone, and in the instance of a Greek profile the nose is an extension of the forehead, “the spiritual organ,” which “through its movements, however, slight, serves to express appreciations and judgments of a spiritual order” (Aesthetics 730). In contrast, the nose may function as a member of the nutritive apparatus:

The forehead is thus isolated and takes on an expression of firmness and self-centered mental concentration, cut off from the verbal expression of the mouth, which thus becomes a mere organ serving nutrition and which employs the nose as a subsidiary organ that arouses or stimulates a purely physical need by calling attention to odors. (730)
The ambiguity of the sense of smell is related to which of the two zones, either speculative or material, might command control over the nose.

Though Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach initially embraced Hegelian idealism, he ultimately renounced Hegel’s system in favor of a consistent materialism. Critiquing both Kantian and Hegelian philosophy as leading to man’s alienation and division, to distortions of the body and the senses, Feuerbach writes: “I categorically reject such absolute, vague speculation, turned in on itself as it is, speculation that feeds only on itself. A whole world separates me from such philosophers, who would blind themselves the better to think; I need my senses to think” (qtd. in Le Guérer 180). The sensuous world, that is the material or sensible world, in Feuerbachian terms constructs consciousness. Feuerbach’s “flesh and blood” humanism counters idealism, and Feuerbach himself concludes that what Hegel lacked was a “nose . . . the unique mental organ, the head, universal as it is, is always clearly defined by a nose–pointed or snub, thin or thick, long or short, straight or crooked” (180). In Feuerbach’s estimation of the senses, smell is capable of “spiritual and scientific actions” that might serve knowledge as well as art.

More radical than Feuerbach, Nietzsche appropriated the sense of smell as an integral part of his critique of idealism and Christianity. In Twilight of the Idols, he proclaims all of the senses as “subtle instruments for observation,” but singles out the nose for its ability to access evidence: “This nose, for example, of which no philosopher has hitherto spoken with respect and gratitude, is none the less the most delicate tool we have at our command: it can detect minimal differences in movement which even the spectroscope cannot detect”(46). While Feuerbach redeems the senses, and in particular the sense of smell, by intellectualizing it, Nietzsche demands recognition for the sense of smell’s as well as the body’s animality. For Nietzsche, the fleshy envelope that
previous philosophers had ignored with contempt, holds the keys to untapped wisdom: “In so far as the senses show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie” (46). Charging philosophy as the worship of mummified, dehistoricized concepts, he further denounces any philosophical claims concerning sense-deception:

   Be a philosopher, be a mummy, represent monotono-theism by a gravedigger-mimicry! – And away, above all, with the body, that pitiable idee fixe of the senses! Infected with every error of logic there is, refuted, impossible even, notwithstanding it is impudent enough to behave as if it actually existed. (45)

Moving beyond the empirical to the metaphysical, Nietzsche professes: “All my genius is in my nostrils,” emphasizing smell’s role in the thinking processes, linking smell and wisdom, mental penetration, and sympathy. Smell is the sense of psychological as well as moral knowledge:

   Dare I mention one last trait of my nature, one that does not make my commerce with other men the easier? I am sensitive—to a disconcerting degree—to cleanliness, to such a degree that I can physically perceive our sense— the proximity—how to express it?— the heart, the secret innerness, the “guts,” of every soul . . . This sensitivity has endowed me with psychological antennae that enable me to grasp and even palpate every secret: from almost the very first moment of contact, I am aware of the slimy dross concealed in the depths of more than one nature that is the product of unhealthy blood but covered with the varnish of education. If my observations are exact, such natures, which affront my sense of cleanliness, are also aware of the circumspection with which my disgust inspires me: which does not make them any less malodorous. (Ecce Homo 32 )

In short, Nietzsche’s nose allows him to sniff out the stench of civilized man who has lost his animal nature. His sense of smell becomes a “sixth sense” with which Nietzsche might identify the rot inherent in the decadent notions of idealism and Christianity, and he proposes to provide “quite different and far more agreeable perfumes” to “sufficiently subtle nostrils” (33).

While Nietzsche’s search for an understanding about the nature of knowledge leads him to exalt his nose over the cold logic resulting from civilized man’s denial of his instincts, Freud’s
Kant refers to sight, sound, and touch as the senses of intellect. Smell and taste are the senses of pleasure.

A psychoanalytical—though somewhat philosophical—approach to the depreciation of the sense of smell and the development of civilization upholds a similar idea that modern man has repressed, even renounced his sense of smell. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud notes the “organic repression” of the role of smell. As man assumed an upright position, his visual sensations replaced the olfactory as the primary source of sexual stimulation. When man’s nostrils moved from their close proximity to the ground, and therefore to intermittent odors of menstruation—odors which regulated sexual functions—the role of smell became less important. Man’s rise resulted in a more constant sexual process based on visual stimulus, which fostered in the male, according to Freud, “a motive for keeping the female” (53), and led to “the founding of the family and so to the threshold of civilization”(54).

Thus has the nose figured in the quest for truth and knowledge, even to the understanding of the process of civilization—in these last examples with a certain prominence, though most often with obscurity and ambiguity, and at other times with contempt. Persistently, smell, the sense of proximity referred to by Kant as a “lower sense . . . a sense of pleasure” (Anthropology 45) has been disparaged or covered up more than the other senses. From Plato to Nietzsche, philosophers aligning themselves with the mind and logic have tended to devalue the sense of smell. Plato and Aristotle maligned the sense for lacking language and for leading to pleasures not conducive to contemplation. Rating smell as inferior, Hegel excluded it from any aesthetic consideration. Those few philosophers, like Feuerbach and Nietzsche, who esteemed the body have tended to acknowledge the obvious and primordial role of smell, and have rebelled

15 Kant refers to sight, sound, and touch as the senses of intellect. Smell and taste are the senses of pleasure.
against any discrediting of the olfactory. Regardless of these attempts to redeem the senses and in particular smell, traditional philosophy eschews sensory perception and has deeply influenced Western perspectives on sensory experience.

Descartes’ dualistic view of the world remains dominant, and those thinkers who have moved away from the Cartesian idea that the world is the fixed extension of the mind belong to an exiguous group. One such contemporary thinker is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who recognizes in his philosophical assertions the primacy of sensory perception, claiming that it has an active dimension based on its primordial openness to the life world (to the “Lebenswelt”). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims: “In so far as I have hands, feet; a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent on my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way that I do not choose”(440). Merleau-Ponty’s approach resolves the problem of Meno’s paradox by showing that knowledge of things is discovered through a subject-object dialogue. Departing from Descartes’ mind-body dualism, in which the body is a machine and the mind is what runs the machine, Merleau-Ponty posits the body as a living organism which experiences consciousness in and through the body, not just the mind. Despite the attention his attempt to overcome the problems of empiricism and rationalism in the Cartesian tradition has received, Merleau-Ponty’s effort to break away from Cartesian dualism constitutes an “alternative” approach in contrast to the dominant discourse that favors the intellectual over the corporeal. Interestingly, Bernard Flynn mentions that Merleau-Ponty sees the work of poets and artists as being capable of transforming the experience of the flesh, of both the

individual and the world, into the thought of the world. Writing about painting in “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty describes the “vision of the painter” which is able to show what “profane vision” might miss in “its rush to posit objects. The painter’s vision calls attention to the play of light and shadow through which the visible object becomes visible” (Flynn 165).

In his poetic transformations of the experience of the flesh – experiences often described in olfactory terms – Faulkner calls attention to how the body experiences consciousness and participates in knowledge. As Drusilla and Bayard walk in the garden at twilight, and she commands him to kiss her, and “the scent of the verbena in her hair seemed to have increased a hundred times, to have got a hundred times stronger, to be everywhere in the dusk in which something was about to happen which I had never dreamed of” (227), Bayard’s body and his soul function as one. Bayard is not, to use Jacques Maritain’s phrase, “an angel inhabiting a machine and directing it by means of the pineal gland” (179). Instead, Bayard’s body and soul, as an integrated structure, are overcome by the smell in the immediacy of the all too material moment. In Faulkner’s practice of the olfactory imagination, the mind and body are fused together; his symbolic imagination connects the sensible world and the condition of man through analogy with what may lie beyond it. His attention to smell eludes the Cartesian rational system since smell assails both consciousness and the unconscious at once, and his “epistemology of the olfactory” is at odds with what Tate calls “the angelic imagination,” a curse that works to keep one from knowing and loving the world.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Faulkner’s olfactory imagination can be traced as a contributing motivation in the work of Gabriel García Márquez, who maintains a complex but extensive affinity with Faulkner’s fiction. Much like Faulkner, García Márquez also avoids imperial prescriptions for order and meaning as he makes use of an olfactory intimacy with reality. For
example, in *The General and His Labyrinth*, which offers a fictionalized telling of the last seven months in the life of Simón Bolívar, the Great Liberator of Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador from Spanish rule, García Márquez grants prominence to smell and the nose. Ex-president Bolívar—one of South America’s most mythical figures who becomes one of García Márquez’s most legendary hyperosmiacs—exhibits his penchant for perfume. In this novel, García Márquez depicts the humanness of this historical person who is most often considered in terms larger than life. The mythical-man is brought down to real life, in part by the depiction of his passion for scent which itself becomes mythical: “he confessed it was a weakness of his, to the point where his enemies accused him of having spent eight thousand pesos of public funds on cologne” (157).

Moreover, Bolivar bathes in perfumed water for several hours each day in order to trigger more than his share of the typical machismo response. Bolivar’s nose as well as his scented body directs him in his sexual exploits. Yet, only Manuela “the bold Quiteña, who loves him” (6), secures an enduring place in the General’s heart, an accomplishment which emanates from her odor: like Drusilla, Manuela smells of “verbena water” the scent “favored by the military” (7), an olfactory intimacy which situates her securely in the spaces favored by Bolivar’s fevered memories: his battlefield victories and his bedroom intrigues. Through a symbolic imagination which begins with the body, García Márquez endows Manuela with the same degree of humanity with which the mythical Bolivar is endowed, using smell in a manner similar to Faulkner. Smells serve as the crossroad between the structure of personal, everyday experience and the structure of knowledge, whether that knowledge be historical, cultural, scientific, or philosophical.
Chapter Three
Smell and the New World Novel: Contemplating Being in Redolent Metaphors

It is just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, in breathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the natural grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair.

— Faulkner, *Light in August* (313)

Faulkner’s landscapes are suffused with a fragrance of mauve, with a power of melancholy that makes you feel like painting your own countryside, whether near or far, when you see what Faulkner has evoked.

— Edouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, (106)

Though Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon routinely receive critical attention for their creative act of reconstructing Thomas Sutpen’s failed attempt at an American dream, few to none credit the two Harvard students for laying out Faulkner’s poetics of the novel. And yet, in a “strange room” situated in the “strange iron New England snow” (141) of Cambridge, Massachusetts – the only non-Southern setting to be found in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* – Quentin and Shreve contemplate being, specifically what it means to be Southern, through a cooperation (despite their antagonisms) of different ways of knowing: of *episteme*\(^\text{17}\) and *theoria*\(^\text{18}\).

\(^\text{17}\)Aristotle uses the term *epistêmê* to indicate the possession of a conclusion and the ability to see how the individual items of knowledge fit the systematic context of that conclusion. Literally defined as “science,” the term is often translated as “knowledge” and is distinguished from the word *technê*, which is translated as “craft” or “art.” See *Nicomachean Ethics*, in particular Book VI. Michel Foucault used the term *episteme* in his work *The Order of Things* to identify the set of thoughts which determine the character of a culture – the historical a-priori that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the condition of their possibility within a particular time frame: “I would define the *episteme* retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits a separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *episteme* is the apparatus which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may be from what may not be characterised
As Quentin and Shreve come together in a single act of knowing, they act out a duality indicative of Faulkner’s novelistic imagination, an imagination that habitually joins not only different ways of knowing but also the local and the lofty, the intimate and the cosmic, and the earthy and the universal. And in Faulkner’s cosmos of duality and contradiction, a cosmos far removed from “the strange” and pragmatic Euro-world of Massachusetts, smell works not only as the intersection between polar opposites, but as the catalytic agent of their cooperation.

An outsider at Harvard himself, a frustrated yet prurient Shreve, Quentin’s Canadian roommate, sorts through and attempts to meaningfully fit together Quentin’s tenuous facts about the Sutpens, the Coldfields, and Charles Bon. From Shreve’s perspective, the names might as well be interchangeable with incest, miscegenation, and tragedy. Shreve, curious to understand what it means to be Southern, wants to make sense of Quentin’s retelling of a series of events, or rather of what Robert Dale Parker calls “a non-story of the conspicuous lack of events, so much seems to be made of so little” (1). The two young Harvard men, one from the extreme North and the other from the deep South, are both caught up in a passion to know, both are brooding over what it means to be Southern, and yet, significantly, their contemplative activities take divergent

\[\text{as scientific} \] (Power/Knowledge 197). Regarding Shreve’s epistemological approach to knowledge, also see Robert Dale Parker, Faulkner and the Novelistic Imagination (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1985). Parker notes that “Rosa’s ignorance is tactical, she lacks a piece from the puzzle; Shreve’s is epistemological, he has the most important pieces but refuses to trust them” (3).

In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle uses the term \textit{theoria}, traditionally translated as contemplation, an activity which expresses a search for truth. There have been many translations and interpretations of the term, though here I use the term \textit{theoria} to mean, as some have interpreted Aristotle, a reflection on the knowledge of origins almost like meditating on the idea of a god. Amelie O. Rorty, ed. Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), and in particular the essays by Rorty, “The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, 377-394; J. L. Ackrill, “Aristotle on Eudaimonia,” 15-33; and Kathleen V. Wilkes, “The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle’s Ethics,” 341-58.
philosophical paths. Shreve’s search for understanding is epistemic: he is already in possession of a conclusion, which might be summarized simply as “the South,” or more specifically, “the defeated South,” and all that remains to be figured out is how he might plot, like points on a graph, a consistent pattern of occurrences to fit what he knows – a schema which might yield different though equally plausible solution sets, and which also functions as a source of Shreve’s frustration since Quentin’s pattern of occurrences resists consistency. Quentin murmurs that Shreve’s interrogation is not new, not prompted by Mr. Compson’s recent letter announcing Miss Rosa’s death, but has been ongoing since his arrival at Harvard back in September, nor is it sui generis since it poses the same questions submitted by other intellectually curious minds at Harvard: “Tell about the South! What’s it like there? What do they do there? Why do they live there? Why do they live at all?” (142).

In contrast, Quentin’s desire to know is more in line with Aristotle’s theoria – he wants to know the truth, the “higher” truth about the South, and so he reflects on the unique mélange of information – both personal and public – about the South, information which he already possesses or rather which seems to possess him; he muses over the facts and names with which he has grown up, “his very body . . . a commonwealth” (7) of defeated names and ghosts. Quentin is guided by his “twenty years’ heritage of breathing in the same air [emphasis mine]” as had the now “stubborn back-looking ghosts” as well as by the fact that he has been Miss Rosa’s chosen one, the one she elected to tell about the “old ghost times” in the heat and in the odor of the previous “summer of wistaria” just before he left Mississippi for Harvard. Miss Rosa’s own path of understanding, one which relies on her own organic and first-hand experiences, also depends on the olfactory. She “mark[s] how the wistaria, sun-impacted . . . distills and penetrates,” the air, eventually infusing Miss Rosa’s escape from the “trashy myth of reality” (115).
It is important to note the simultaneity at work with breathing and the act of smelling. Molecules of odor flow through the human system with every breath. The act of breathing, of inhaling and exhaling, cannot be separated from the act of smelling. Diane Ackerman poetically describes the symbiosis at work:

We see only when there is light enough, taste only when we put things into our mouths, touch only when we make contact with someone or something, hear only sounds that are loud enough. But we smell always and with every breath. Cover your eyes and you will stop seeing, and cover your ears and you will stop hearing, but if you cover your nose and try to stop smelling, you will die. Etymologically speaking, a breath is not neutral or bland – it’s cooked air . . . . when we breathe we pass the world through our bodies, brew it lightly, and turn it loose again, gently altered for having known us. (6)

While Quentin works out his metaphysics of the South, Shreve offers rational reflections for understanding Quentin’s dilemma; and in the middle of his purporting, Shreve sets up his own olfactory scenario for apprehending Southernness, which, despite the terminological differences between his and Quentin’s intellectual pursuits, oddly corresponds with Quentin’s unvoiced olfactory thoughts:

Wait. Listen. I’m not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I don’t know how to say it better. Because it’s something my people haven’t got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We don’t live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves . . . and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? [emphasis mine] a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forevermore as long as your childrens’ children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett’s charge at Manassas? Gettysburg, Quentin said. (361)

In his bid to get at the facts, Shreve seems here to be expressing his awareness that the olfactory is a discourse, while maintaining a characteristic skepticism about its referring to anything real.
Even so, he lists the ways that he might know the truth about what it means to be Southern, and in his list of epistemological coordinates, Shreve plots the olfactory as a way of accessing knowledge.

In both Shreve’s and Quentin’s estimations, the olfactory supplies more than sense-based evidence. The olfactory also has an ontological purpose: historical and cultural dissemination and identity are airborne. Quentin is who he is, at least in part, because he has breathed in a cultural heritage that simmers in the hot Mississippi climate, and Shreve is who he is because he has not. It is not that the air simply contains cultural information, but that the cooked air acts as a catalyst, an activator that confers life to the content Quentin has heard and learned whether simultaneously or even prior to his experience. For Quentin, unlike Shreve, the smell actually acts on his mind, specifically his memory and affections. Smell is a mediator or catalyst for refocusing the mind. Despite their differences, Shreve, with his epistemological approach, and Quentin, with his pursuit of theoria, as well as Miss Rosa with her own organic philosophy, all seem to take part in a single act of knowing: all of these characters confront the nature of experience, of subjectivity, and of mind/body dualisms, all attending to the relevance of the olfactory as a necessary component of everyday life as well as a means of accessing knowledge.

In Quentin’s and Shreve’s equally passionate yet disparate contemplative projects, Faulkner demonstrates his novelistic approach to knowledge via the body particularly through the sense of smell. In the cold room “above the frozen and empty quad,” Quentin and Shreve piece together knowledge. Shreve stands facing Quentin, and their breathing vaporizes “in the cold room where there was now not two of them . . . the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins” (236). As the two students stare at one another and
breathe in the same cooked air, the olfactory initiates a mediation, if not a melding of different ways of thinking about the truth, and at that point, a creative action takes over:

their voices (it was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one . . . the two of them creating between them, out of rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere. (243)

Breathing in the same non-circulating air, the two come together with one objective: to create knowledge, and their ways of knowing combine in a synthesis of *episteme* and *theoria* indicative of Faulkner’s fiction.

Knowledge, or at least the quest for knowledge, repeatedly appears as the subject of many of Faulkner’s works. Parker claims that “Faulkner’s novels are shaped as . . . sustained narrative, by their elaborate orchestrations of . . . ignorance,” though Faulkner “keeps pointing our attention to the very thing we don’t know” (3). He reads *Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying, Light in August*, and *Sanctuary* as “detective novels” in which mysteries continually unfold, although the most significant events are often “defiantly withheld.” Parker confirms that “Faulkner’s subject . . . to the limited extent that we can reduce his many and varied experiments to a subject, is the ethical dilemma that arises from the problematic status of knowledge” (10). In the case of Quentin’s *theoria* and Shreve’s *episteme*, Faulkner’s novelistic imagination employs smell as the catalyst that unites ways of knowing and rejoins the forgotten intimacy of the physical to the forgotten universal.
The status of knowledge and the antagonisms of *episteme* and *theoria* so pivotal to Faulkner’s fiction are also central to key theories about the novel.\(^{19}\) In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera concurrently identifies the “passion to know” as the essence of European\(^ {20}\) spirituality as well as being the catalyst for the crisis of the Modern Era. Kundera’s comments begin with his own assessment of Edmund Husserl’s concerns for the modern world. The crisis of the Modern Era is a tragic “forgetting of being,” a term coined by Husserl’s student Heidegger, and about which Husserl despairs. This “forgetting” stems from the advance of a scientific knowledge which plunges man into an ontological haze from which he cannot clearly see the world or his own self. The crisis can be traced to Galileo and Descartes, and the “one-sided nature of the European sciences, which reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation and put the concrete world of life . . . beyond their horizon” (*Art* 3). Kundera adduces that subsequent to Descartes’ aggrandizement of man to the position of “‘master and proprietor of nature,’ . . . man’s concrete being . . . has neither value nor interest” (*Art* 4).

As dismayed with the Modern Era’s narrow pursuit of knowledge as Husserl admits himself to be, Kundera acknowledges a redemption, if not a redeemer, for the crisis of the Modern Era in the novel and in Cervantes, respectively. For Kundera, Cervantes resists and

\(^{19}\) Though there is a variety of criticism concerning the novel, some prominent studies that have guided my thought include: Georg Lukács’ *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* and *The Historical Novel*; Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*; Milan Kundera’s *The Art of the Novel*; Walter Reed’s *An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque*; Marthe Robert’s *Origins of the Novel*, and Michael McKeon’s *The Rise of the English Novel, 1600-1740*.

\(^{20}\) Kundera asserts that Husserl’s use of the adjective “European” extends “beyond geographical Europe (to America, for instance)” (*Art* 3).
combats modernity’s loss, and *Don Quixote* lays bare “the ambiguity of [the] epoch, which is decline and progress all at the same time” (*Art* 4).

Not all novels neatly fit into this category of redemption, however, and Kundera locates two groupings to differentiate between those that do and those that do not. Kundera refers to novels that offer redemption as “the first half-time of the novel” (*Interview* 9), a category which includes novels written in the tradition of Cervantes, and which have the capacity to remind humanity of life’s noble purposes. The “second half-time” of the novel, according to Kundera, consists of novels which are “mere records,” a category which lines up with what Georg Lukács calls the novel of historical consciousness. Novels in the Cervantean mode counter philosophy’s and science’s abrogation of man with “nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being” (*Art* 5), as they scrutinize “man’s concrete life” and reckon with the uncountable variables of what it means “to be.” Against the novel of historical consciousness, which as delineated by Lukács, issues in a consciousness of progressive alienation, the legacy of Cervantes seeks a more fundamental inquiry, requires more imagination and not merely representation, and recalls life’s noble purposes in its implicit inquiry.

The divergent philosophical paths to knowledge which Faulkner presents in *Absalom, Absalom!* might at once seem to parallel the two strands of history/knowledge into which Kundera divides the modern world (and which also play out in his categorizing of the novel): one initiated by Descartes and the other by Cervantes. In significant ways, Shreve’s epistemological approach lines up with a Cartesian and, therefore, reductionist investigation which is responsible for what Husserl and Kundera call the crisis of the Modern Era. His quest for knowledge echoes his own Cartesian education and modern rationalism: his affiliation with a system that does not “remind [him] to never forget.” With no corporeal experience of or in the South, his contact with
the subject of his investigation is limited to what he thinks about what Quentin has told him and how that information matches up with another informing context, the historical narrative of the South functioning as knowledge that Gregory S. Jay claims is “a priori . . . a totality, a unity, or a grand story whose plot and hero we already know” (270). And yet, Shreve finds a qualified redemption in his encounter with Quentin’s soulful search for Sutpen.

On the other hand, Quentin’s *theoria*, backed up by his personal Southern experience with miscegenation, assimilation, and syncretization, suggests the search for meaning that Kundera claims for “the first half-time of the novel.” Though, in some ways, Quentin’s search goes beyond Cervantes’. Cervantes has indeed not forgotten being, he is a modern insofar as he sees the human subject caught in all sorts of delusions; his primary work is disentangling himself from them. Quentin’s search goes a step beyond; his *theoria* can only be attained by encountering the powers of the world beyond – by either contemplating god, or by listening to the dead, as Faulkner has said.

Faulkner, however, assiduously avoids being trapped by a set of choices; instead he insists on a cooperation, a synthesis, a duality of *episteme* and *theoria*. He pronounces no judgment between Quentin’s quest for a higher truth and Shreve’s epistemological approach. In fact, he adds to their narrative voices the accounts of Miss Rosa and Quentin’s father, who have their own ideas about how and where to find knowledge. The combined voices reproduce the disjunctures of understanding and knowledge in a real world in which history and being are both determined by and different from the linear history and genealogies of Europe and a European America. Thus Faulkner’s novels take part in a dual nature of the novel, though that dual nature is also a dialectical conflict within the novel. He provides a mode of access to knowledge that enforces the coexistence of a linear and rational interpretation of the past while insistently raising
the question of how the truth and the past might be known. He does not set up the real and the
ethereal, nor science and philosophy, nor body and mind as antithetical. In Faulkner’s fiction, the
olfactory is a catalyst that renders Faulkner’s novels as both mimetic and poietic; his attention to
smells renders a representable image which is often transformed at the same time.

It is important to note, however, that Faulkner’s duality, his imaginative and creative
rendering of the mimetic and poietic, is tied inescapably to a particular place. By his own
concession, the lofty and universal purpose of Faulkner’s novelistic work is to find the truth of
the human heart, though he also confesses to the regional specificity of his writing when he says,
“I am just a farmer who likes to tell stories.”21 Delivered in his peculiarly sardonic style,
Faulkner’s oversimplification regarding his own literary talent – a talent that would earn for him
recognition as the greatest novelist America ever produced22 – affirms the duality of his work.
His claim to be a farmer is a definite reminder of Faulkner’s origin – an origin both rural and
oral. His statement echoes what Sherwood Anderson once told him back in the New Orleans
days, back at the beginning of Faulkner’s writing career: “All you know is that little patch up
there in Mississippi where you started from” (Meriwether, “A Note” 8).23

21 Richard Gray, in The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography, notes that
Faulkner “played many roles in his life – the effete, bohemian aristocrat, the wounded war hero,
the farmer unkempt in body and mind, the red-coated, stiff-backed huntsman on horseback” (1).

22 Too many references exist that suggest Faulkner’s position as the greatest American
novelist to be able to cite them all. The following, and only one listed here, is written by Donald
M. Kartiganer and appears in Faulkner at 100: Retrospect and Prospect: “Thirty-five years after
his death he looms as large as ever: revered by writers throughout the world; analyzed by literary
critics according to whatever theoretical approach is currently in vogue; assumed by nearly all
writers and readers, including those who do not acknowledge his influence or feel especially
compelled to reread him, as a fixture, perhaps the fixture, in our American literary constellation”
(xiv).

23 In one of his lectures at the University of Virginia, Faulkner said “I was using what I
knew best, which was the locale where I was born and had lived most of my life. That was just
Acting on Anderson’s advice, Faulkner began work in New Orleans in 1926 on a novel he would call Flags in the Dust, later admitting the profoundly autobiographical nature of his work: “I began to write without much purpose . . . until I realized that to make it truly evocative it must be personal” (qtd. in Gray 127). As early as 1926, then, Faulkner recognized the vital importance of writing the South, the “region of swords and magnolias and mockingbirds” (Meriwether, “An Introduction . .” 412) in his writing. As a result, a crucial sense of place would infuse his most significant novels. At this early stage in his career, he was laying down the parameters of Yoknapatawpha, his “own little postage stamp of native soil” (Faulkner, Interview 255). Faulkner’s frequently quoted phrase, made during an extended interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, is not often quoted in its entirety, though in its complete context provides some significant notions to be considered: “Beginning with Sartoris, claims Faulkner,

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual to the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a goldmine of peoples, so I created a cosmos of my own. (Interview 255)

Pointing to the duality of the actual and the apocryphal, Faulkner connects the writer to his people with opening his writing up to the cosmos. In fact, his making of Flags in the Dust is his apprenticeship in this novelistic duality. Paradoxically, then, Faulkner the farmer, the local storyteller, emerges as a world novelist who depicts universal changes brought about by modernity. Faulkner’s mixed world, a world of progress and decline, provided a vantage point from which he could dramatize and investigate the past, the present, and the future. His awareness of the expressive possibilities inherent in his regional perspective kept Faulkner like the carpenter building the fence – he uses the nearest hammer” (Gwynn, Faulkner in the University 3).
returning home to his muse, and his imaginative discovery of Yoknapatawpha became a way of understanding his native land of Mississippi. After writing *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner reflected on the variety of experience and his rendering in the novel of the community’s customs and rituals.

I realized for the first time that I had done better than I knew, and the teeming world I had had to create opened before me and I felt myself surrounded by the limbo in which the shady visions of the host stretched half formed, waiting each with its portion of that verisimilitude which is to bind into a whole the world which for some reason I take it should not pass utterly out of the memory of man” (48).

Faulkner presents the author’s success at creation not as his goal but as a beginning, almost as if he were presenting an offering at an altar, an initiation into something bigger than himself. His initial act of poiesis opens the way for a descent into an underworld like Odysseus’, where he must speak to the shades of the famed dead, “the host” – each of them “waiting” for the completion of their partial stories. The scene Faulkner evokes contributes to that act of *theoria*, the contemplation of a god, without which true poiesis is impossible. Even so, he does not abandon “verisimilitude,” which the novel dare not desert; mimesis and poiesis always combine for Faulkner.

Perhaps unwilling to abandon the host he had created and which he needed in order to create, Faulkner deliberately chose to live his life in Oxford, Mississippi. Unlike many other modernists who left home for New York or Paris, he stayed home. Though he may have felt alienated from a community that tortured him as it nurtured him, Faulkner repeatedly renders his home, and yet, Faulkner moves beyond the provincial. The honeysuckle, the wisteria, and the verbena give rise to obsession. Glissant takes them to “symbolize everything, privileging appearance over reality and external blossom over internal truth” (147). They “leave a vague
aroma of everything that could have happened and everything that was renounced” (148). In writing the olfactory, Faulkner not only identifies smell as an important contributor in the production of knowledge, but he uses smell to stake out the complexity of his region as well as his novels and to intensify the contradictory voices of his narratives. Edouard Glissant, in his revelations about the complexities of Faulkner’s work explains that

Faulkner invented a writing that . . . . describes and at the same time seeks to say what cannot be said through description yet fully signifies (establishes through disclosed reasoning) what is described. The pitch and fluctuations in Faulkner’s writing come from the fact that also, at the same time, it constantly reminds you that this full disclosure is impossible. (Faulkner, Mississippi 138).

Glissant’s conception of Faulkner’s “deferred writing,” writing that is both “straight to the point and suspended” (139), is illustrated in Faulkner’s use of olfactory descriptions. When Faulkner describes some of the South’s decorative flowers – for example, the sprigs of verbena, which Drusilla wears in her hair; the honeysuckle, which Quentin identifies with his sister, Caddie; and the oversweet wisteria, that reminds Rosa of “the miscast summer of [her] barren youth” (116), he is writing his indigenous locale; he exposes his provincial roots in writing smells. The plants themselves, many of them indigenous to Mississippi and the South, underscore the geographical specificity of his literature and confirm what Phil Stone once wrote about Faulkner:

The author . . . is a man steeped in the soil of his native land, a Southerner by every instinct, and more than that, a Mississippian. George Moore said that all universal art became great by first being provincial, and the sunlight and mocking-birds and blue hills of North Mississippi are a part of this young man’s very being (Preface to The Marble Faun 7).

In this alienated culture, Faulkner moves away from the concept of the Euro-American novel to write the New World Novel. Although the destiny of a thriving and victorious America has been defined in much of its literature, the destiny of the economically dependent and defeated American South did not fit neatly into the constructed image of success. In his novels, Faulkner
adjusts the optimistic, successful, nurtured, pragmatic culture of America with the gift of tragedy. His structural framework conforms better with an understanding of the New World Novel, the book of America, as José David Saldívar calls it. Saldívar explains that to understand the book of America, “one of the great fictions of modernity must be surrendered: the fiction of a common language and a common culture. The dream of a common culture has been one of the most persistent American illusions” (66). In modifying this dream, Faulkner broadens this American project. He participates in a struggle that crosses national boundaries. He evidences, as noted by Fuentes and Glissant, a form of expression common to novels of the Other America.

The novel of the “Other America” (the Caribbean and South America) is opposed to that which is fixed (by word and gesture) in the urban, industrial world of the north of the United States. I also tend to relate Faulkner’s world (the furthest from northern America as far as his ideas are concerned) to this group [. . . the desire] for history in literature and the tragic return, which Faulkner has in common with us (Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi* 147).

The New World novel is part of a larger movement based on creative engagement with other facets of reality and on the making of a culture, or re-imagining a people. Through mimesis, the novel renders and unmaskes one history, and through poiesis the novel points forward and advocates an alternative version of reality. The double function of unmasking and recreating in the novel is noted by Edouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse*:

> Let us take the literary work’s widest impact; we can agree that it serves two functions; the first is that of demythification, of desecration, of intellectual analysis, whose purpose is to expose the hidden workings, to demystify. It also has a hallowing purpose in reuniting a community around its myths, its beliefs, its imagination, or its ideology. (99-100)

Questions raised by the modern European novel are no longer central concerns; more important are questions raised by the interrelation of different cultural orders, images, and patterns superimposed on the same terrain. In many ways, Faulkner resists the same forces of modernity,
of historical oblivion that Latin American writers have resisted, and his attention is primarily focused on his society and its communal concerns, and not on what Viney Kirpal sees as the “private, lonely alienated person of modern Western literature” (149). In representing and in recreating this communal terrain, Faulkner uses the olfactory. One would think to find this spirit of resistance and attention to smell everywhere in New World writing, but it seems to be repressed in so many Anglo-American writers, and more prominent in Latin America. Smells bring an intimacy with a reality that is not European and is by nature strange to the Europeanized literary consciousness but familiar to the organism that has grown up in this Southern hemisphere.

Dubbing the New World novel as \textit{lo real maravilloso}, Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in “On the Marvelous Real in America” asserts that it is a variety of art different from European Surrealism. The New World novel employs a heightened awareness of reality. It offers a “natural” product. Carpentier argues that the marvelous real does not subvert reality. Its fundamental character is baroque:

a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. (86)

Not surprisingly, this line of inquiry positions Faulkner in a pan-American context. Indeed, it has become commonplace to note Faulkner’s influence on Latin American writing. From the moment that his works became available to Latin Americans in the early 1930s they struck a chord of recognition. Examining Faulkner’s relationship to the other American South, Deborah Cohn has explored Faulkner’s influence over a number of Spanish American authors, including Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, Juan Rulfo, and Juan
Carlos Onetti. In his contribution to *A Faulkner 100: The Centennial Exhibition*, García Márquez reflected on Faulkner’s significance:

Ever since I first read Faulkner in my twenties, he has seemed to me to be a writer from the Caribbean. This became more apparent when I tried to describe settings and characters from Macondo, and I had to make a great effort to keep them from resembling those of Faulkner . . . . A few years went by before I discovered the key to the problem; the Caribbean is poorly delineated. It is not a geographical area around the sea, but rather, a more vast and complex region, with a homogeneous cultural composition which extends from northern Brazil to the U.S. South. Including, of course, Yoknapatawpha County. Within this realistic conception, not only Faulkner, but the majority of the novelists from the U.S. South, are writers possessed by the demons of the Caribbean. But it was Faulkner who showed me how to decipher them. (“William Faulkner 1897/1997”).

Carlos Fuentes offers a similar perspective on Faulkner’s place in Latin American literature in his 1974 address to the PEN Conference:

But *Absalom, Absalom!, Light in August, or The Sound and the Fury*, could, in their mythic essence, have been told by a wise sage in central Africa, an ancient guardian of memory in the Himalayas, an amnesiac demon, or a remorseful god. Yet it was from the Deep South of the same central, optimistic, success-nurtured, pragmatic culture that emerged these Compsons and Sartorises and Benjy’s and Burdens and Joe Christmas’s to bestow the gift of tragedy on an epic civilization, to undermine the Puritan legacy of the elect and the damned, by the obscure, potent certainty that there is no moral tragedy unless the struggle is between equally legitimate forces, forces that together represent a moral dilemma that can only be transcended by embracing the moral conflict with its antagonist . . . Sinclair Lewis is yours, and as such, interesting and important to us. William Faulkner is both yours and ours, and as such, essential to us. (“Central” 119).

In line with these assertions that connect the two Souths, newer studies move beyond investigating Faulkner’s influence on Latin American writers and are beginning to link the American South with Latin America. These studies emphasize the New World experience as constituting a commonality between the South and Latin America. In his opening remarks for the Twenty-Seventh Annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, Donald Kartiganer noted a new attention . . . to Spanish America as the source of a literature not only influenced by Faulkner’s fiction but curiously parallel to it, in both its formal
strategies and historical vision, an attention to the culture and history of the Creole in Southern consciousness, as well as to that of the Native American, groups whose presence in Faulkner’s work is both substantial and largely ignored by critics (xix).

In the sense that the South experienced its own struggle with colonialism, slavery, and the plantation system, it is similar to Latin America. Cohn finds a number of parallels between the works of Faulkner and those of Spanish American authors.

[Faulkner’s fiction] offered themes, images, and paradigms that resonated with the Spanish American authors, and that they deployed time and time again in their own works. At the root of this sense of commonality lay two main factors. On the one hand, there was a sense of identification with the agrarian, plantation, and post-plantation societies that Faulkner portrayed, centered around the depiction of the social order and its decline, racial tensions, and the experience of underdevelopment, poverty, and marginalization. On the other, there was an extremely strong empathy with the history of the white South: many of the Spanish American authors felt that the South’s defeat in the Civil War, the stigma attached to it subsequently, its subordination to and neocolonialism by the – by another – North . . . were akin to the experiences of their own nation. (“The Paralysis of the Instant” 32).

Glissant also comments on the resemblances between the Caribbean and the South when he claims: “We are both a creole people” (Caribbean Discourse 56).

As has been shown, the South and Latin America are both world “Souths” which have to find their way in modernity; both have had to learn new ways to tell stories. However, moving beyond a discussion of either Faulkner’s influence on Spanish American literature, specifically during the critical period known as the “Boom” of the 1960s and 1970s or the current trend towards the recognition of the commonalities of history and culture between the South and Latin America, reading García Márquez alongside of Faulkner offers another, perhaps larger, advantage. A comparison of Faulkner and García Márquez speaks to the advantages of “intertexual” juxtapositions and compensates for what Bakhtin identifies as interpretative ‘blind spots’ when literary works are restricted to area, genre, or period studies:
it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside of the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others. (Bakhtin, *Speech 7*).

Reading García Márquez, in the context that he himself is reading Faulkner from the outside, moves beyond the conventional sense of either reception or influence. Bakhtin, in discussing the sources of carnivalization, confirms this comparative reading when he states that what is primary is not “influence” per se but the development of the genre as a whole:

> We emphasize again that we are not interested in the influence of separate individual authors, individual works, individual themes, ideas, images – what interests us is precisely the generic tradition itself which was transmitted through the particular authors. Throughout this process the tradition is reborn and renewed in each of them in its own way, that is, in a unique and unrepeatable way. (Bakhtin, *Problems 159*)

A comparative study limited to noting influence, asserts Paul Connell, “merely perpetuates a mimetic and linear fallacy of literary production and authorial intent, and ignores the reality of the creative process and the way a genre transforms and reinvigorates itself” (133). Within Bakhtin’s schema, the novels that fit best are those arising, not in the centers of culture–not London, Paris, or New York, but rather on the borderlands and frontiers of culture where different ways of knowing come into contact.

Reading Faulkner through the lens of García Márquez provides a way of discovering what is only detectable through an outside, “meta” reading. García Márquez’s meta reading of Faulkner works not only to repeat Faulkner’s poetics of the novel; his reading brings out what is distinctive about Faulkner’s presentation of history, and then to produce novels that further the genre as a whole. One of the distinctions of the presentation is how Faulkner and García
Márquez use smell, the most evanescent of the senses, to take us down alleys of remembrance, tossed by whiffs of invention, the scent of memory evoking the importance of the past in both worlds, and to the resistance of European ways of seeing and writing reality. Their New World novels emerge from the polyphonic and fragrant contours of their material worlds.
In her frequently cited essay, “The Site of Memory,” Toni Morrison suggests that the writer’s historical task is to “remember” with honesty and integrity. She maintains that community and cultural identity are constructed through a complex and ongoing process involving both an emotional and an epistemic effort.

For Morrison, the moral imagination locates the site of memory in a realistic, yet often highly imaginative and marvelous, view of corporeal experience and personal/communal identity. Memory is written on the body, whether that body be the physical landscape of the South or the emotions of an individual, all of which yearn for recollection. Memory haunts the land, the culture, the mind, and the body. For Faulkner and García Márquez, smell, like water, has perfect memory; the olfactory sense moves in places where the other senses cannot follow to trigger moral imagination and emotional memory. In their fiction, smells haunt the present, and like
disembodied souls, themselves, they call forth visual apparitions – eidolons – from the past, aligning history and memory with the body. In this context, the term “eidolon,” meaning “spectre” or “phantom” is used to denote a supernatural apparition which appears quite suddenly and whose presence is limited to a visual encounter. An eidolon differs from a ghost, a supernatural visitor who appears successively and might attempt modes of communication with the living which go beyond the visual.24 Significantly, an eidolon never delivers interpretation. An eidolon, like the olfactory memory, itself is strictly personal. Smell inscribes itself on the body of the character who is able to recall details with a moral imagination that goes beyond the “trashy myth” of reality; however wild the imagination might run, the original point of olfactory reference, like the primal course of the river, perpetuates and validates the personal as well as the communal experiences.

The fictional worlds of both Faulkner and García Márquez might well be described as places haunted by memory.25 Both writers address their regions’ respective burdens of history, and both attempt in their bodies of work to show how through remembering, their fictional characters might repossess the present by means of reconciling the past with the present and the future. Faulkner conjures up a South haunted by the past, in particular the defeat experienced in the Civil War and Reconstruction, while García Márquez invokes images of a region isolated in the shadows of a confused past and resigned to limiting the effects of colonization. Mario Vargas

24 In Demonology and Witchcraft, Sir Walter Scott uses the term—and offers a similar definition—while illustrating a story about a “man of science’s” fantastic experience while “calling up his Eidolon in the hall of his former greatness” (i, 36).

25 In The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South, Richard Gray refers to Faulkner’s fictional landscape as a “land haunted by memory” (231).
Llosa affiliates the work of Faulkner and García Márquez as well as the cultures of the Deep South and Latin America as he cites the extraordinary importance of the past “which is always present in contemporary life” to the work of both authors (“From Aracataca to Macondo” 10). In their fiction, Vargas Llosa contends, “the past does not precede the present . . . it coexists with it, it emanates from it” (García Márquez 274). Deborah Cohn points out in History and Memory in the Two Souths that as writers from their respective regions, both Faulkner and García Márquez “trace a rocky transition from an agrarian social system, as well as the changing sense of community that this process entails, and show how memories of the old ways continue to haunt the present” (7).

Moving beyond a definition of memory as merely the voluntary ability of recalling physically absent items, Cohn defines memory as “the point at which notions of time and individual perspective intersect” (26). Memory, behaving in this more active role, has the capacity to transport past experience to the present, often concentrating the past into a single moment, and sometimes allowing the dead to share narrative space with the living. Hauntings frequently set the stages of Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fiction and dramatize memory’s role in how individuals position themselves in time. The presence of fictional eidolons demonstrates the degree to which individuals understand their identities through their memories of or beliefs about the past.

Critics have previously pointed out that Faulkner and García Márquez often represent the intersection of history and memory as hauntings. While tracing the over-arching role of memory

26 “El pasado no precede al presente . . . coexiste con el, mana de el mismo.” (Unless otherwise noted, all Spanish to English translations of secondary sources are mine).
in clarifying Faulkner’s use of disordered time and “influence of the dead,” Lee Anne Fennell claims that “memory, with its disregard for chronological time and its idiosyncratic and highly personal chains of association,” pulls “pieces of the past into the present, resurrects the dead, and remakes family history” (29). Jonathan Baldo refers to characters in García Márquez’s fiction who are cut from the community of the living and their “desperate attempt to remain with the living by prevailing against time and death” (89). Yet despite this and other critical attention paid to the role of memory in the author’s preoccupations with the influence of the past and its dead on the present, few to none have commented on how either writer attends to the connection between smell and memory, and, in particular, of how olfactory memories, impervious to time, might haunt the present, setting the stage for the appearance of ghosts and eidolons who inhabit vivid reinstatements of the past. A careful examination of olfactory language and situations in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* and in García Márquez’s *Leaf Storm*, will establish how for both authors, smells, like disembodied souls themselves, call forth ghosts and eidolons. Both authors

---


28 In his discussion about the special attributes of odor memory, Tyrgg Engen in *Odor Sensation and Memory*, asserts that “the most prominent feature of odor memory is its imperviousness to time . . . . It is specialized for the ability to reinstate the past and to ignore subsequent odor experiences not associated with the formative event” (81).

29 *Leaf Storm* was originally published in Spanish in 1955 under the title *La hojarasca*. In this discussion, unless otherwise noted, I will reference Gregory Rabassa’s English translation.
use Proustian moments of recollection to depict memory not as a controlled, conscious return to what one might review or reconsider, but as a chance visitation of the past, an olfactory haunting of the past through and in the body. Like Proust, Faulkner and García Márquez align history and memory with the body on a strictly personal (read: physical) level; consequently, memory is not limited to the bounds of nostalgia.

Significantly, however, Faulkner and García Márquez depart from Proust’s European narrative, expanding the range of representation from the private/individual canvas of experience inherent in modernism to a New World imagination of polyphonic culture and its vast canvas of experience. Their olfactory visitations delineate time in terms of simultaneity rather than chronology or succession, and demonstrate how Faulkner and García Márquez speak an aesthetic of the body and memory in what can be translated as their critique of the Western aesthetic of the mind. In “Faulkner, Glissant, and Creole Politics,” Barbara Ladd points to this aesthetic, claiming that the “creole voice in Absalom, Absalom! . . . speak[s] an aesthetic of the body, of memory, and of place in their critique of the Western aesthetic of mind manifest in History” (47).

In The Fate of Place, Edward Casey notes that contemporary philosophers are seeking to reclaim place “by way of body” (202) and adds that “if we are surprised at this . . . it is only because one of the main agendas of philosophical modernity is the subordination of all . . . phenomena to mind” (203).

The olfactory’s role in resurrecting the past is literarily well-established. In one of the most celebrated anecdotes of memory being called forth by a chance encounter with a familiar

30 Trigg, as do other contemporary researchers and scientists, refers to “Proust’s famous recollections aroused by the aroma of a petite madeleine dipped in tea, which in a flash brought back long-forgotten events of his childhood” as the “Marcel Proust syndrome” (82).
smell, the aroma of a madeleleine soaked in tea causes Marcel Proust to recollect, to know once again, his aunt's country home. From the tiny space of a teacup in *Swann's Way*, all of Proust's novel emerges:

And as soon as I had recognized the taste\(^{31}\) of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents. (I: 64)

One whiff of the once familiar confection, and the Proustian hero sees quite vividly the house at which he spent so many of his younger days. Prior to this fragrant stirring of his involuntary memory, he demonstrates the frailty of the deliberate, conscious act of remembering. When he rationally strains to remember, to gain access to his knowledge of the past, he remembers only in fragments, in bits and pieces of memory. For Proust, voluntary memory screens as much as it reveals; the conscious memory falters and is not adequate. Epiphany, by contrast, comes without any discursive control, and what is absent and elusive, is instantly ushered into the present by an odor.

Throughout his seven-volume masterpiece, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust rejects empiricism and rationalism, and establishes a metaphysics that moves beyond the reduction of controllable variables that makes scientific discourse a discourse of limited value. William C. Carter identifies Proust’s key theme as “the phenomenon of memory ignited by a physical sensation” and points to Proust’s conclusion that man’s “true nature lies outside of time” (32).

---

\(^{31}\)Proust includes taste as a trigger of memory. He uses the word “taste” in this passage, but he links taste with smell in the preceding passage, avowing that “taste and smell alone . . . bear the vast structure of recollection” (I: 63-64).
His theories of time, space, and ways of remembering past experiences go against the prevailing Cartesianism of his time: “When from a long-distant past nothing subsists,” claims Proust, “after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time. . . like souls . . . and bear . . . the vast structure of recollection” (I: 63-64). Smells, for Proust, possess a disembodied power that might function to make absence present. With their soul-like function, smells are able to resuscitate memory and the past, and therefore extend the nature and limits of the knowable, just as they call attention to the communion of the body and memory. Thus, Proust, asserts Roger Shattuck, “mock[s] any effort at spiritual transcendence and any heroic interpretation of history, leaving us to our true humanity, ‘the mixed condition’ of body and soul” (96).

Akin to Proust, both Faulkner and García Márquez evoke smells as souls in order to represent how memory and the past access the present. Using involuntary memory in much the same way as Proust does, Faulkner and García Márquez introduce olfactory spirits into their fictional plots; odors infiltrate the present after being channeled through chance olfactory instances and once present, act to conjure up ghosts, eidolons, and the past. In the case of Faulkner and García Márquez, however, the past is being recounted for a community rather than for an individual. In a number of their novels, a purely contingent presence of some odor during an initial experience “remains poised . . . like [a] soul” and functions at a time in the future to make absence present. Smells as souls function as the catalysts for memory, escorting other eidolons along with them, often ascribing a unique designation to the object once smelled or again smelled.
For instance, attention to the smell of “a wistaria vine blooming for the second time” sets *Absalom, Absalom!* in motion in the dark parlor of an Antebellum home where the soul of the smell in “the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall” resuscitates the long dead and absent Thomas Sutpen back to life (1-4). Sutpen in his “man-horse-demon” glory functions as the eidolon when he cinematically appears in vivid detail, though “quiet inattentive and harmless” (4). In the hot and airless room where “listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound” (3), memories involuntarily reconstruct a stage where the past is vividly, albeit silently, replayed for Miss Rosa.

Likewise, García Márquez’s first novella, *Leaf Storm*, unfolds with attendance given to how smells embody the past. In his pre-*Cien Años de Soledad* depiction of Macondo, García Márquez describes a New World landscape where jasmine gives “off its insistent breath . . . because in a certain way that smell was a prolongation of [a] mother” (67). Visited by a smell, like a soul, of the “jasmine bush against the courtyard wall” that was blooming on the night he was born and so prior to his ability to participate in rational thought, the grandson envisions “a dead man in the kitchen . . . looking at the ashes in the cold stove” (46). The jasmine in *Leaf Storm* is cultural, and emblematic of a desire to preserve the past in the present. Ada explains to the grandson that jasmines are like people who “come out at night and wander through the night after they are dead” (46). In both *Absalom* and *Leaf Storm*, eidolons are resurrected in haunted

---

32Fennell makes mention of “triggering stimuli” which may cause remembered events to “emerge suddenly and vividly in response to a particular sensory impression or chain of associations” but discounts memory as a “personal reconstruction” that is not able to “rearrange recorded episodes from the past in the manner of one rearranging bits of film footage” (31).
olfactory instances, facilitating access to a way of knowing that moves toward the marvelous and beyond any realistic bounds of the knowable.

The souls of smells act as literary ghosts to narrate the authors’ philosophy and poetics of history – of how they establish memory and history in literary structures. In “Ancestral Presences: Magical Romance/Magical Realism,” Lois Parkinson Zamora, in a comparative discussion of how historical experiences in the U.S. and Latin American fiction can be “remembered, reported, and (re)created” in words, focuses her investigation on “the nature of literary ghosts” that serve as “carriers of metaphysical truths, as visible or audible signs of atemporal, transhistorical Spirit” (77). Adding smells, like souls, to Zamora’s list of ancestral presences further extends her pertinent observations, with one difference: Zamora’s ancestral presences depend on sight and hearing, while smells function as olfactory signs that also “carry historical burdens of tradition and collective memory” (77). And whether they act to fill the void of individual solitudes, or as “links to lost families and communities” (77), as do the literary ghosts discussed by Zamora, smells make absence present, and in their delineation of the nature and limits of the knowable, they serve as a “critique of modernity” (78). Zamora claims that the presence of literary ghosts “is inherently oppositional” to modernity “because they represent an assault on the scientific and materialist assumptions of Western modernity, namely that reality is knowable, predictable, and controllable” (77). The souls of smells collaborate with other literary ghosts in their critique of modernity, and moreover, like ghosts, the souls of smells “float free in time,” and are “eternal and everywhere” (77), facilitating a view of the fluidity of time.

Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s novelistic imaginations seem acutely conscious of the fluidity of time, and both move away from modernity’s progressive, linear view of history.
Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s concepts of temporality, of how they represent time past and passing, have been consistent subjects of commentary about the work of both authors. From Sartre’s early existentialist reading about time and the self in *The Sound and the Fury* to Gail Mortimer’s recent Lacanian assessment of the past and loss in Faulkner’s fiction, Faulkner readers, asserts Patrick O’Donnell, “have developed a compelling argument for regarding temporality as a key element” in the understanding of Faulkner’s fiction (107). For Gavin Stevens of Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun*, “The past is never dead, it’s not even past” (285).

Faulkner expressed his desire to condense “everything into one sentence – not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present” (qtd in Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File*, 115), which resulted in his incredibly long and often baroque sentences.

Zamora maintains a similar view concerning García Márquez’s fiction, stating that his novels “are extended considerations of temporal reality” (49). García Márquez also literalizes a fluid sense of time in the very first sentence of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which encompasses past, present, and future in a single breath: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (11). This condensation of time repeats itself again in Melquiades’ manuscript, which “had not put events in the order of man’s conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant”(382).

As does Proust, both Faulkner and García Márquez appeal to the work of Henri Bergson, Proust’s contemporary, who, like Proust, sought to unravel the mystery of time and memory. In a now famous interview with Loïc Bouvard, then a French graduate student at Princeton, Faulkner
explains his concept of time: “There isn’t any time . . . in fact, I agree . . . with Bergson’s theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity. In my opinion time can be shaped quite a bit by the artist; after all, man is never time’s slave” (qtd in Meriwether 70). Deborah Cohn notes that “critics often compare García Márquez’s notions of time to those of Henri Bergson” (The Paralysis of an Instant” 70 ), since García Márquez depicts time “not as a continuum, but, rather, as duration, as a past which creeps up on and encompasses the present and the future” (70 ). In the work of Faulkner and García Márquez, the souls of smells “remain poised a long time” to act as duration, and to reestablish the past in the present.

Both Proust and Bergson seek “permanence” in a world where things, people, ideas, and feelings were transient. Bergson’s primary concept of duration explains memory as a dynamic life-shaping force that conveys the past into the present, allowing the past to endure. “The persistence of the past into the present” (22) is the key premise of Creative Evolution, while in Matter and Memory, Bergson states, “If there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place” (66). These images, according to Bergson, potentially effect a change for the person involved in the act of remembering. “Without this survival of the past into the present,” said Bergson in An Introduction to Metaphysics, “there would be no duration . . . only instantaneity” (40). Bergson’s chief distinction from Proust is that he validates voluntary memory, therefore paying less attention to the role of sensory perceptions. Paramount for Bergson, however, is the premise that without memory there would be no permanence of a previously experienced
epiphany, and thus, epiphany would lose any significance; the moment of revelation need never happen at all.

Even at a glance, the pasts of Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s respective regions necessitate remembering lessons from times gone by; their ways of fictional remembering befit this “past” consciousness, and their narratives reflect an apprehension of time which avoids linear time and encompasses past, present, and future. Moreover, both authors must deal with cultural traditions that are disjunctive or have been destroyed, and their historical projects trace an anxiety of origin – a familiar theme in American literature. And yet, both Faulkner and García Márquez render searches for precursors as problematic. Because origins in the New World and in the New South are multiple and indeterminate, because characters cannot long for homelands that do not exist, because their fictional circumstances go beyond simple separation/reunion, voyage/return, their work transcends what Zamora refers to as a “simple modernist nostalgia for origins,” though it does not conform to a “postmodernist dismissal of any kind of continuity” (77). Both authors point out the problems with a universalizing Western Historical vision – the concept associated with Hegel, which asserts that human and cultural events are part of and the product of a transcendent and rational force which controls and directs those events.

Though Faulkner has been interpreted and read as writing from the center of a Western Historical vision, this discussion aligns itself with other ways of reading Faulkner. For example, in *Caribbean Discourse*, Martinican novelist and essayist Edouard Glissant describes Faulkner as “creole” who speaks from an intersection of History with the histories of human historical and plural experience. In agreement with Glissant’s interpretation of Faulkner, Ladd suggests that for Faulkner, “as for many writers of the ‘Other America,’ there is, for good reason having to do
with the experience of slavery and colonization, little sense of an actual investment in this History” (33). Glissant and Ladd read Faulkner in terms of simultaneity “rather than chronology or succession, in terms of irruption rather than development, in terms of exile and return rather than origin and departure” (35). Mario Vargas Llosa offers a similar view of García Márquez’s attention to multiple histories: “The world of Faulkner,” like his (Vargas Llosa’s) world, like García Márquez’s world, “is preindustrial, or at least, resisting industrialization, modernization, urbanization” (“Reality” 75-76). This resistance to modernity punctuates the work of both Faulkner and García Márquez and is evidenced by their characters’ fascination with, if not reliance on, memories of the past. Their plots revolve around similar beings, individual and collective, for whom time stops or is suspended.

Indeed, both Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s work contains and promotes the idea of “simultaneity” – an established concept recently reiterated by Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* as the Godlike ability to “see all moments, past, present, and future, so that the here and now [is] only part of the eternal” (382). “Simultaneity,” which Rushdie cites as Walter Benjamin’s concept of “Messianic time” from his discussion of redeeming the oppressed past in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” is “important . . . for a novelist” who should “be both linear and Godlike, to express both the truths of simultaneity and those of linearity” (362). It is to the “idea of sequence, of narrative, of society as story,” as well as to Benjamin’s concept of “simultaneous, multiform, protean” time that Faulkner and García Márquez attend; though concerned with exploring their regional histories and the problems that plague them, Faulkner and García Márquez circumvent what Benjamin refers to as “homogeneous, empty time” (264). In particular, throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Leaf Storm*, their direction to resurrect the past
and its dead is clear, as is their concern about how past events are recorded and by whom, as well as how that knowledge is accessed in the present. For both Faulkner and García Márquez, smells effectuate a way of knowing, a method of resurrecting the past. More than other sensual stimuli, odors evoke vivid and complex emergences of memory; memories are driven by past experiences where the temporal and spatial context – in particular the aromatic context in which such experiences occur – are their defining attributes. Benjamin himself pays homage to the role of smell in recalling the past:

The scent is the inaccessible refuge of the [involuntary memory]. It is unlikely that it will associate itself with a visual image; of all sensual impressions it will ally itself only with the same scent. If the recognition of a scent is more privileged to provide consolation than any other recollection, this may be so because it deeply drugs the sense of time. A scent may drown years in the odor it recalls. (184)

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the novel often regarded as Faulkner’s greatest achievement, perplexing time shifts from multiple narrators out of chronological order all create the drugged sense of time to which Benjamin refers. In the linear fashion of a family saga, Faulkner positions Sutpen—a would-be patriarch who dreams of a future settled by “fine grandsons and great grandsons springing as far as the eye could reach” (218). “I had a design,” Sutpen confesses to Grandfather Compson. “To accomplish it I would require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family” (212). Ironically, Sutpen’s future design centers around forgetting his own past. After being turned away from the front door of a Virginia plantation because he is without possessions or status (read: poor white trash), a young Sutpen crosses the boundaries of the U.S. by way of the Gulf of Mexico and enters the Caribbean to leave the past behind. He cuts his ties with his West Virginia origins and his association with the dispossessed in order to reconstruct himself as a powerful patriarch of a dynasty. Leaving the South for the Caribbean, he succeeds in finding
wealth and family, only to leave them behind to “abrupt” back into the South by way of Mississippi, where he will pull a plantation from the land, but will eventually fail in his design to see sons and grandsons populate his empire. His linear design will fail in a South fractured by War and Reconstruction, racism and creolization. In this context, the term “creolization” is used in the same way that it is used by Glissant, to mean more than “métissage” or racial mixing, but of the “long-unnoticed process” of integration and regeneration which leads to a confusion of time and a multiplicity of histories (269).

In the biblical account of Absalom from the Old Testament, the sins of the father are visited upon the son, and Faulkner’s Absalom repeats the cyclic theme of the father/son conflict complete with cycles of recurrent sin. Absalom, however, is more than a personal tale of the failed American dream of a self-invented man (like The Great Gatsby, to which it is often compared) or of filiations collapsed. In Absalom, which in many ways works to explain Faulkner’s other novels, Faulkner confronts the plantation society of the South—the foundation upon which the South was established. Glissant identifies Absalom as Faulkner’s “endless and aborted progress toward the ‘foundation,’ or settling on the new land”(42). Significantly, Sutpen’s career as a New World planter articulates the story of hemispheric colonization and critiques the plantation culture of the Old South while it concurrently critiques the Western aesthetic of mind which privileges History over multiple histories, rational thought over corporeal experience.

The whole plot of Absalom centers around the act of memory as each narrator struggles to either remember or to forget the past. The novel’s only present action involves the reconstruction of the story of Thomas Sutpen who has been dead for more than forty years at the time the novel
begins. In *Absalom*, Faulkner’s concepts of time and memory as well as memory’s link with the olfactory continue to unfold. Of the novel’s multiple narrators—Miss Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, and Shreve McCannon, each who present different versions of Sutpen’s past—two experience the appearance of an eidolon when olfactory memories haunt the present. First, the smell of wistaria, like a soul, invades Miss Rosa’s solitude, where, accompanied by the eidolon of Sutpen himself, the olfactory resurrects the past of this lone female narrator— the only narrator who knew Sutpen personally. Long after Sutpen’s death, at a time when old age has dulled her voluntary memory functions, the persistent smell of the wistaria growing on the outside wall floods the scented corridors of Miss Rosa’s memory. The same fragrance unlocks Quentin’s memory as well. Quentin, the sensitive and emotional character resurfacing from the earlier *The Sound and the Fury*, still a citizen of Jefferson, is—in *Absalom’s* plot—planning a departure for Harvard, where he hopes to be far away from the South and its ghosts. Like ghosts themselves, however, both Rosa and Quentin suggest Faulkner’s philosophy and poetics of history. In *Absalom*, and for Rosa, in particular, Faulkner embodies the persistence of the past into the present through the olfactory, and therefore grounds history within the body, offering a validation for Miss Rosa’s version of the past.

Critical references to Miss Rosa, however, have largely overlooked the olfactory elements in her narrative. At the beginning of *Absalom*, Rosa, in a “grim, haggard amazed voice” (7), delivers what Minrose Gwin calls an “hysterical tale” (68) of Thomas Sutpen’s advent into Yoknapatawpha County. Gwin would thus seem to be part of a long line of critics for whom the high intensity and shrillness of Rosa’s voice cast doubt on the reliability of her story. They distrust Rosa’s melodramatic voice, perceive her narrative as the rambling of an hysterical
woman, question her knowledge and challenge the reliability of her perspective. Ilse Dusoir Lind, for example, in one of the earliest and most influential essays, describes Rosa’s voice of blind subjectivity and impossible romanticism as: “shrill, belated, and misguided, [a] cry for vengeance [which] opens the tale at its highest pitch” (35). Sean Benson claims that “her knowledge is inadequate: thus her perspective is more limited than those of the other narrators” (451).

Likewise, J. Christopher Cunningham argues that “Rosa’s notion of history emerges from her conservative Methodist background: the history that she offers is ordered by a traditional, Protestant logic of good and evil, divine justice and retribution, and the inescapable corruption of sins that are passed from generation to generation” (568). Finally, Donald M. Kartiganer points to the “evil introduced by Rosa . . . that renders both Sutpen and the events surrounding him essentially incomprehensible” (73). Gwin, though she recognizes Rosa’s shrillness, doesn’t discount her narrative but convincingly shows that the other narrators within the text – Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve – work to invalidate Rosa by essentially re-writing her story (68).

More recent criticism, while still in agreement with Gwin, defends Rosa’s narration and her narrative. Linda Wagner-Martin’s spirited feminist commentary concludes that Rosa’s “strangely silent discourse. . . answers the elaborate rhetoric of Mr. Compson . . . and leaves the reader wondering at the power of Rosa’s largely unvoiced but ultimately assertive tale.” Rosa, she argues, acts as the “mother of the narrative” and as “Quentin’s literary mother” (237). Likewise, Rosemary Colem persuasively argues that Rosa’s status in the novel demands critical reevaluation (420). However, such valorization does not go far enough; Wagner-Martin and Colem stop short in their arguments and undervalue Rosa’s chronicle. So far unnoticed is the
awakening of Rosa’s involuntary memory which allows her not only to recall, but to recall with a corporeal clarity. A smell conjures up Rosa’s memory, and in fact, acts to exorcize Miss Rosa – herself described as a ghost – from her solitude, and so emphasizes the significance of the body and memory. Following the olfactory visitation and the subsequent remembering, Miss Rosa steps out from a haunted past, and uncharacteristically acts to effectuate her freedom from the patriarchal domain of Yoknapatawpha.

In Chapter Two, Mr. Compson explains to Quentin, “Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made them into ghosts”(7). For Rosa, however, life as a ghost began much earlier than the war. Compson describes Rosa’s childhood as “that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth which consisted of Cassandra-like listening beyond closed doors, of lurking in dim halls” (47). Like Cassandra, Miss Rosa lives outside of time, though simultaneously she lives as a helpless female trapped within it. In Chapter One, Quentin imagines Miss Rosa as a little girl, “in the prim skirts and pantalettes, the smooth prim decorous braids, of the dead time . . . with that air of children born too late into their parents’ lives . . . an air Cassandra-like and humorless and profoundly and sternly prophetic out of all proportion to the actual years even of a child who had never been young” (14-15). Rosa’s childhood is marked by absence: her “absence of youth” might be summed up by the fact that she is absent a mother, absent of love, and absent of the kinds of experience shared by most children. Rosa spends this

33Cassandra, one of the twelve daughters of Priam and Hecuba of Troy, refuses the amorous advances of Apollo who has given her the gift of prophecy. To punish her, Apollo decrees that anyone who hears Cassandra’s prophecies will believe them to be falsehoods. In Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, Cassandra returns from Troy with the triumphant Agamemnon as his slave where she is met with the murderous rage of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s jealous wife. Before she enters the home, she foretells a bloody scene to which the Leader responds: “The stranger seems keen-scented as a hound.”
vacant, empty time in “a grim mausoleum air of puritan righteousness” (47), where her reliance
on sound and smell as a trusted means of accessing reality is a direct result of isolation and
loneliness. “Listening beyond closed doors” became her only recourse for communication and
“lurking in dim halls” the only playground of her childhood (47).

The narration consistently employs the image of the chrysalis to describe Rosa. Within a
cocoon that isolates her from close relationships, Rosa waits, “regarding any and every thing
which could penetrate the walls” (47), and has little else but the sensory experiences of her
restricted environment to keep her company. Rosa’s thoughts about “remembering” take on a
decidedly Proustian theoretical tone evident in her narrative: “See how the sleeping outflung
hand, touching the bedside candle, remembers pain, springs back and free while mind and brain
sleep on and only make of this adjacent heat some trashy myth of reality’s escape” (115). Rosa’s
monologue echoes Proust’s trust in involuntary memory. The treasure of impressions that are
formed by sensations experienced are not voluntarily accessible, and so, Proust only accepts the
truth of involuntary memory. “Sensory experiences,” says Proust, “bear unfalteringly the vast
structure of recollection” (I 64).

For Rosa, as for the Proustian hero, reality lies in the senses as she lucidly explains in
Chapter V:

Once there was – Do you mark how the wistaria, sun-impacted on
this wall here, distills and penetrates this room as though (light-
unimpeded) by secret and attritive progress from mote to mote of
obscurity’s myriad components? That is the substance of
remembering – sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see
and hear and feel – not mind, not thought; there is no such thing as
memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no
more, no less. (115)
As Rosa points out in this passage, smell, as do the other sensory modalities, makes indelible impressions that become submerged in the unconscious. Rosa’s early Proustian contemplations will manifest when the smell of the wistaria wafts through Rosa’s gloomy office. The wistaria plant is a natural object which she might associate with one of the most fulfilling moments of her life, and which comes to represent Rosa’s past. The repeated sensory experience of smelling the wistaria unlocks a door to the corridor of Rosa’s memory. Visited by the smell of the wistaria, she recollects “the miscast summer of [her] barren youth” (116). Whereas the other narrators’ words construct versions of Sutpen’s story from hearsay and assumptions, Rosa’s story originates from an involuntary memory and the chance instance of smelling the fragrant wistaria. The wistaria channels the smell from the earlier experience and enables a dramatic instant replay of events she herself endured. As it does for the Proustian hero, Rosa’s past, and Sutpen’s eidolon along with it, rises up “like a stage set.” In this way, her story—assertive and authoritative—challenges the dominance of the male narrators’ perspectives, as it challenges the concept of an absolute reason or logic that controls memory or history.

The substance of her remembering, a smell from her past, functions to empower her and her narrative, having evolved from the only other time in Rosa’s life when she felt so empowered:

Once there was (they cannot have told you this either) a summer of wistaria. It was pervading everywhere of wistaria (I was fourteen then) as though of all springs yet to capitulate condensed into one spring, one summer: the spring and summertime which is every female’s who breathed above dust, beholden of all betrayed springs held over from all irrevocable time, repercussed, bloomed again. . . . That was the miscast summer of my barren youth. (116)
Left to spend the summer with Ellen and Judith at Sutpen’s Hundred, Rosa projects her own longing for love onto the romantic screen silhouetted by Judith and Charles Bon. Rosa confesses: “Yet on the day when I went out there to stay that summer, it was as though [Charles Bon’s] casual pause at my door had left some seed, some minute virulence in this cellar earth of mine quick not for love perhaps . . . but more than even love: I became all polymath love’s androgynous advocate” (117). Having never experienced love in either a sensory or an emotional way, Rosa’s curiosity emboldens her usual timidity and emblazons her typical reserve. She hides in bushes and envisions the “invisible imprint of his absent thighs” and sees in the garden “his passing shape, his face, his speaking voice” (119). She suddenly turns from fantasies haunted by Bon to dreams of sleeping with Judith: “let me sleep with you . . . . Let us lie in bed together while you tell me what love is” (119).

The short reprieve from her father’s house finds Rosa in a place where her senses run free and her body awakens. All the while the sweet smell of the wistaria penetrates the “warped chrysalis” of Rosa’s life. All too soon her dream ends: “My father returned and came for me and took me home and I became again that nondescript too long a child yet too short a woman” (119). Yet, the wisteria’s perfume is inscribed in her memory and in her body and will “remain poised a long time . . . like [a] soul . . . and bear . . . the vast structure of [her] recollection” (Proust I: 63-64). The olfactory memory will endure and will visit Rosa again to resurrect the past in order to fulfill the present.

Over forty years go by before the smell of wistaria again penetrates Rosa’s shell, though in Faulkner’s non-linear time structure, Rosa’s “sharing” with Quentin takes place early in Chapter One of the novel. In the opening sentence, Rosa sits opposite Quentin Compson in the
dim, hot airless room “still called the office because her father had called it that” (3). For forty-three summers, this house, constructed by patriarchal design, has entombed Rosa; the “dim coffin-smelling gloom” of Rosa’s asylum isolates her from “light and moving air” because “when she was a girl someone had believed . . . that dark was always cooler” (3). For forty-three years she whiles away her half-life in ghost-dominated shadows until the fragrance of the “twice bloomed wistaria against the outer wall” (4) infiltrates the gloom and quickens her memory.

The oversweet smell penetrates the office air and triggers Rosa’s memory, and she sends a message for young Quentin Compson to come and hear her story. Rosa sends for Quentin because “it was a part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air . . . which the man himself had breathed” (7). In order for Quentin to help her, he, too, must experience the past with his own senses. Her “grim haggard amazed voice” continued to talk “until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound” (3). To facilitate Quentin’s acceptance of her story, Rosa relies on the smell, like a soul, and on Quentin’s heritage of breathing the same air that Sutpen breathed and on her voice that “would not cease . . . as if it were the voice which [Sutpen] haunted where a more fortunate one would have had a house” (4). As it did for Rosa, the olfactory magically conjures up a vision of Sutpen for Quentin to watch along with Rosa, and “the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration” appears (3).

Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts halftamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran . . . . Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them. (4).
The visions evoke a circular sense of time as a revolving and continuous present, and by the end of Rosa’s narrative, these “rememberings” empower Rosa to break out of the chrysalis of her existence. Unlike Sutpen, who spends a lifetime trying to overcome the stigma of being sent to the back door, Rosa has spent a lifetime on the other side of doors, never being invited into companionship and security, power or space. She has remained locked in a small space of shadows and eavesdropping, believing herself unable to break down locked doors. However, when she and Quentin finally reach Sutpen’s Hundred on that eventful night, Rosa takes the initiative to break down the door:

“Break it,” she whispered. “It will be locked, nailed. You have the hatchet. Break it.”
“Break it!” she hissed. “It belonged to Ellen. I am her sister, her only living heir. “Give me the hatchet.”
“Wait, he said. “Do you really want to go inside?”
“I’m going inside,” she whimpered. “Give me the hatchet.” (294)

Rosa asserts her rights and decides to go through the door with or without Quentin’s help. Her accomplishment over fear stems in part from her recollections of doors from the past that needed to be broken and entered; her uncharacteristic aggressiveness traces back to her olfactory visitation and its persistence to merge the past into the present. At fourteen, Rosa had borrowed the identities of Judith and Bon and projected her inexperienced self into spaces not belonging to her. Now in her old age, Rosa returns to Sutpen’s Hundred with young Quentin Compson, ready to face the ghosts of the past. This time, no one “exists above the dust” who can keep her from repossessing the present. As in Bergson’s notions of memory, the past creeps up on and encompasses the present. Armed with “the substance of her own unique remembering,” Rosa confronts the truth and *Absalom* becomes the story not only of fathers and sons but of the
daughters of the South. “You don’t even know about her,” Quentin says to Shreve. “Except that she refused at the last to be a ghost . . . She could find someone to go with her and bust into that locked house because instinct or something told her it was not finished yet” (290). The substance of her remembering, the soul of the insistent sweet breath of the wistaria speaks softly to Miss Rosa and delivers her from her solitude.

Rosa’s narrative not only contributes to the telling of the truth about Sutpen; her story gives shape and space to the ghost-like women dominated by Sutpen and men like him. Rosa’s “substance of remembering” contradicts General Compson’s patriarchal generalizations: “They lead beautiful lives – women. Lives not only divorced from, but irrevocably excommunicated from, all reality” (156). The indelible impressions etched upon Rosa’s body communicate the reality of her life; smell unlocks the door to courage, resulting in the validation of her history. Rosa’s previous single-mindedness in keeping the past alive, as a “woman who . . . had already established herself as the town’s and the county’s poetess laureate by issuing to the stern and meager subscription list of the county newspaper poems, ode, eulogy and epitaph” (6), does not find a past that will “endure” until she is visited by the perfumed soul of the wistaria that repossesses the present.

The smell which haunts Rosa also triggers Quentin’s memory, though it works outside of his own subjective experience, as has his region’s past– a past from which he longs to escape. Richard Godden comments on Quentin’s entrapment by the past in The Sound and the Fury, and says that when Quentin dismantles his father’s watch, he “Presumably . . . wants to escape from his father’s model of time, but its inner parts prove annoyingly well made and the watch continues to tick” (111). Quentin does not want paternal time – that “mausoleum of all hope”
inherited from his father’s version of southern history, but his inherited memory does encompass more than what he personally remembers. And as it does for Rosa, smell draws him, infiltrating and appropriating his senses, bringing an absent past into the present. The ghostlike presence of smell infiltrates his ways of knowing and relating to the world around him. Though his own sensitivity to odors is first (and well) established in *The Sound and the Fury* where he metaphorically associates the smell of honeysuckle with his sister Caddie, Quentin’s olfactory experience in *Absalom* takes the form of an olfactory haunting, conducting him on an excursion into a past that occurred in his own “pre-history,” into a past that occurred before he was born. Odor invades the office where he meets Miss Rosa; with her, Quentin envisions Sutpen’s eidolon, and witnesses Sutpen’s advent into Yoknapatawpha County, thereby disrupting the model of Historical memory.

Quentin’s olfactory instance entirely ignores the typical chronological progression of memory, resounding the often quoted passage from *Light in August*: “Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders” (104). In this instance, the olfactory extends Quentin’s memory beyond the bounds of his own life; the olfactory oversteps mortality. Since Quentin was not born during the time when he might have established a metonymic association with the smell of wistaria and Sutpen, the fact that he, himself, sees Sutpen in vivid and cinematic fashion, suggests the power of smell to reach across the generations. “In the office with the “dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria . . . and the rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity” (4), the linear temporal flow is interrupted at a point that allows for the expansive past to overtake the present for someone who never had a personal, individual part in that past. Smell
travels through time as “data of prehistory,” using Benjamin’s phrase, that allows Quentin to experience an “encounter with an earlier life” (182), a life before his own.

Beckoned by Miss Rosa, Quentin comes to the tomb-like home where “in the gloom of the shuttered hallway,” Miss Rosa waits to introduce him to her olfactory memory, to the source and structure of her “remembering.” Absalom’s Cassandra-like prophetess moves from classical to biblical allusion; Rosa, as an Old Testament prophet, anoints Quentin as her olfactory heir. Like Rosa, Quentin is also living a ghostlike existence on the outside of time. Though “still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost” Quentin is “nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was” (4). Though Quentin does not share the initial sensory experience of smelling the wistaria, the past is engraved on him nevertheless: “his very body [is] an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he [is] a commonwealth . . . a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts” (7).

Smell, like a soul, visits not only Rosa, but Quentin as well, carrying a burden of collective memory. Quentin shares in Rosa’s haunted visitation, and he himself sees Sutpen and his wild band “overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing” (4). As it does for Rosa, the fragrant visitation confounds the past and the present; Quentin is overwhelmed by the past and becomes part of a living “dead time.” The dead time comes to life again in the dark room in which Quentin experiences the visitation of an “olfactory remembering,” and bodily absorbs the fragrant past which repossesses the present. Quentin refers to this absorption of the past later in the novel:
Because you knew it already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do; so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering. (212-213)

He carries the memories with him into Chapter Two, which begins: “It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father’s cigar” (23). Possessed now with the “substance of remembering,” Quentin remembers, even much later in the “strange iron New England snow . . . that dead summer twilight—-the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies--attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room” (141). Once at Harvard, Quentin attempts to share his past with fellow student Shreve, but Shreve’s historical objectivity as well as his anosmia in the cold and fragrance-barren snow, prevent him from absorbing Quentin’s memories. The work of the fragrant involuntary memory ends in Quentin’s and Shreve’s cold dormitory room, and the attempt to rationally reconstruct the story leaves Quentin under an unbearable weight of History, remembering a South he can neither forget nor disavow.

Similar visitations by eidolons and smells, like souls, occur in García Márquez’s first novel, Leaf Storm, though as in Absalom, the Proustian moments have gone virtually unnoticed. The same may not be said about García Márquez’s other affinities with Faulkner and Faulkner’s obvious influence in Leaf Storm, a novel “often . . deemed ‘too Faulknerian’” says Cohn (“The Paralysis of the Instant” 59). Not long after the novel’s publication, Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann claimed that “if La hojarasca is a failure, it is largely because it is written in a borrowed idiom that never becomes a personal language”(233). Michael Palencia-Roth views Leaf Storm as “written under the influence of other styles and novelists . . . and the most influential, belongs to William Faulkner” (33). Vargas Llosa also asserts that Leaf Storm’s
Macondo “bears the metaphysical dew of Yoknapatawpha County” (“From Aracataca to Macondo” 10). García Márquez himself describes Faulkner’s useful model for writing about traumatic histories:

> The “Faulknerian” method is very effective in describing Latin American reality. Unconsciously, that was what we discovered in Faulkner. That is, we were seeing this reality and wanted to tell it, and we knew that the method of the Europeans didn’t work, nor did the traditional Spanish method; and suddenly we found the Faulknerian method extremely accurate for describing this reality.  

(La Novela en América Latina)

These negative criticisms largely ignore the benefit of García Márquez’s “meta-reading” of Faulkner, and neglect the advantages of intertextual juxtapositions. Even though García Márquez himself acknowledges that he draws on Faulkner, he is doing important work to establish his own imaginative world. Though García Márquez does not elaborate on what exactly the “Faulknerian” method is, the method certainly includes the olfactory as a way of “seeing” reality and of being able to describe reality. Moreover, García Márquez emphasizes the failure of the European method, indicating his departure from the Proustian novelistic project with which he has at least the olfactory in common. Proust maintains a subjectivity that Faulkner and García Márquez never embrace. His first-person narrative sets the tone for a European narrative in contrast to Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s chronicle-like narratives.

---

34 “El metodo “faulkneriano” es muy eficaz para contar la realidad latino-americana. Inconscientemente ruego eso lo que descubrimos en Faulkner. Es decir, nosotros estábamos viendo esta realidad y queríamos contarla y sabíamos que el método de los europeos no servía, ni el método tradicional español; y de pronto encontramos el método faulkneriano adecuadísimo para contar esta realidad.
Similarities as well as the departure points exist between *Leaf Storm* and *Absalom*, and *Leaf Storm* is most frequently compared with Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*. Raymond Leslie Williams, in *The Modern Latin American Novel*, asserts that “*Leaf Storm* was written when García Márquez was clearly an admirer of Faulkner, and it read[s] much like *As I Lay Dying*” (102). Critics have frequently noted the similarity of their archetypal burial sequences. In *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren’s family must overcome overwhelming natural and emotional obstacles to transport her remains to Jefferson, Mississippi, while in *Leaf Storm*, a highly respected, retired colonel’s promise to a mysterious French doctor to provide him with a proper burial echoes Anse Bundren’s promise to Addie. The similarity of these burial promises has led critics like Harley Oberhelman to “consider [*Leaf Storm*] . . . to be the most Faulknerian novel” in García Márquez’s corpus (68).

While both *Leaf Storm* and *As I Lay Dying* share similar moods of decadence and decay, a comparison that García Márquez made himself, rather than simply trace the odor of decay depicted in a community whose only desire “is to smell the odor of organic decomposition behind the doors” (14) of the foreigner, García Márquez’s attention to the fragrance of the past delineates the olfactory affinities and subtle differences between *Leaf Storm* and *Absalom*,

---

35 A few critics also note *Leaf Storm*’s similarities with *Absalom, Absalom!* In his article “The Faulkner Relation,” Plummer marks Isabel’s resemblance to two characters from *Absalom*: “The mother is the Quentin of *Leaf Storm*, with a lot of Rosa Coldfield thrown in” (36). “Like Rosa,” Plummer asserts, “she is rigorous in her puritanic morality” (36). *Leaf Storm*’s reliance on the olfactory to link the present with the past is a treatment that prominent critics like Vargas Llosa and Cohn have not entirely disregarded, though their attention to smell is truncated. Vargas Llosa briefly notes the “odor of putrefaction, a physical, historical and moral decay [that] overwhelms” *Leaf Storm* (9). In an article that examines García Márquez’s experimentation with linear time, Cohn mentions the wistaria of *Absalom* “which signals the transitions from past to present in Miss Rosa’s sections” and the jasmine plant of *Leaf Storm* “which is a living reminder of Isabel’s dead mother” (60).
though this delineation necessarily includes some attention to how the odor of decay might reference the past. Like Absalom’s Yoknapatawpha, Leaf Storm’s Macondo is a place haunted by smells, though in Macondo, the image of the jasmine, which gives “off its insistent breath” (67) replaces Miss Rosa’s totemic wisteria. Leaf Storm makes use of Proustian and Bergsonian concepts of memory as does Absalom, though we find in García Márquez’s work, as we do in Faulkner’s, some views of time and memory that are decidedly his own. Though similar to Proust and Faulkner, García Márquez’s conception of time—very different from chronological time—is an “inner time” that might repossess the present during a chance olfactory instant. García Márquez’s time, like Proust’s, might be described as “a vase filled with perfumes, sounds, places, and climates” and which, when inhabited once again by an original perfume, might “be given back to us” (VI: 567).

Despite the fact that Plummer, for one, has read the descriptive phrase “leaf storm” as a metaphor for the “rubbish of modernity” (34), García Márquez purposefully draws an intertextual line away from the present and backwards through time returning to the text of an ancient Greek drama to introduce the novel that he would confess to be his “favorite,” because “he felt it was his most sincere and spontaneous” (McMurray 3). The epigraph that precedes the story—a quotation from Sophocles’ Antigone—foretells Leaf Storm’s plot, as well as emphasizes multiple layers of meaning in the novel. In Antigone’s plot, the title character understands the life-threatening consequences of her actions yet nevertheless chooses to defy the state’s decrees in order to obey a higher, moral law. “‘Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving,” proclaims Antigone in response to reignning King Creon’s public proclamation that no one may bury Polyniecies, her brother. Though she faces public stoning, Antigone disobeys Creon’s orders and
buries Polyneices because she cannot leave her brother “unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.” She professes to “owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living.”

In *Leaf Storm*, the Colonel does not face certain death, but he does risk the community’s disfavor as he carries out much the same sacrifice in an attempt to honor the dead. For the Colonel, as for Antigone, honoring the dead is a ritual service that entails removing the dead and decaying body out of human sight and so out of human mind, since death itself, even in the most honorable of circumstances, extends a powerful and visual corporeal dishonor that should not serve as the source of final, and perhaps more powerful, memories. In fact, memorials to the dead should be built of both material and immaterial elements such as earth, stone, marble, and memories of experiences lived – not of decayed flesh, not of the body devoured, whether by decay or disrespectful creatures, human or otherwise. Antigone values this ritual above her own life, because she does not want her brother’s memory to be associated with the horrific visual images of a putrefied body; Antigone wants her brother to be remembered with love; the Colonel, motivated by his own ideals of personal honor, risks communal disfavor in hopes that the hateful memories of the doctor might also be forgotten. What goes unsaid in Antigone’s narrative is the connection between the smell of the decayed body and how that smell is written on the bodies of the living. In the Colonel’s cultural landscape, however, honor for the dead includes an olfactory reference; the Colonel understands that the smell of the dishonored body will ensure olfactory memories that will never dissipate. Simply put, the site/sight of death, whether honorable or dishonorable, might itself be forgotten, but not when those memories are memorialized by and through smell.
Unlike the characters in *Absalom* whose encounters with souls of smell are entirely by chance, the inhabitants of Macondo understand the connection of memory and smell. They purposefully set up olfactory situations in an effort to invoke the haunting souls of smells; they invite ghosts and eidolons to inhabit their memories of the past, illustrated by their tradition of planting jasmine in order to remember the dead. If effect, Macondonians attempt to seduce olfactory memory in order to conjure up the souls of smells. Seduction efforts don’t always succeed since not every Macondonian has the benefit of a heightened sense of smell, but even so, the “chance” of an olfactory encounter is exponentially raised. And in the doctor’s situation, the premeditated plan is to perpetuate their hatred of him.

Though *Leaf Storm’s* action is centered on the Colonel’s determination to carry out a promise of a decent burial made three years earlier to a man whose defiant actions and strange behavior had caused great hostility in Macondo, the burden of that action is centered around memory. How might the doctor be remembered? In his recent autobiography, García Márquez claims that “life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it” (*Living to Tell the Tale* epigraph), and a central focus of *Leaf Storm*, is how one is remembered as well as how one remembers. The doctor entreats the Colonel to remember his one good deed: in retribution for a “healing” rendered the Colonel, the reclusive French doctor asks the Colonel to “throw some earth over his body so that the vultures would not eat him” after his death (91). His entreaty also indicates his desire to be outside of communal remembrance: covered with earth, he will be out of communal sight and smell and memory.

In fact, long before his death, the doctor—much like Rebeca of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, had “closed the doors of [his] house and buried [himself] alive” (146) to escape from
being remembered. At the time of his death, the vultures circling the doctor’s decaying body include not only the creatures, but the human members of community as well. The Colonel’s desire to make good on his promise is vehemently opposed by the community since the doctor had refused to care for wounded men carried to his door years earlier during a local political confrontation. In response to this great offense, the people have sworn to leave the doctor unburied. Unlike Rebeca, however, whom Macondo’s residents fail to recall, the doctor cannot escape the community’s desire for a “communal remembrance.” The greatest desire of the people of Macondo is “to smell the odor of organic decomposition behind the doors that he didn’t open that other time” (Leaf Storm 15), and at the sparsely attended wake, the Police chief evinces his agenda to make sure the people get what they want: “We can’t be sure that he’s dead until he starts to smell” (14). Like Rosa, who aligns herself with the Proustian concept concerning voluntary memory’s function, as if it were some “trashy myth,” the people of Macondo understand the connection between smell and involuntary memory; they want to remember their hate. In a community incessantly haunted by the odor of decay, the evoked souls of smells might provide a perpetual link to that hatred.

The living in Leaf Storm, then, invite the dead to share their narrative space, though two narrators in particular are visited by eidolons channeled by odors. Sitting in a “closed room” where the “air is stagnant like concrete” (3), Leaf Storm’s three narrators relate their different versions of reality and memories of the past before the corpse of the doctor who hanged himself the night before. An insistent breath of “trash” and “trunks” fills the scene and inspires the twenty-eight monologues delivered by the three characters: the colonel, who, like Antigone, is bound to a higher, moral code; his daughter, Isabel, a deserted mother; and Isabel’s unnamed ten-
year-old son. Throughout the interior monologues of these narrators, García Márquez mingles the past with the present by distorting linear time. “The three distinct life phases of the narrators,” asserts Michael Bell, “give the narrative an increasing depth . . . of time strata” (12). Beginning in medias res and working in a circular and repetitious way, all of the events take place within a thirty minute time period on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 12, 1928—a leap year in Macondo. Cohn notes García Márquez’s “deliberate refutation of linear chronological time” that is replaced by “the psychological time of memory” (“The Paralysis of the Instant” 59).

Narration in the novel alternates between the first person, “I” narrated largely in the present tense by the ten-year-old boy, to the third person perspectives of the Colonel and Isabel which revisit significant events of the past several decades. Critics have noticed Isabel’s similarities between Miss Rosa and Quentin, but of the three narrators, she is most unlike these characters from *Absalom* because she is not visited by olfactory ghosts; only the Colonel and the grandson are haunted by smells which pull ghosts and eidolons from the past, making use of olfactory instances as a structure for the past.

The Colonel’s grandson, the first narrator in the novel, experiences olfactory hauntings and subsequently envisions eidolons, providing further evidence of the olfactory’s significance to the structure of memory in *Leaf Storm*. In a novel which demonstrates a drugged sense of time, the grandson experiences time as simultaneous – he can see moments of the eternal. Much like Aureliano in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Quentin in *Absalom*, the grandson is the owner of memories “in his head since long before he was born” (*One Hundred Years* 328). A kindred spirit of Miss Rosa as well, the Colonel’s grandson is a creature of memory haunted by smells. These visitations which occur when his involuntary memory is triggered by olfactory instances
mark him different from other *Leaf Storm* characters who are limited to one or two temporal dimensions.

*Leaf Storm* opens with the unnamed grandson’s first monologue, which Michael Bell perceives as “the innocent viewpoint of the young boy” (12). Cohn’s similar perspective marks the young narrator as “severely limited . . . able to understand only what he can see, hear, smell, and touch” (“The Paralysis of the Instant” 61). Plummer also calls attention to the grandson’s sensory demonstration while at the doctor’s wake: “The boy is seeing his first corpse, but he does not see so much as sense . . . it’s his function to render the preparation of the corpse graphic, tactile, to fix the atmosphere of the event, which , in turn, is mean to resonate as a symbol for the post-leaf storm state of the town” (35). In its distrust of the reliability and depth of the grandson’s narration, such criticism seems oddly reminiscent of critical remarks about *Absalom*’s Miss Rosa.

Like Miss Rosa, the unnamed grandson is not quite as childlike or limited as he might seem. In the opening line, he announces, “I’ve seen a corpse for the first time” (*Leaf Storm* 3). As the novel progresses, however, he admits to repeatedly seeing the “dead man who sits down every night” in a “useless chair placed in the kitchen corner” (36). By his own admission, then, the grandson has seen a “dead man” prior to attending the wake. The discrepancy does not signal the ten-year-old’s unreliability. In fact, his obvious word play—substituting the word “corpse” for “dead man,” his interpretation of the subtle differences between the words—emphasizes a linguistic maturity that does not befit the language of a child.

Unlike Vardaman Bundren of *As I Lay Dying*, who is unable to comprehend the death of his mother, or Benjy Compson, the retarded narrator of *The Sound and the Fury*, or other “severely limited” narrators used by Faulkner, the grandson in *Leaf Storm* demonstrates not only
a more mature understanding of language, but also a somewhat subverted vision of the difference between the physical reality of the dead body and his own intangible but more powerful reality of the apparition. That is, in the boy’s encounter with the limits of the knowable, what is spiritual/nonmatter counters what is logical/matter. The “dead man who sits down every night” is not a corpse that can be moved, ignored, or hidden. He assumes a place in the kitchen that becomes a place in the boy’s life. On the other hand, the corpse presents the awkward insignificance of life in present time. The body looks like “clay” and has become a nuisance, a problem to be solved as the inhabitants try to figure out how best to dispose of it. So far unnoticed is how the grandson’s sensitivity to odors bears the structure of memory for Macondo; beyond this sensitivity, the boy, like Quentin, is visited by the souls of smells who set the stage for eidolons of people he has never known and who extend to him an ownership of memories beyond his years.

Numerous textual similarities exist between the first few pages of *Absalom* and the first few pages of *Leaf Storm*, between Miss Rosa and the grandson. The grandson’s experience at the wake, in the “heat [that] won’t let you breathe in the closed room” (3), mimics Rosa’s experience in the “dim coffin-smelling gloom” of her father’s office, “a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened” (Faulkner, *Absalom* 3). In the room which remains closed because his grandfather cannot open the decrepit window that is “glued” with time “to the wood around it, the grandson articulates a claustrophobia caused by air “stagnant like concrete” with “a smell of trash” (García Márquez, *Leaf Storm* 3). Both Rosa and the boy sit in chairs oversized for their small bodies: Rosa sits across from Quentin “in a straight hard chair that was so tall for her that her legs” are “clear of the floor with that air of impotent and static rage like children’s feet”
(Faulkner, *Absalom 3*). The grandson narrates that his feet “don’t touch the floor and hang in the air half a foot away . . . I begin to swing my legs, not thinking about anything until I remembered” (García Márquez *Leaf Storm*, 5). The similarities move beyond the obvious physical correlations, however, as both *Absalom*’s Rosa and *Leaf Storm*’s unnamed grandson rely on the souls of smells to provoke their memories.

As both sit in closed spaces filled with odors of the past, smells call forth the past into the present. On the wall of her father’s office, the wisteria conjures up the ghost of Thomas Sutpen. While sitting on the chair in the dark and empty room – empty except for the corpse of the dead doctor, the trash smell “that was solid and permanent . . . like the heat” (5), re-members the dead man’s face though the coffin is closed. This re-membering act is significant, and even before the grandson “examines” the corpse, he can “see him just the same, everywhere, with his bulging eyes and his green, dead face in the shadows” (6). As his memory is triggered by the odor of trash and trunks, the grandson recalls the doctor, employing the kind of act described by Hans J. Rindisbacher in his seminal work, *The Smell of Books*, as the act of “re-membering,” as the exercise of turning “the past into flesh and blood” (215). With the coffin closed, the boy claims, “I’ve got it so clearly that if I look at the wall I can see his open eyes, his tight gray cheeks that are like damp earth” (44). The “re-membering” experience is so powerful, that the grandson claims, “if they blindfolded me, if they took me by the hand and walked me around town twenty times and brought me back to this room I’d recognize it by the smell. I’ll never forget how this room smells of trash, piled-up trunks, all the same” (45). As he smells and remembers, the boy removes the corpse from present time and encounters the doctor as an eidolon. The boy’s early statement, “When I looked toward the bed I didn’t see him the way I
had before. I saw him dead” (5), now takes on greater meaning. For the boy, a “dead man” as an
eidolon has even greater power than the man did in life, and certainly more meaning than an
inanimate corpse. In the present, during this time of remembering, the past rises like a building in
its scaffolding. His immediate sensory memory is triggered by the phenomenon of the soul of a
smell in the present.

Beyond this demonstration of the boy’s memory-making apparatus at work in the present,
his narrative accomplishes more than the re-membering and preservation of present time. His
flashbacks not only recall his school friends and previously experienced after school activities: in
his monologues, he describes a community in ways that should be unfamiliar to a boy who is not
yet eleven. In Macondo, where time and space seem insignificant to people “tormented by a
prosperous past and the bitterness of an overwhelmed and static present” (79), the souls of smells
channel a reconstruction in the boy’s memory in order to bring together the past and the present.
A boy like this, with these abilities, can appear only in a place like Macondo, during a time of
decline and debasement, or as Milan Kundera refers to it, of “decline and progress all at the same
time” (Art 4 ). Indeed, García Márquez’s settings often have analogical meanings, and the boy
could be imagining Latin America’s experience of the twentieth century, the promise and decline
of industrial capitalism.

For this special boy, the reconstruction begins at his home with memories that are
dynamic—that quicken a static present—with thoughts that work in the present to reshape the
landscape and landmarks for a town “created out of the rubbish of other towns” (1). Throughout
the novel, García Márquez depicts the singular significance of smell to this boy who claims
“There’s no smell at home that I can’t recognize” (45). As soon as the window shutters are
removed from the exterior walls of the doctor’s closed room, the boy’s mother takes him to the window where “things become visible.” Seeing the town again, “as if I were returning to it after a trip,” the boy centers his attention on his house, “faded and rundown, but cool under the almond trees; and I feel from here as if I’d never been inside that green and cordial coolness, as if ours were the perfect imaginary house promised by mother” (13). Scents repeatedly waft through his succeeding monologues, and in one, he accounts for each family member and each room of his home, according to the smells they engender:

When they leave me alone on the veranda I close my eyes, stick out my arms, and walk. I think: When I get the smell of camphorated rum I’ll be by my grandfather’s room. I keep on walking with my eyes closed and my arms stretched out. I think Now I’ve gone past my mother’s room because it smells like new playing cards. Then it will smell of pitch and mothballs. I keep on walking and I get the smell of new playing cards at the exact moment I hear my mother’s voice singing in her room. (45)

The boy’s harmoniousness with his world is palpable; its an expression of the ideal for the poetic imagination. His memories are not limited to the present and its immediate past. In fact, the grandson, like Quentin, defies his own temporal limits. Like Quentin, he submits to the souls of smells and is haunted by people from his own prehistory. He recalls a night when the air is “thick and heavy” and he senses “a smell that doesn’t exist in any rooms in the house. It was a strong and warm smell, as if someone had been shaking a jasmine bush” (45). When asked to explain the unfamiliar odor, his grandmother, Ada, “close[s] her eyes and look[s] in the other direction” (45). Insistent on some answer, he asks again, “Do you smell it? It’s as if there were some jasmines somewhere.” Then she said. “It’s the smell of the jasmines that used to be growing on the wall here nine years ago” (45).
Throughout the novel, jasmine seems to function as an agent of memorialization. Cohn, in fact, claims that the jasmine plant is “the reification of memory” for the inhabitants of Macondo (“The Paralysis of the Instant” 63). But neither of these formulations has it exactly right. Toni Morrison better clarifies the situation when Sethe talks about the “memory out there, waiting for her.” The past gives memory objective existence. For the grandson the jasmine is “alive and almost human,” though when the grandson reacts to the perfume of the jasmine, he is smelling jasmine that “used to be growing.” “But there aren’t any jasmines now,” says the boy. Ada responds: “Not now. But nine years ago, when you were born. There was a jasmine bush against the courtyard wall . . . . there was a great winter storm and they had to clean out the garden” (46). The soul of the smell of the jasmine, an indestructible odor, is interwoven with the past, and the “almost human” jasmine with its original perfume of the past unlock the corridor door to memories beyond the grandson’s temporal reach. Ada explains to him: “The same thing happens with jasmines as with people who come out and wander through the night after they’re dead” (46). Smelling the jasmine that is no longer alive leads to his first recollection of seeing dead men: “I knew from then on that there’s a dead man in the kitchen and every night he sits down, taking off his hat, looking at the ashes in the cold stove” (46). The grandson’s experience moves beyond the nostalgia felt by the Colonel and his family when they first moved to Macondo, and they were “unable to let go of a past that they had left behind” (25). The insistent breath of the jasmine reaches out from the past to repossess the present.

Neither are the grandson’s olfactory instances fixed in two dimensions of time; they are not limited to the past and the present. In the doctor’s room, he experiences a premonition of his own death. Looking at the doctor’s coffin, he predicts his future: “That’s the way you’ll be.
You’ll be inside a coffin filled with flies. You’re only a little under eleven years old, but someday you’ll be like that, left to the flies inside of a closed box” (12). His foreknowledge of the future includes an olfactory prediction. As the novel ends, he remembers Ada’s instruction “Ada told me that curlews sing when they get the smell of a dead man” (96). As the doctor’s coffin is being carried out through the door, the grandson says, “Now they’ll get the smell. Now all the curlews will start to sing” (97).

Isabel conveys in one of her monologues: “I want to be sure that nobody will, that no one will open that invisible door that prevents [my son] from going beyond the reach of his senses” (9). She does not want him to “[eat] the apple in paradise”(10). As in Absalom, however, the souls of smells are at work, and Isabel is unaware that like Quentin, her son has just begun to have access to the “pre-history” of all those who first traveled with trunks to Macondo. He is and will continue to be visited by these souls, and involuntarily injected with years of experiences—past, present, and future—made all the more available to him because of his sensory sensitivity, in particular to his sensitivity to smell and his connection with the jasmine plant, which is “almost human” for the inhabitants of Macondo (Cohn, “The Paralysis of the Instant” 63). In The Labyrinth of Solitude, Octavio Paz describes solitude as being “separated from what we were in order to approach what we are going to be in the mysterious future.” It is “our division not from others but from our past and future selves.” Given the grandson’s visitations by the souls of smells, and his resulting simultaneity, his ability to see all moments of the eternal, he may be like an antidote for the solitude that plagues Macondo, a role that makes him dissimilar from Absalom’s Quentin.
As the narrator with the broadest historical perspective, the Colonel also constantly mingles the past with the present in his monologues. He also demonstrates his sensitivity to odors, in particular to the perfume of the jasmine, a plant that bears the structure of memory for Macondo. The text emphasizes the jasmine which functions much like the lettered signs used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the signs that José Arcadio Buendía “plants” in the recently founded town of Macondo. Near the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Macondo suffers a collective lapse of memory brought on by plague of insomnia. To resist the erosion of memory, José Arcadio Buendía uses brush and ink to mark everything with its name. In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Dr. Juvenal Urbino claims, “The man who has no memory makes one out of paper” (40). In *Leaf Storm*, the ability of the olfactory to memorialize works in place of José Arcadio Buendía’s preoccupation with the preservation of memories by inscription. In fact, following the death of his wife, the Colonel, in a monologue reminiscent of Thomas Sutpen, muses that “No one trusts the morality of a home where the man doesn’t have a legitimate wife by his side” (28). Linking his need to “re-member” the wife with the power of the souls of smell that are impervious to time, and that set the stage for the appearance of ghosts and eidolons, the Colonel “plant[s] a vine against the courtyard wall” since “when a loved one dies we should set out a bed of jasmine to remember her every night” (28). The Colonel provides the olfactory means for his wife’s eidolon to return, he wants to “re-member” her body. For the Colonel, as for the people of Macondo, the re-membering process includes planting jasmine in order to foment a haunting by the soul of a smell and indicates the community’s resistance to the erosion of memory.
During the aforementioned memory plague in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Buendía plants a large sign on main street that expresses the town’s creed: GOD EXISTS. In the fragrant landscape of *Leaf Storm*, José Arcadio Buendía’s signs are not necessary and even god returns to life, visiting Macondo as an eidolon. One evening, as the Colonel and the doctor stand next to the railing of the garden, just “beyond the warm smell which was alive and almost human as it rose up from the jasmine bush” (67), the Colonel explains his sensation of being “in the heart of an immense gallery of prophetic images” (67). As the “jasmine [gives] off its insistent breath” he sees god as a lonely figure walking the night. In *Leaf Storm*, the souls of smells are interchangeable with José Arcadio Buendía’s time machine in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; the smell of jasmine beckons them forth and allows for the “reviewing every morning, from beginning to end, the totality of knowledge acquired during one’s life” (*One Hundred Years* 53).

In Macondo, however, as it also does in Jefferson, the totality of knowledge acquired during one’s life can transcend time, and language, and what one may have seen. For Faulkner and García Márquez, memory writes itself on the body where it waits to be involuntarily recalled. Haunted by memory, the fictional worlds of Faulkner and García Márquez make accessible scented landscapes and fertile environments for smells, like souls. In these olfactorily aestheticized worlds, the souls of smells call forth eidolons and evoke vivid memories and recollections of the past. Resistant to destruction by time or by space, smells, like souls, sustain the past, bearing the structure of recollection and offering an alternative way of understanding how historical experience can be remembered and recreated. Smells act as literary ghosts to bring the absent past into the present and to extend the nature and limits of the knowable.
Chapter Five
The Quintessence and Puissance of Allure:
Aromas of Sexuality in Faulkner and García Márquez

“With my nose I learned that in the herd there is a female not like the others; and I ran, following her trail in the grass, . . . following her love summons.”
– Italo Calvino, “The Name, the Nose” (71).

For Faulkner and García Márquez, aromas of sexuality signify the quintessence of allure, and both invent male characters obsessed with smell – in particular, obsessed with the smells of certain female characters. In the opening lines of The Sound and the Fury, the “idiot child” Benjy refrains from offering a visual description of his sister Caddy, though Faulkner himself claims that “what that idiot child saw” establishes “the groundwork of that story” (qtd. in Faulkner in the University 86), and relies instead on an olfactory image to produce his sister: “Caddy,” Benjy recalls, “smell[s] like trees and when she says we were asleep” (5). Reiterated throughout the novel’s first section, Benjy’s association of Caddy and her “smell . . . .like trees” emphasizes not only Benjy’s obsession with smell but also his obsession with his sister and his fixation with her odor. His brother Quentin, whose own idée fixe with their sister Caddy has often been read as his obsession with sibling incest, also describes Caddy in recurring olfactory terms: over and over again, Quentin situates Caddy’s sexuality with the fragrance of honeysuckle. When recalling

36 Benjy’s numerous references to Caddy’s smell include the following: “like leaves” (5); “like trees” (5); “like trees” (6); “like trees in the rain” (12); “Caddy smelled like trees” (27; “She smelled like trees” (27); “Caddy smelled like trees” (29); “like trees” (31); “She smelled like trees” (46); “She smelled like trees” [italics Faulkner’s](46); “Caddy held me . . . and something I could smell” (48).

that smell in relation to Caddy, Quentin finds the atmosphere so thick that he cannot breathe. In
the scene most often noted for its incestuous resonations—the long, uninterrupted memory
sequence in which Quentin encounters Caddy at the branch—Quentin bellows, “damn that
honeysuckle I wish it would stop (97).” Despite the fact that Benjy and Quentin distinguish
Caddy by different smells, both brothers’ narratives testify to a parallel that exists between the
olfactory and the force that drives the human erotic.

Like Faulkner’s Benjy and Quentin, García Márquez’s unnamed dictator in *The Autumn
of the Patriarch* is particularly attuned to smells and more specifically to aromas relating to
female characters and their sexuality. Scenes throughout the novel corroborate that the driving
mechanism of the General’s sexuality is smell. From his initial sexual encounter with “a camp
follower whom he had surprised in the middle of swimming naked in a river” and with whom
“he had died of fright” not only because of his fear at being initiated into manhood but because of
her body “that smelled of pine soap” (153) to the final chapter of the novel, which narrates the
olfactory component of his sexual molestations of young schoolgirls, the General’s nose
regulates his sexual functions.

These characters, Benjy, Quentin, and the General, as do others in the fiction of Faulkner
and García Márquez, directly link the olfactory and sexuality, and so initially seem to appeal to
an interpretation that would include psychoanalysis, and therefore, Freud, as a means to
illuminate the authors’ work. Freud, as Doreen Fowler asserts, “laid the groundwork of all
psychoanalytical literary criticism” (197), with his dream analysis and psychoanalytic concepts
such as repression. In fact, a Freudian inquiry does indeed suggest a literary approach to the close
and reciprocal relationship between the nose and the genitalia, although the approach used here
marks a departure from typical Freudian inquiry. This inquiry does not draw upon what might be described as the typical, if not “canonical” Freudian excepts from *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *The Igo and Id, Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Instead, of particular interest for this discussion are Freud’s far reaching observations about sexuality and civilization in *Civilization and its Discontents*, in which Freud focuses on the loss of the importance of smell brought about by man’s upright posture. The drift of his argument directly links smell with sexuality and the loss of smell with the processes of civilization. According to Freud, man’s rise to an erect posture (which leads to voluntary sex, family, finally resulting in civilization) caused the fall of olfaction.\(^38\) In *The Smell of Books*, Hans J. Rindisbacher paraphrases Freud’s olfactory concerns: “Man’s rise to an erect posture caused the downfall of olfaction from its sexual regulatory functions since the male nose was no longer at the same level as the female genitals” (103).

Even as Freud asserts olfaction’s loss of power as the price paid for civilization, he underscores the “effect of the female’s odor on the male” which might lead to delays or setbacks in the process and progress of civilization. The resulting concern, says Freud, fosters the idea that the female should be isolated during menstruation to “prevent any return to an anterior phase of human development” (190). The necessity of this isolation, however, Freud further claims, puts women “into opposition to civilization. . . . Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it” (50).

---

\(^\text{38}\)In *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell*, Annick Le Guérer notes Freud’s concern about “the effect of the female’s odor on the male” which led to his assertion that the female should be isolated during menstruation to “prevent any return to an anterior phase of human development” (190). The necessity of this isolation, claims Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, puts women “into opposition to civilization. . . . Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it” (50).
Consequently, Freud links smell’s loss of power and its repression with a feminine loss of power and repression.

However, in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s texts, smell remains, even if repressed, strongly connected with sexuality and the forces of Eros, a fact that contradicts Freud’s Euro-centered commentary. They suggest a divergent theme for the history of the New World – in the New World, olfaction is still strongly linked with sexuality. In the wilderness of Yaknapatawpha and the undeveloped world of Macondo as well as other map points in South America, the downfall of smell from serving as the regulator for sexual intercourse has not happened; Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fictional worlds resist modernity. As Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s characters, both male and female, offer affirmation of the relationship between the nose and sexuality, as they underscore the “essence of woman” as the ultimate stimulus of male olfactory fantasy, they ultimately represent male/female identities and power relations in which the female retains a more equitable role.

In short, Faulkner and García Márquez depict male characters who smell and respond to female characters frequently defined by the men in terms of fluids and scents more than in terms of external anatomy. An often involuntary male olfactory response accomplishes a depiction of female olfactory power. In addition, Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s body male and body female often resist binary readings and in fact set up new binaries, as readings of male/female become obfuscated. The male nose in their fiction occasionally takes on a double meaning, and sometimes functions like a vagina in its fertile sensitivity to the smell of the female. Penetrated

39Auguste Galopin, a physician who experimented with human odors and human sexual behavior, wrote in 1886 that “the purest union that can exist between a man and a woman is that created by the sense of smell” (157).
by the woman’s odor, it becomes impregnated by involuntary desire.

A host of scholars have approached Faulkner’s texts in order to analyze his portrayal of sexuality and gender. In numerous articles and books written over the past four decades, feminist critics have studied his novels and short fiction in order to answer questions about how Faulkner presents the biology as well as the psychology of sexuality, about the paradigms of being “masculine” or “feminine,” and to point out other characters’ as well as society’s reactions to gender. Caroline Carvill, who supplies an overview of the significant extant scholarship written from a feminist and gender approach to Faulkner’s work in *A Companion to Faulkner Studies*, notes the importance of feminist criticism, that has “reshaped the map of Faulkner critical studies” (215). Interpretations about how Faulkner writes women have moved from pointing out his misogynistic view, as does Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, to Minrose C. Gwin’s claim that Faulkner “becomes in his greatest works the creator of female subjects who, in powerful and creative ways, disrupt and sometimes even destroy patriarchal structures” (4). In the introduction to the proceedings of the 1985 Faulkner and

---


41 Ilse Dusoir Lind claims that “Faulkner is the only major American fiction writer of the twenties and thirties who incorporates into his depiction of women the functioning of the organs of reproduction” (“Faulkner’s” 92).
Yoknapatawpha Conference which focused on Faulkner’s portrayal of women, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie conclude that the critical enthusiasm about the subject of “Faulkner in relation to women” is “so complex and problematic . . . that as yet there has been little consensus on the most fundamental questions” (vii).

There has not been an outpouring of feminist commentary about García Márquez’s portrayals of gender, even though there has been an otherwise enthusiastic response to his work. Rubén Pelayo suggests that the feminist response to García Márquez’s work has been affected by the fact that feminists in Latin America “sponsor the values of maternity and wifehood” (158), and he adds that the “world” of García Márquez’s novels, “is a matriarchal one” (158). Chiefly reporting about how feminists might read Love in the Time of Cholera, Pelayo sets forth that any feminist reading would surely reveal that the strongest roles belonged to García Márquez’s women, and that the novel “fares well under a feminist reading because it vindicates the possibilities of women triumphing over the prejudices of age, race, and social class” (161).

Contrastingly, Irvin D. S. Winsboro notes that, “Few critics have focused on the fact that [Latin American novelist’s] female archetypes are presented much too glibly and, perhaps, too frequently as perceived realities based on their culture’s patriarchal practices” (151). Winsboro goes on to state that García Márquez conforms his female characters to classical stereotypes “prescribed by marianismo, the cultural ideal common to Latin America, that women are “religious and pious, focused on family, secluded at home, and the moral force of their families” (141). Marquez, according to Winsboro, is the “product of a society that embraces both machismo and marianismo” (Winsboro 156). The women of Macondo are pictured as “male-defined, biological reproducers or sexually pleasing objects who are treated thematically as
accessories to the men who actually shape and control the world” (157). Searching for the nexus of the olfactory and sexuality and the resulting renderings of power in García Márquez’s fiction, and in Faulkner’s fiction, allows for reading male and female characters who subvert stereotypical and therefore binary readings.

Courtship (read: gender, sexuality, and possibly the erotic), for instance, meanders its way through the plot of “Was,” the opening chapter of Faulkner’s *Go, Down Moses* (1942) – one of only two pieces in the novel not published in earlier forms. Set in 1859, “Was” is typically referred to as a comical tale about Buck and Buddy McCaslin’s attempt to recapture Tommy’s Turl, a half-white but still slave McCaslin, who repeatedly runs away from the McCaslin homestead to pursue his own sexual interests in Tennie, the neighboring Mr. Hubert Beauchamps’s girl. Each time Tommy’s Turl escapes, Buck McCaslin embarks upon a ritualized hunt to recapture the fugitive; each time, the hunt mounts from tracking down the fugitive Tommie’s Turl to becoming as well, Buck’s meager and rather reluctant attempt at courtship – since each time, Buck dons his necktie before riding out to solicit the attention of Mr. Hubert’s sister, Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp (though whether it is a reluctance to romance or a reluctance to remain celibate is not exactly clear). Uncle Buck, who is “lean and active as a cat” (7), has long sublimated his own sexual desires, choosing to live in an unconventional household of white men, half-white and mostly male slaves, dogs, and foxes. Safely under the camouflage of hunting his escaped slave, Uncle Buck cautiously extends his quest as a hunt for Sophonsiba. “Miss” Sophonsiba, to be more precise, whose designation as a “Miss” unmistakably alerts others to her status as an incomplete woman, “missing” a husband and children of her own, as are other well known and allegedly sexually repressed Yoknapatawphan “Misses,” such as Miss
Rosa Coldfield, Miss Emily Grierson, Miss Minnie Cooper, and Miss Zilphia Gant. What Uncle Buck certainly does not fully actualize is that Miss Sophonsiba is effectively hunting him, and by the end of the novel, she proves to be the better hunter. The hunt is resolved later on in *Go Down Moses* with the marriage of Uncle Buck and Miss Sophonsiba - the future parents of Ike (Isaac) McCaslin - whose coming of age is the central action of the novel.

From the moment Uncle Buck dismounts his horse and steps onto Beauchamp property, his instinctual impulses are subject to enticement, especially those impulses of an olfactory nature. The white handkerchief that appears in the upstairs window does not indicate Miss Sophonsiba’s surrender, but rather her aggressive and deliberate approach. The white handkerchief, however, is not her primary allure, as presently, Buck hears a “jangling and swishing noise and [he begins] to smell the perfume” before Miss Sophonsiba ever descends the staircase (8). Comparable to the primordial narrator of Calvino’s “The Name, the Nose,” Buck smells first and visualizes later – though in Faulkner’s subverted version, the male, as the “hunted” involuntarily picks up the scent of the female, who in this tale of pursuit acts as the hunter. Having smelled Miss Sophonsiba’s love summons, Buck waits for her at the foot of the stairs; but when he physically faces his future mate, her spoor functions more powerfully than her woman’s body, and he describes her scent more specifically than he defines her woman’s body. Though Buck is mesmerized by the “roan colored tooth” that “flicks and glints between her lips” (11), he observes that her perfume is stronger, “like the earrings and beads sprayed it out each time they moved” (11). Intuitive of his interest, Miss Sophonsiba puts sensual words to the moment, as she suggestively remarks to Buck that he is like “a bee sipping from flower to flower” (11).
Later in the story, through a series of misadventures, Uncle Buck McCaslin returns to the Beauchamp’s home, and carefully makes his way up the stairs to what he believes to be the guest bedroom. Instead, Buck creeps all unawares into Sophonsiba’s bed; he enters this lady’s sanctuary, her sacred, private space, however innocently, and he must pay the price to honor the code - the code that a Southern woman’s honor must be protected. Miss Sophonsiba, in fact, by virtue of geography belongs to the cult of southern womanhood: which as W.J. Cash explains in *The Mind of the South*, made it possible to associate white women of the privileged classes with the very notion of the region as a whole. The cult, Cash points out, rested on a clear division of roles. Black women and some white women were assigned the sexual function; not that they were the only ones ever engaged in sexual relations, but that they were those with whom the sexual dimension of experience was habitually and mythically associated. This made it possible to transform the majority of white women into creatures of angelic perfection, stainless expressions of the ideal, whose sexuality was minimized, even if it was ever acknowledged. Visually and physically, Faulkner’s Miss Sophonsiba seems to be a shining example of this archetype of Southern womanhood, but instead she subverts the type by using her scent as a lure to bait Uncle Buck into a marriage proposal that would consequently lead to sex in some future act of consummation. We might say that Miss Sophonsiba is “loaded for Buck.” It is also clear that Uncle Buck’s nose, penetrated by Miss Sophonsiba’s odor, has been impregnated with involuntary desire.

As most every critic of the book has observed (Cleanth Brooks, Thadious M. Davis, Richard Godden, Minrose Gwin, Barbara Ladd, John Matthews, et al) the particular strengths and weaknesses of *Go Down, Moses* circulate around Faulkner’s representation of its two major
themes: the themes of wilderness and race. Yet even as this “bear country” resists civilization, those who venture into it depend upon smell to find their way around. Human problems are resolved by hunts in the wilderness, but the sexual hunting ironically highlights the common humanity of the black and white couples—Tennie and Tommy’s Turl and Miss Sophonsiba and Uncle Buck. Not only are both white and black couples engaged in sexual hunts that derive from and depend on smell, but Tommy’s Turl’s and Tennie’s sexual rendezvous will be doomed if the dogs pick up Tommy’s Turl’s scent before he makes his way to Tennie. In addition, Miss Sophonsiba’s success in distributing her “love summons” leads Buck to forego his hunt for Tommy’s Turl until much too late in the day to have a good chance for a capture. Within a safe distance from Buck and from the runaway-slave-sniffing dogs, Tommy’s Turl looks toward the main house where the “white” courtship ensues. Momentarily out of danger, since the chase has shifted from one aimed at regaining runaway property to one aimed at conquest of virginal territory, Tommy’s Turl, who has a sexual conquest of his own to make, omnisciently observes that “anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the women folks to working at it” (13). Though not quite a “primordial swamp,” Faulkner’s “bear country” is an undeveloped place of sexual subversions—a place where the olfactory overpowers civilization, counteracting both the cult of womanhood and the men’s gambling code of honor.

Faulkner’s strongest discourse about smell and the sexual human body steams its way through *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel that Faulkner exalted as his “finest failure . . . the one that I feel most tender toward” (qtd. in Cowan 14), and as his interviews might attest, he never tired of talking about it. For Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* is like the child “which caused
Eric J. Sundquist identifies Faulkner’s fourth novel as “the key to the treasure of Yoknapatawpha” (118). Though a foray into the unconscious world of a would-be aristocratic family living in a state of small-town decay, the novel has consistently drawn more critical attention for its theme of time than for any other aspect of the novel. Jean Paul Sartre’s early essay provides the most famous comments about the details the power of the unchangeable past to invade the present and occupy it wholly. Hyatt H. Waggoner discusses the novel’s “shuffling back and forth in memory between past and present” (98). Cleanth Brooks looks at the “three different notions of time held by the Compson brothers” (64).

Other critics have frequently discussed gender issues and female deployments in the novel. Many have commented on Caddie’s sexual power. Richard Gray asserts that “more than any of Faulkner’s women . . . she is ‘too much’ for her men, too various and unpredictable for them to handle” (140). Others have focused on Caddie’s gendered independence. In a recent article, Cheryl Lester asserts that “when [Caddie] ceases to play the Southern belle, she effectively disrupts the Southern dialectic of gendered relations” (140). Few critics of this novel have mentioned Faulkner’s lavish attention to smell and its relation to sexuality, in particular, smell’s relationship to Caddie’s sexual power which serves this discussion to further explain the motives and actions of another character in the novel: Caddie’s brother Benjy.

_The Sound and the Fury_ opens with a narrative provided by the “idiot child” Benjy, whose world is primitive, not civilized. Benjy’s world is one of direct sensation, and his behavior is simple. In many ways, Benjy is still in the garden . . . he is a not-yet-man living in a not-yet-fallen world. Faulkner says “So the idiot was born and then I became interested in the
A number of Faulkner’s stories and novels are peopled with idiots: the main character in “The Kingdom of God,” one of the New Orleans’ sketches; Jim Bond, from Absalom, Absalom!, and Ike Snopes, from The Hamlet.

relationships of the idiot to the world that he was in but would never be able to cope with and just where could he get the tenderness, the help, to shield him in his innocence” (qtd. in Cowan 14). Though critics pay attention to “the raw data of Benjy’s perception” (99), his identification as an “innocent” forestalls the connection of Benjy’s citizenship in world where the olfactory has not yet fallen from its sexual regulatory position. Benjy’s preoccupation with how things and people—specifically, how Caddie smells— is never associated with sexuality. In early critical work, John W. Hunt refers to Benjy’s repetitive narration that Caddie smells like trees, about which he claims that Benjy “associates Caddy with the life-suggesting trees, not with the sex and death suggesting water” (91). Faulkner himself, however, made sensual if not sexual associations between women and trees. In a 1955 interview in Nagano, when asked to describe his “ideal woman,” Faulkner responded:

Well, I couldn’t describe her by color of hair, color of eyes, because once she is described, then somehow she vanishes. That the ideal woman which is in every man’s mind is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand . . . and every man has a different idea of what’s beautiful. And it’s best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree. (The Lion in the Garden, 128)

John T. Matthews, in his significant article, “The Discovery of Loss,” notices that “Benjy associates the fragrance of trees contradictorily—both with Caddy’s virginal innocence and with the onset of her sexual betrayal. That she always “smelled like trees” makes the paradox of natural innocence and natural maturation sensible to Benjy’s nostrils” (83). Gail L. Mortimer pays most attention to Benjy’s sensory perceptions:

42A number of Faulkner’s stories and novels are peopled with idiots: the main character in “The Kingdom of God,” one of the New Orleans’ sketches; Jim Bond, from Absalom, Absalom!, and Ike Snopes, from The Hamlet.
A group of objects of various shapes, smells, and colors comfort Benjy as substitutes for his sister Caddy. . . . Firelight is “the same bright shape as going to sleep,” and Caddy smells “like when she says we were asleep.” Caddy often smells “like trees.” These are the reassuring smells, connected to his dim remembrance of the warmth she represented to him. Moreover, Benjy experiences all intense realities in terms of smell: death (Damuddy’s), sickness (Mother’s), the cold, the perfume symbolizing Caddy’s unfamiliar sexuality, and the change as Caddy gets married. The narrative associations reflect his intense, if primitive, perceptions as he intuits the crucial truths about changes in his family” (110).

Mortimer’s accounting of Benjy’s “intense realities” does not include his own experience with sexuality. As for Quentin, however, Mortimer links his association of Caddy and “the potent smell of honeysuckle, which symbolizes sexuality as a pervasive and threatening presence” (110).

Mortimer, as do many Faulknerians, attends to Quentin’s incestuous desire—his fixation on his sister Caddy as “the center on the horizon.” Only Richard Godden, in his recent critical article, “Tyrrenian Vase for Crucible of Race,” suggests that Benjy, too, “achieves an act of corrective incest” (103). For Godden, however, Benjy’s incest is a form “of more or less recognized miscegenation” stemming from Versh’s association of Benjy’s name change with being “bluegum,” - a black conjuror with the magical ability to impregnate female family members with a single look into their eyes— all of those reproductions being “bluegum” as well. Godden suggests that when Benjy intuits Caddy’s loss of innocence, which happens late in the summer of 1909 when she loses her virginity, he looks “into Caddy’s shifty eyes and reimpregnates her in an innocent incest which involves no penetration” (101).

That Godden invokes Benjy’s incest as “innocent” is characteristic of criticism about Benjy. Donald Kartiganer argues that Benjy’s way of seeing the world is with an “innocent eye unwilling or unable to impose any imaginative pressure.” Benjy has no “prior models of ordering
or cultural bias” (79). Faulkner, himself, makes claims about Benjy’s elemental and innocent nature: “Benjy is incapable of good and evil because he had no knowledge of good and evil” (qtd in “Interview with Jean Stein” 17). But he significantly illuminates this statement when he reifies that “Benjy wasn’t rational enough even to be selfish; he was an animal” (17). Dalton Ames, the “perhaps father” of Caddy’s illegitimate child reiterates Faulkner’s association of Benjy as “animal” when he calls Benjy the “natural.” Benjy’s “natural” response to Caddy is just as sexual as Quentin’s response; both Quentin’s and Benjy’s olfactory interest in Caddy takes an erotic form. Benjy’s response, however, differs from Quentin’s since he has no cultural bias toward incest; he is unaware of any dividing line between permissible and perverse. Caddy’s smell, her love summons, triggers Benjy’s natural, unrepressed sexual response. My reading, like Godden’s, “is at odds with prevalent critical accounts which either sentimentalize him as a moral touchstone or mechanize him, reducing him to a camera with a tape recorder attached.” (19).

Certainly, Quentin’s obsession with incest and with sexual desire is better articulated, and many note his association between the odor of “that damn honeysuckle” – with sex. Even though Quentin is better at phrasing his incestuous desire, however, Benjy’s olfactory association of Caddie and trees suggests a similar sexual anticipation. Quentin concedes Benjy’s share in original sin when he acknowledges “the general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadow every man’s brow even Benjy’s” (112). Even Benjy, according to Quentin, knows the truth. Even Benjy desires Caddy.

Like his brother, Benjy seeks his mother but finds Caddy. Caddy is the mother’s substitute, and she herself embraces this role. When Caroline Compson expresses irritation with
her “burden” of motherhood, Caddy comes quickly to the rescue: “You don’t need to bother with him. I like to take care of him, Don’t I, Benjy” (41). Any psychoanalytical interpretation of Benjy’s sexual desire for Caddy, however, moves beyond what Godden calls “the oedipal dragnet” that has been “run much through Faulkner’s preoccupation with incest . . . in which brother challenges father by loving sister as surrogate for inadequate mother” (104). Unlike Quentin, whose problems in terms of Freud’s theories of narcissism have been notably read by John T. Irwin, Benjy represents Freud’s primordial man - a man without the civilizing effects of “not-yet-erect,” and so before the fall of the olfactory. While Quentin’s incest dreams may be motivated not only by his repressed sexuality as well as his Oedipal impulses, and also by the cult of Southern womanhood’s standard of the unbreachable hymen, Benjy’s impetus is purely spontaneous and natural. As man before “the fall,” the nexus of the olfactory with sexuality and desire can be directly traced throughout Benjy’s narrative.

Early in his narrative, Benjy acquaints readers with his singular attention to smell. The novel opens on the morning of April 7, 1928, with Benjy and Luster on all fours and their noses to the ground, hunting in the grass for Luster’s lost quarter, the price of admission to the circus playing in Jefferson that night. The day also marks Benjy’s thirty-third birthday, though during Luster’s conversation with the unnamed washer at the creek bank, Benjy is described as being “three years old thirty years” (11). At the precise moment when his pants snag on a fence nail, Benjy experiences his first flashback into past; he relives a moment when he has crawled through the same fence with Caddy, and it is at this early point in the narrative when he begins to relate his extraordinarily precise olfactory perceptions.
Benjy’s first mention of his hyper-olfactory sensitivity involves a climatic attention to the weather: “I could smell the cold . . . I could smell the bright cold” (4). A few lines later, however, he first mentions Caddy and initiates his testament to the olfactory and its hold on the attraction between the sexes: “She opened the gate and came in and stooped down. Caddy smelled like leaves” (5). Then just a few lines later Benjy repeats his olfactory attention to Caddy: “Caddy smelled like trees and like when she says we were asleep” (5). In Benjy’s narrative, Caddy develops a kind of olfactory aura. His attention to Caddy’s body is not visual. When Benjy describes Caddy, his attention to her body is very much in evidence but not in terms of how he visualizes her. She is concretely physical to Benjy in terms of her smell. Her physicality transcends merely being a body; her auratic quality identifies her as a presence - an asymmetrical and sexual presence.

In what has been described as an integral scene of the novel, Benjy cries about Caddie’s muddy drawers until she sits in the water to wash off the mud and once again she smells of trees and rain. Smell is central to Benjy’s life and to the pursuit of Caddy, who represents the feminine, the embodiment of his ideal. Benjy’s olfactory sensitivity symbolizes prehistoric man’s urges – his human erotic urge is natural and so like an animal, without a bias for right and wrong, and so not corrupted, and not repressible.

On several occasions, Faulkner insisted that The Sound and the Fury “began with a mental picture” of a little girl’s soiled undergarments. “I didn’t realize at the time it was symbolical” said Faulkner in an interview with Jean Stein in 1956. Godden claims that “Faulkner’s postpublication statements about [the novel] swaddle the book in maidenheads” and demands to know why “a sister’s hymen matters quite so much” (100). Described as the seminal
scene, one that Benjy remembers with vivid clarity early in his narrative, Caddy climbs a pear tree to watch her grandmother’s funeral going on inside the house. Unlike Caddy, who needs some visual evidence to understand what is going inside the house with the adults, Benjy’s own knowledge of Damuddy’s death is based on olfactory proof. Dilsey describes Benjy’s olfactory ways of knowing: “he smell what you tell him when he want to. Don’t have to listen nor talk . . . Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. He smell hit. He smell it” (57). Benjy himself acknowledges that he can smell Damuddy’s death: “A door opened and I could smell it more than ever” (22).

Benjy’s olfactory awareness in this scene is not limited to an understanding of death, but to a sexual connection with Caddy and “the muddy bottom of her drawers,” the image that Faulkner later claimed lay at the center of the novel. Benjy resists any alteration to Caddy’s natural smell. The mud on Caddy’s underpants is significant for Benjy because it masks her aural asymmetry, and he categorically opposes any “masking” of the one, significant odor that maintains Caddy’s aural presence in his life. Benjy’s intense opposition to any change in Caddy’s natural smell offers an explanation of his rejection of Caddy when she wears perfume. What Godden says about Benjy “credits him with a temporal paradigm and a consciousness capable of organizing his experience around that paradigm. This is at odds with prevalent critical accounts which either sentimentalize him as a moral touchstone or mechanize him, reducing him to a camera with a tape recorder attached.”

Like Faulkner’s Benjy as well as his own fictionalized version of Simón Bolívar, García Márquez’s unnamed dictator in The Autumn of the Patriarch is particularly attuned to smells and more specifically to aromas of sexuality. Scenes throughout the novel corroborate that the driving
mechanism of the General’s sexuality is smell. From his initial sexual encounter with “a camp follower whom he had surprised in the middle of swimming naked in a river” (153), to the final chapter of the novel, which narrates the olfactory component of his sexual molestations of young schoolgirls, the General’s nose regulates his sexual functions. Tracing the General’s particular sensitivity to female smells “in the herd . . . not like the others” makes more accessible the discussion about power generated by the novel, and in particular a discussion about sexual power rendered in olfactory terms.

*Autumn of the Patriarch* describes a relentless quest for power, absolute power, but its central irony derives from the relationship between sex and smell. The same powerful, archetypal Caribbean dictator who uses the olfactory to force his debauched sexual conquests of young schoolgirls is himself overcome, if not rendered powerless, by the "animal" scent of a naked nun. The pursuit of power is the novel’s central theme; the General’s precise rank is “General of the Universe,” and his power is so absolute that when on one occasion he orders the time of day changed from three to eight in the morning so that daylight will come sooner, the roses open two hours before dew time. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is not simply the chronicle of any dictator, but as Jona Barciauskas asserts, “Garcia Marquez presents us with a portrait of a dictator who does not aspire to any greatness beyond absolute power” (228). William Kennedy dubs the General “a stunning portrait of the archetype: the pathological fascist tyrant” (17). In an interview published in a collection fittingly entitled *The Fragrance of Guava*, García Márquez claims that his intention “was to make a synthesis of all Latin American dictators, especially the Caribbean ones.” He refers to the novel as a “poem on the solitude of power” (Mendoza 83-86), adding that *The Autumn of the Patriarch* “is the most experimental of all my books and the one
that interests me most as a poetic adventure” (86).

“The dictator,” claims García Márquez, “is the only mythological figure Latin America has produced and his historical cycle is far from over” (88). Indeed, the novel incorporates a variety of historical incidents interwoven with the fiction created by García Márquez, producing what Laurie Clancy describes as a “labyrinthine structure . . . a reflection of the bizarre nature of Latin American history and dictatorships” (140). For example, García Márquez’s General of the Universe – a veritable dictator among dictators who rises to power by virtue of his connections with the occupation forces of the British and then with the Americans – sells the Caribbean Sea to the Americans who move it to Arizona. Graciela Palau de Nemes claims the historical authenticity of this episodic event – the sale of the sea to a foreign power – which happened in the early twentieth century in the Dominican Republic.

Geographically situated not in Macondo but in another imaginary Caribbean nation, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* joins a tradition of earlier Latin American dictator novels including *Tirando Banderas* (1929) by Ramón del Valle Inclán and *El señor presidente* (1946) by Miguel Angel Asturias. One of several Latin American novels appearing in the 1970s dealing with a dictator – novels which include Alejo Carpentier’s *Reasons of State*, *I the Supreme* by Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos, and *Office for the Dead* by Venezuelan Arturo Uslar Pietri – García Márquez bases his fictional Latin American *caudillo*, or strongman, on several real-life dictators including Gustavo Rojas Pinilla of his own Colombian homeland, Generalissimo Francisco Franco of Spain (the novel was written in Barcelona), and Marcus Pérez Jiménez of

---

43 *The General is His Labyrinth* fits in the canon of dictator literature as well.
Venezuela. “You can spot all the different dictators” claims Gregory Rabassa⁴⁴, the English translator of *Autumn of the Patriarch*, which he claims as his favorite García Márquez novel: “It had a much more direct political message, although *Cien años* is also political but in a more subtle way” (26).

When he began working on the manuscript, Gabriel García Márquez told an interviewer that the only image he had of it for years “was that of an incredibly old man walking through the huge, abandoned rooms of a palace full of animals” (Kennedy 16). Instead, like *Leaf Storm* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* opens on a death scene ripe with the smell of a dead man’s stinking corpse – “the breeze of a great man dead and rotting grandeur” (1). Vultures have broken into the presidential palace, and their flapping wings stir up “the stagnant time inside, and at dawn on Monday the city awoke out of its lethargy of centuries” (1). The patriarch, we are told, has lived to be somewhere between one hundred and seven and two hundred and thirty years old. With no regard for chronological order, each of the six successive chapters of the book, each written in long paragraphs, and each a single sentence, begin with the death of the General; all convey the General's thoughts which channel his desperation and loneliness alongside of the atrocities and ruthless behavior that keep him in power. As he does in *Leaf Storm*, and as Faulkner does in *As I Lay Dying*, Garcia Marquez relies on narrators. The General himself, as well as unnamed witnesses, recall the dead person’s life. The gross exaggerations in this novel are reminiscent of his short story “Big Mama’s Funeral.” Kennedy refers to the style of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* as “a densely rich and fluid pudding that

---

⁴⁴ On the recommendation of the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar, García Márquez hand picked Rabassa to translate *Cien años de soledad*, and he deemed the translation so in keeping with his own meanings, Rabassa has since translated five other García Márquez novels.
makes Faulknerian leaps forward and backward in time” (18).

Throughout the novel, odors continuously waft their way through the most personal as well as the most political of scenes. The General of the Universe describes the “raw-meat smell of war” (131) in a nation where “the sweet fragrance of gardenias” mingles with the “rotting salamanders of the equatorial tributaries” (15). The breeze from the sea offers coexisting odors of “rotten shellfish” and “the fragrant vapor of jasmines” (11). On one occasion, the General recounts a discussion he has had with his mother about the concept of “nation”: “A nation,” says the General, “is the best thing that was ever invented, mother, he would sigh, but he never waited for the answer from the only person in the world who dared scold him for the rancid onion smell of his armpits” (17). Most often, however, the General’s conversations and memories of odor have to do with matters of a sexual nature.

Early in the first chapter as the narrator presents a panoramic view of the presidential compound . . . the “vast lair of power” (1), he/she zooms in on the concubines’ quarters and speculates on the possibility “that more than a thousand women had lived there with their crews of seven-month runts” 45 (2). In fact, during his prolific exploits, the General sires over 5000 children with the women of his Caribbean harem, women essential for the satisfaction of the General’s voracious sexual appetite. Frequently, the concubines, in their function as pregnant earth-mothers, are compared to cows, like Lena Grove, the bovine protagonist of Light in August. The General’s harem is like a herd of females, and in a direct comparison that he makes between cattle and women, the General’s double, Patricio Aragonés, attests that the “least one asks of

45 The phrase “seven month runt” refers to the fact that all of the General’s children are born prematurely.
good women” is that they “don’t smoke from the haunches or smell of singed flesh (23). The General’s sexual schedule requires daily succor that nearly always takes place in the afternoon, precisely at the hottest time of the day, and at a time when the women might lack any of the freshness they might have had early in the morning before the numerous chores of a day of taking care of children, cleaning, and cooking or after an evening’s preparation for what might be more characteristic nocturnal lovemaking events. Instead, the General makes his way to the concubines’ quarters in the hottest heat of the day when he randomly selects a woman “by assault, without undressing her or getting undressed himself” (23).

In fact, the General prefers sex with a fully clothed woman and routinely prefers it in a more public space where the event might be overseen and overheard. The General’s sexual relations always take place in rooms or spaces other than the bedroom, whether on the open ground outside of the quarters themselves, in the stables with the other livestock or on kitchen tables. Sex with the General need never be a private affair; in fact, the General’s sexual partners customarily have to shoo buzzing children out of the public rooms where the General has suddenly turned into a sex show. Perhaps, even more tellingly the General’s climaxes are always followed by the same emotional reaction: the General sobs, his thoughts circling around his own loneliness and lack of love.

The General’s strange mating rituals, thus riddled with repression, develop from his first and unfulfilled sexual encounter. After his first sexual encounter, which includes a traumatic experience of the olfactory kind, the General shuts himself off from a normal sex life, retreating into an animalistic repetition of sexual motions, all of which are emotionally impotent. The General’s first sexual experience, an event which changes his life profoundly, occurs when he is
“already an artillery lieutenant in the third civil war” (153). Still a virgin, the General, acting more out of fear than desire – “the fear of losing the chance . . . more decisive than the fear of the attack,” jumps into river water fully clothed upon “seeing a naked woman bathing in the river” (153). The camp follower immediately discerns that the poor man is a sex starved soldier whom she is ready and willing to gather “into the lagoon of her pity” (153). The General, then the Lieutenant, ponders a significant question: “how in hell do women do things as if they were inventing them, how can they be such men about it” (153). When the willing and experienced woman reaches for his manhood, she instead grabs the General’s herniated testicle, a deformity with which he was born, and screams, “Go back to your mama and have her turn you in for another one . . you’re no good for anything” (153). The General’s last experience as he leaves his first sexual battle is an olfactory one: he smells that “body that smelled like pine soap” (153). From that moment on, the General lives a life tortured by the shame of his enlarged testicle, and so, he avoids being undressed with any future sexual partners. He distrusts women who smell clean . . like soap, until he finds a woman not like any of the others in his herd.

Somewhere in the middle of the second chapter, the General’s recollections turn to his affair with Manuela Sánchez, the working class senorita with “her muslin dress and the hot coal of a rose in her hand and the natural smell of licorice of her breathing” (63). Unlike the women of his harem, Manuela, one of the many “beauty queens” that the General crowns, becomes a woman in the herd who is not like the others – her asymmetry is measured in olfactory terms in so far as she does not smell like the others. Raymond Williams claims that the General is “rendered helpless at her sight” (149), that as a man who has all of the power of god in the
unnamed Caribbean nation, he “is reduced to an adolescent search for her. He looks for her in
the neighborhood, asks for directions, introduces himself to her mother” (149).

In truth, following the crowning moment when the General first meets Manuela, the
General is obsessed not with the sight of Manuela Sanchez “of my evil hour,” he is obsessed with
her smell: an odor incites his emotional frenzy. “Tell me this delirium isn’t true” the General
laments, “tell me it’s not you, tell me that this deadly dizziness isn’t the licorice stagnation of
your breath” (63). In olfactory hallucinations following the beauty contest, Manuela’s “hot
breath” perfumes “the air of the [his private] bedroom like an obstinate downwind with more
dominion and more antiquity than the snorting of the sea” (63-64). The operative word in this
passage is “dominion,” because the General’s will is lost to him. He becomes enslaved to
Manuela.

Following a frantic search, the General of the Universe, as if he were a Prince Charming
in possession of a glass slipper, eventually locates the odoriferous queen in a slum of the city. In
this instance, however, the Prince has lost control, operating under an olfactory hysteria. Content
merely with locating his Queen, day after day he sits opposite Manuela on the sofa in a room
where her mother serves as an olfactory chaperone. The General is amazed as the power of her
fragrance to keep him prisoner in the working class slum, “in a house of beggars,” where
Manuela lives: “Where is your licorice smell in this pesthole of lunch leftovers, where is your
rose, where is your love” (70).

The General patiently courts Manuela, the Queen of his nose, purchasing so many gifts
and gadgets for her that he has to acquire the surrounding houses so that his Queen has room to
accommodate all of her gifts. Following the appearance of a comet, an occasion when Manuela

offers the only physical attention when she grabs his hand, the General makes arrangements the next week for a solar eclipse. He hopes for more physical attention from the woman whose breath smells like licorice. As they wait for the eclipse, he sits on the roof “of Manuela Sanchez’s house, sitting between her and her mother, breathing strongly so that they would not notice the difficulties of his heart under a sky numb with evil omens, breathing in for the first time the nocturnal breath of Manuela Sanchez . . . her open air” (76), but just as the time of the eclipse nears, Manuela vanishes: “While he breathed in Manuela Sanchez’s twilight breath as it became nocturnal . . . the rose languished in her eclipse” and in “the place where her smell had been” there was nothing, not even ‘the licorice breath of your lungs” (78-9). After Manuela’s surprising disappearance, rumors persist about sightings of her in different parts of the Caribbean, but she is never found. Though she is seen “dancing the plena in Puerto Rico,” the General laments that “she just blew the hell away,” claiming that Manuela “evaporated into the shadows of the eclipse” (89). As he laments her disappearance, he laments the loss of power that he experienced while intoxicated by her smell: “I haven’t been the dictator of my destiny like I was before” (89). Time heals, however, and the General eventually remembers “the full bloom of his barbarity once more” (89).

Following his abandonment by Manuela, the General soon experiences the loss of another significant woman in his life – his mother. The General trades in an olfactory obsession for Manuela with the desire to have his dead mother canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. After months of canonical investigation, the church’s emissary refuses to allow Bendición Alvarado the classification of sainthood that her son, the General of the Universe, desires, claiming that the “cause was suspended for insufficient proof” (147). At this point, the General proclaims “the
civil sainthood of Bendición Alvarado by the supreme decision of the free and sovereign people, he named her patroness of the nation” (147). What follows is the total expulsion of the church from the unnamed Caribbean nation, itself an exaggerated adaptation of an historical event: the expulsion of the Roman Catholic Church from Mexico in the mid-19th century, played out here in hyperbolic proportions. The General requires all church officials to leave with none of their possessions. He then orders “the immediate, public and solemn expulsion of his grace the archbishop primate followed by that of bishops, apostolic prefects, priests, nuns and all persons native and foreign who had anything to do with God” (148). Furthermore, the General decides that they should “embark naked as the day their mothers bore them” (150), and he oversees their exodus as they are being loaded onto ships for immediate departure. It is during one of these supervisions that he first sees Leticia Nazareno, the woman who will become his only legitimate wife and the occasion of the General’s second olfactory love story. This fragrant tale subverts the absolute domination the dictator enjoys.

He distinguished her among the others in spite of the fact that she was no different, she was small and sturdy, robust, with opulent buttocks, large full teats, clumsy hands, protuberant sex, hair cut with pruning shears, spaced teeth firm as ax heads, snub nose, flat feet, a novice as mediocre as all of them, but he sensed that she was the only woman in the drove of naked woman, the one who on passing in front of him had left the obscure trail of a wild animal who carried off my vital air. (151)

Leticia’s smell entices . . . it is her smell that marks her asymmetrical nature and motivates the General to demand the presidential security services “to kidnap her from the convent in Jamaica” where “they loaded her aboard among the ship’s stores of a collier and they laid her naked and drugged on the columned bed in the bedroom” (152). But when the General arrives to claim his fragrant prize, she is somehow changed. His servants have prepared her for the king . . as Esther
is prepared for the King. She has been bathed in perfumes and oils; she is scrubbed and polished; she has been made ready for a king; but as he contemplates her “in sleep with a kind of infantile amazement” he is “surprised at how much her nakedness had changed since he has seen her in the harbor shed” (152). The General is not pleased with the improvements that have been made:

they’d curled her hair, they’d made her up right down to the most intimate nooks and crannies, and they put crimson polish on her fingernails and toenails and lipstick and rouge on her mouth and cheeks and mascara and she gave off a sweet fragrance that did away with your trace of a wild animal . . Jesus, they’d ruined her trying to recreate her. (152)

Like Benjy, the General is not happy with perfume. His attraction to her is squelched because she does not smell like her natural smell. Because his attraction is not visually stimulated, in her perfumed state, she is just like the other nuns. His appetite is teased only when her odor matches the odor of her natural state.

For more than a year, the General is content to simply sleep by Leticia’s side on the bed where she is held a prisoner. Only when her smell returns does he consummate their love: “He participated alone for nights on end in the secret outflow of her body, he breathed in her smell of a mountain bitch that grew warmer with the passage of months, the moss of her womb sprouted (154). When he finally consummates his sexual attraction to Leticia, “in spite of his measureless power he [is] more frightened that she” (152). Following their first lovemaking, he does not sob as he has following sexual relations with all of the other women in the herd. Instead,

---

46 In the old testament story, Esther is massaged for “six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors, and with other things for the purifying of women” before going to King Ahasuerus who has chosen her as a wife.
he experiences a bowel movement, after which she must bathe him “to clean him up from the last love-making’s dinky-poo” (163).

The General forfeits his power to Leticia, and he carries “out her orders as if they were from love all the more obedient” (154). Though he has resisted literacy all of his adult life, he abandons “the flattery of power and the enchantments of the world to devote himself to her contemplation and service” (154), and decides to let her teach him to read. He instructs his staff that he is going to be “very busy learning to read and write, so no one interrupted him not even with the news general sir that the black vomit was wreaking havoc among the rural population while rhythms of my heart got ahead of the metronome because of that invisible force of your wild-animal smell” (164). And when Leticia asks for the restitution of the confessional schools expropriated by the government, the General proclaims “never in a million years, he decided, and yet they did come back general sir . . .their expropriated holdings were restored with interest” (165). “God had been brought in on a ship general sir, really, they had brought Him on our orders, Leticia, his legitimate wife, becomes “the hidden power behind those endless processions which he watched in amazement” (366). By virtue of her smell, Leticia Nazareno held the keys to his power” (174) until she and her son are assassinated and eaten by wild dogs.

In the novel’s last chapter, a young female narrator – a victim of one of the General’s numerous crimes of power – divulges that the charismatic dictator “made me happy at the age of twelve” (208). One “among the troop of schoolgirls in identical uniforms who stuck out their tongues at him . . .when he tried to entice them with candy” (210), the adolescent girl narrates the olfactory details of her initial sexual encounter with the General, who, during the last years of his life, customarily waits just outside of the parochial school gates in order to extract sexual
companionship from the young girls attending the school. Although sexually unsure of himself – an insecurity stemming back to his rejection by the camp follower who “smelled like pine soap,” the now omnipotent General has come to understand the power behind machismo; he has mastered the ruthless power that he must minute-by-minute employ to keep himself in the highest office in the nation. Certainly more cognitively aware of his own sexuality than Benjy, the General approaches young girls with intended design, even armed for the crime. He uses candy as a lure guaranteed to lead to their sexual entrapment. In this instance, the General understands that he deals with children who often do without the necessities of life, including food.

The General visits the schoolyard armed with a bag of candy – a stratagem he realizes is requisite to getting the attention of young, and, he calculates, hungry, girls. Unlike Benjy, who bursts through the unlocked gate and nesciently sets in motion events that lead to his castration, the General’s molestations are carefully premeditated. He initially seduces his victims with candy, something he believes they will desire; because of his own experiential knowledge of how smell stimulates sexuality, he incrementally moves his victims along a path of desire: he ploys the hungry girl with food, but not just any food; he waits for her mouth to water for the sweet candy, a special treat, and then he moves from his careful exploitation of his victims’s sense of taste to a manipulation of her sense of smell. The young girl, her name not as significant as the fact that she is only twelve years of age, confesses that “he put his fingers underneath the edge of my panties, he smelled my fingers, he made me smell them, smell it, he told me, it’s your smell” (208). The General teases the powerless victim with her own smell, taunting her with her own sense of personal and sexual power.
Critical commentary of this scene from the novel – aimed at criticizing aspects of women’s oppression – attends to the food but not to the olfactory experience of the passage, which goes unanalyzed: “the Patriarch uses food in his sexual games with the unnamed school girl who falls in love with him” (179-80 ), asserts Dianne Marting. “With an irony typical of Garcia Marquez, the real whore from the port complains about the Patriarch's waste of good food when she is going hungry” (180). Using her own sexual smell, the god-like dictator compels her into his own sexual obsession, and he succeeds in this olfactory atrocity as he has in countless others. The young girl testifies to her qualitative change when she claims, “I didn’t need Ambassador Baldrich’s candy any more to climb through the stable skylight to live the happy hours of my puberty with that man” (208). By fourteen “he had become the only reason for my life” (209); she is trapped in the labyrinth of a brutal fantasy:

I . . . spent the rest of my life dying for him, I would go to bed with strangers off the street to see if I could find one better than he, I returned aged and embittered with this drove of sons by different fathers. (209)

The production of power in the novel is conflicted and not simply a polar production. The patriarch is not all power, he is not all bad, not all good. Julio Ortega asserts that “The spectacle of power develops in the text as a conflictive production, rather than simply as a polar production” (175).

Faulkner and García Márquez both depict sexual power as a conflictive problem throughout much of their work, inventing characters obsessed with smell, characters affirming the perception of smell and sexual power/powerlessness. For Faulkner and Garcia Marquez, aromas of sexuality mark not only the quintessence of allure but its power. Though the olfactory perception shifts from the precivilized condition of Benjy, to the modern status of Quentin, to the
postmodern position of the General, in each represented period, scents emanating from the female are perceived by the male each depicting the male’s powerlessness to resist. In the New World, the nose has not changed; it has been and will continue to be the aboriginal hunter, though as the olfactory marks the force of attraction between the sexes, the hunter easily shifts to become the hunted.
Chapter Six
An Ethics of Smell: Revelations of the Other in Faulkner’s *Light In August* and García Márquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera*

To the one we are the fragrance of death unto death;
and to the other the fragrance of life unto life.
– St. Paul, II Corinthians 2:16

As they pay heed to both the material and moral conditions of their worlds, Faulkner and García Márquez infuse their fiction with an ethics of smell. Throughout their novels, odors and olfactory encounters trace the human—at times the all-too-human—response to the “Other.” Sometimes that response is individual, about “I” and “thou,” though often, it is based on a community’s discrimination about “us” and “them,” and so locates members inside or Others outside of a self-contained community. For instance, in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, the smell of Addie’s rotting corpse justifies the communal reaction that doubly signifies a social rejection of members of a lower class. Race elicits communal olfactory sensations in *Light in August* as Joe Christmas “carrie[s] with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent” (33).

A passage from García Márquez’s *Leaf Storm* attends to Macondo’s anticipated satisfaction of someday smelling the corpse of the reclusive French—and emphatically foreign—doctor, who earns the hatred of the community because he is not one of them; in fact, his association with the “human leaf storm” that contaminates while concurrently colonizing their community goes unmentioned. The town, “created out of the rubbish of other towns” (1), longs for “the pleasant odor of his decomposition floating through the town without anyone’s feeling moved, alarmed, or scandalized, satisfied rather at seeing the longed for hour come” (8) because the doctor rejected their invitation to be part of their community by refusing to treat some of their wounded soldiers.
These olfactory negotiations of self/other relationships pay tribute to smell as a moral phenomenon. Though the olfactory often goes unnoticed because of the hegemony of sight, odors figure prominently in every area of social interaction. Anthony Synnott identifies smell as “a boundary-marker, a status symbol, a distance-maintainer, an impressing management technique. . . but it is above all a statement of who one is” (183). As Janice Carlisle remarks, smell has long been regarded as the sensory register that “unerringly responds to the differences between one individual and another” (25). Anni Le Guérer claims that smell provides “the most direct and profound impression we can have of another person” (23). Though not much critical attention and analysis has been given to literary olfactory encounters, writers in the past as well as in contemporary times have made frequent use of olfactory language to describe the “Other.”47 Because smells allow us to sniff out cultural differences/distinctions, smelling is a cultural exchange. Moreover, because the olfactory provides a means to the end of the Other’s exaltation or deprecation, smell ultimately becomes an act of judgment.

In the instances from Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fiction that I have just cited, the olfactory perception of the Other occurs from a distance, rendering the Other as a faceless, invisible, and therefore alien object to be avoided or subjugated. For other characters in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fiction, however, a more intimate and fragrant encounter triggers an ethical response that involves a breaking free from a contained solitude, whether that solitude be associated with the personal self or with the community’s own perceptions about

__________________________

47Olfactory texts from a more distant literary history would include, though not be limited to: Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time, James Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. A short list of contemporary texts includes: Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, Patrick Süskind’s Perfume, Roald Dahl’s Bitch, and Italo Calvino’s “The Name, The Nose.”
itself, and which ultimately leads to a comprehension of being “Other” oneself. In these instances, smells play a significant part in the summons to an ethical response in the form of a moral responsibility for the well-being of the Other. Such instances occur for Byron Bunch and for Joe Christmas in *Light in August*; and in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, the smells discerned by Dr. Juvenal Urbino and Florentino Ariza provide occasions for García Márquez’s exploration of ethics and ontology.

In many ways, questions about the self/the Other and about the ethical response arising in Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fiction are similar to the ethical concerns of contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. Like Faulkner and García Márquez, Lévinas emphasizes social relationships over philosophical abstractions and dispenses with reflection on ideal concepts in favor of embodied personal experience, as he challenges some of the totalizing rational systems of the Enlightenment. Expressing his criticism of Western philosophies of being, Lévinas writes:

> The essential contribution to the new ontology can be seen in its opposition to classical intellectualism. To comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it but to find ourselves in affective disposition. To comprehend being is to exist. All this indicates, it would seem, a rupture within the theoretical structure of Western thought. To think is no longer to contemplate but to commit oneself; to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved. This is the dramatic event of being-in-the-world. (qtd in Peperzak, Critchley, and Bernasconi 4)

Lévinas describes this being-in-the-world as a subjectivity which begins with a face-to-face encounter with an absolute Other, an act that brings the subject closer to the Other by positing direct experience of the Other as prior to comprehension and language. For Lévinas, selfhood can only emerge in the resulting “summons to goodness” that follows this encounter. Being-in-the-world is possible only after a free ethical response to the Other. As Lévinas argues, the face of the Other presents an immediate ethical demand that transforms the individual as he or she
responds. The basic ethical condition, an “Ethic of Ethics,” as Derrida calls it (Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics” 111) is embodied for Lévinas in actual inter-human situations:

The [o]ther becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question . . . . It is the responsibility of a hostage which can be carried to the point of being substituted for the other person and demands an infinite subjection of subjectivity. (Levinas Reader 82-84)

It is important to note, however, that for Lévinas, the “visualized” face itself is not the primary focus of this significant face-to-face encounter, and is, in fact, transcended in the inter-personal encounter. In Totality and Infinity, Lévinas criticizes a Western ocularcentric (visual) bias that he claims results in the world of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. Vision campaigns for a world of solid objects with clearly defined edges, while Lévinas calls for communication that “cuts across the vision of forms” and “denies neat edged closure” (193). In Faulkner’s and García Márquez’s fiction, the olfactory supplies the means to augment, if not circumvent or “cut across,” the visual. An intimate olfactory encounter facilitates the summons necessary for an ethical response.

A number of such olfactory encounters and their subsequent ethical responses are located in Faulkner’s Light in August, a novel published in 1932 as the seventh in the series of Yoknapatawpha stories, all of which explore racial conflicts in the South. Of the series, Judith Bryant Wittenberg claims Light in August to be Faulkner’s “most profound meditation” on race as “a conceptual and behavioral issue as much as (or rather more than) a biological one” (146). The novel is not only about Southerners’ perceptions of race but about how Southerners of the time perceived themselves – those perceptions as they were inscribed in everyday life, as well as in laws written and unwritten – and expressed in different forms of force and subjugation. As Wittenberg asserts
It is striking – and may seem paradoxical – that the Faulkner novel most centrally concerned with an issue that suffused so much of his corpus contains not a single significant character who is identifiably African American . . . . Its focus is more on the concept of race than on actual race relations. (146)

Faulkner, himself living in and aware of the racial situations in Mississippi – a state which, through its aggravated racial division, might have served as the paradigm for racial issues in the South - was working on a novel which he called Dark House, at the center of which was a character named Gail Hightower, a man as obsessed with his grandfather as Faulkner was with his own. He later changed the title to Light in August, a novel about which Cleanth Brooks notices the significance of community: “The community is the powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself in so much of Faulkner’s work” (William Faulkner 52) asserts Brooks, claiming that readers who lack awareness of the community as a force, “find Light in August quite baffling . . . . Yet a little reflection will show that nearly all the characters in Light in August bear a special relation to the community”(53). More recently, Richard Gray, in his important work, The Life of William Faulkner, further describes the novel’s characters as seeming to “be exploring . . . the uses and abuses of privacy” (178), adding that “Light in August does not have the sometimes claustrophobic personal focus” of other Faulkner novels. Gray emphasizes Faulkner’s claim that he was feeling an awareness “before each word was written down” of “just what people would do” (qtd. in Gray 179).

---

48When he changed the title to Light in August, he explained that “in August in Mississippi there’s a few days somewhere about the middle of the month when suddenly there’s a foretaste of fall, it’s cool, there’s a lambence, a luminous quality to the light, as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times. It might have fauns and satyrs and the gods and – from Greece, from Olympus in it somewhere. It lasts just for a day or two . . . .but it reminded me of that time, of a luminosity older than our Christian civilization”(qtd. in Gwynn 199).
What do people do, and in the case of *Light in August*, what do Southern people do when they are faced with the violent legacies of not only racism but of misogyny and homophobic attitudes as well? In part, Faulkner responds to these questions concerned with how people handle encounters with Others - Others being persons located outside of a given Southern community – with a lynch mob, with castration, with murder, and with extreme prejudice, respectively. One of the novel’s several protagonists, the orphaned Joe Christmas, attempts an escape from racism to Jefferson, Mississippi, where no one, not even Joe, knows for certain his racial heritage. In Jefferson, he establishes an illegal alcohol business and commences a sexual relationship with Joanna Burden, an older woman with an abolitionist family heritage. Another protagonist, Lena Grove, purposefully drifts several hundred miles on foot and pregnant, on a quest that takes her from Alabama to Mississippi to find Lucas Burch, her unborn baby’s father – a journey that finally concludes in Jefferson. The former Presbyterian minister, Gail Hightower, another of the novel’s protagonists and a man obsessed with the past, has been turned aside by Jefferson because his congregation cannot abide his sermons, which are too frequently devoted to keeping his grandfather’s memory alive; nor can they condone his self-absorbed life which culminates in his wife’s adulterous affair and subsequent suicide. What these protagonists and other characters in *Light in August* have in common is personal isolation; they are, as Brooks points out, “outcasts – they are pariahs, defiant exiles, withdrawn quietists, or simply strangers” (53). Indeed, their isolation as Others is reinforced by the community response, a detail that itself reinforces another of Gray’s assertions about *Light in August*, that the novel is about how a community defines itself and its members “through its rituals” (179). The communal response to “who is my neighbor,” doubly signifies the communal rejection of those who are not neighbors.
Attention to certain olfactory encounters in the novel, however, show how Others isolated on the peripheries of the community might escape from being-in-isolation to being-in-the-world. For despite the theme of personal isolation operating in *Light in August*, one reason that the novel feels less claustrophobic is that some of the characters step out from their private solitudes to answer the kind of ethical summons articulated by Lévinas. Both Byron Bunch and Joe Christmas respond to an olfactory encounter and answer a summons to be responsible for an Other, both “to the point of being substituted for the other” (Hand 83).

Of these two— as well as of any other of the fictional characters in Faulkner’s cosmos who use their noses as tools to morally evaluate the Other— Byron Bunch serves as an archetype of how subjectivity performs ethically in the context of an olfactory encounter with an absolute Other. The following passage from *Light in August* elucidates the olfactory nature of Byron’s ethical response:

> The temperature began to rise Monday. On Tuesday, the night, the darkness after the hot day, is close, still, oppressive, as soon as Byron enters the house he feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and tauten with the thick smell of the stale, mankept house. And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing— that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed— is well nigh overpowering. Entering, Byron thinks as he has thought before: ‘That is his right. It may not be my way, but it is his way and his right.’ And he remembers how once he had seemed to find the answer, as though by inspiration, divination: ‘It is the odor of goodness. Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful.’ (298-9)

On the oppressively hot Tuesday night, when Byron enters Hightower’s “mankept house” and he “feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and tauten with the thick smell” of staleness, neither his emotional nor ethical response correspond with the physiology of his olfactory experience. Overpowered not only by the stench but also by his own subjectivity, Byron constructs his moral evaluation of Hightower, in effect, substituting his own morality for Hightower’s. Upon entering
In fact, Virginia Hlavsa, in *Faulkner and the Thoroughly Modern Novel*, argues that Faulkner consciously modeled the 21 chapters in *Light in August* on the 21 chapters of the *Gospel of John*. She links the inverted initials of Gail Hightower with the Holy Ghost.

Byron, the innocuous man who has “spent six days of every week for seven years at the planing mill” and riding each Sunday “thirty miles into the country” where he leads “the choir in a country church” has certainly heard scriptures calling for one to lay down his life for another.49 Byron is no doubt familiar with the Apostle Paul’s text that, “To the one we are the fragrance of death unto death; and to the other the fragrance of life unto life.” In this passage from Second Corinthians, Paul conveys a message which emphasizes not only the essential binary nature of smell, but also about how smells are morally evaluated as a community identifies its members. The people of God smell good to the good and bad to the bad, and Byron seems to be referring to this very passage. In fact, the message correlates with Byron’s moral evaluation of Hightower. Byron equates Hightower’s stench with his own moral inferiority – his own inability to smell “life unto life.”

It is still surprising that when “Hightower approaches,” and “the smell of plump unwashed flesh” overpowers Byron, Byron reacts by thinking to himself, as he has thought before, “Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful” (298-9). Hightower has longed for “that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man” (487), and he

does find that forgiveness, though not from the community. Only Byron is willing to call his own self into question and to extend an ethical acceptance if not forgiveness to Hightower.

The passage palpably demonstrates the role that odor plays in the recognition of the Other: in the instant that he walks through Gail Hightower’s door, prior to any visual or aural encounter, Byron recognizes Hightower’s presence –Hightower’s physical trace in the place–because of his own sensitivity to the former Reverend’s personal odor. Byron’s olfactory perceptiveness, on the other hand, may not necessarily need to be particularly sensitive in order to smell Hightower, who doesn’t wash with frequency and who doesn’t concern himself with matters of personal cleanliness. In itself, this kind of olfactory response might seem quite unremarkable. The fact that human beings produce characteristic odors is knowledge of the everyday kind, and an incident of one person describing the smell of another person an ordinary event. And yet, Byron’s ethical response to this olfactory situation is worthy of note. Byron translates the domestic stench he encounters when he enters the home as a supernatural sign of Hightower’s “goodness.” For Byron, Hightower’s personal malodor signifies Hightower’s moral superiority.

The olfactory encounter between Byron and Hightower exacts Byron’s ethical response–a response which does not match up with Hightower’s stench nor with the moral judgments of the community, whose members refuse any significant acts of neighborliness to Hightower. In fact, the ex-minister is summarily turned aside by the community. Though he is white, male, and

50 “Humans produce,” writes Annick Le Guérer, “a characteristic odor in the air around them that reflects their diet and/or health, their age, their sex, occupation, race. It can be argued that because of the physiology of the olfactory apparatus, the most direct and profound impression we have of another person is his (or her) smell” (23).
Christian, and he should be recognized by the community as one of “them,” he is divested of his place in the social hierarchy following a series of scandalous events. To begin with, as some critics have pointed out, Hightower’s sexual orientation is ambiguous. Terrell Tebbetts contends that throughout the novel, Hightower is “suspiciously feminized” (149). At one point, Hightower confesses to his wife “the fact that never and never would she have any part in the assuaging of . . . his hunger” (488). Later, his wife commits adultery and then suicide, but her un-Christian behavior is forthcoming only after Hightower’s acknowledgment of his own atypical desires.

Following the community’s success at forcing Hightower to resign his leadership of the local church, “the town was sorry for being glad, as people sometimes are sorry for those whom they have at last forced to do as they wanted them to” (60). Even so, when Hightower refuses to leave town, some townsmen decide to take matters a little further and beat him. After Hightower refuses to seek prosecution for those who wronged him, “all of a sudden the whole thing seemed to blow away, like an evil wind” (54). The community reconciles itself to Hightower’s presence, but he loses any place of prominence or respect as one of their own.

Despite the community’s judgments over Hightower’s aberrant past, Byron’s moral assessment redeems the ex-minister, translating Hightower’s foul body odor and domestic stench to stand for something entirely different; Byron perceives the smell as Hightower’s designation to a dominant place in a spiritual hierarchy; in effect, he trades spiritual spaces with Hightower. In other words, Byron conceives of a community where Hightower not only has a place, but he occupies a place of high standing. In fact, Byron calls himself into question, accepting for himself the designation of Other. He identifies his instantaneous and unmistakable physical reaction to Hightower’s smell as a signal of his own spiritual shortcomings. Byron’s face-to-face-
encounter, an encounter marked by an olfactory intimacy that engulfs him, calls his own subjectivity into question. Essentially, Byron is willingly taken hostage in the intimacy of the olfactory moment, when he experiences an intimate olfactory instance with Hightower. In that instance, he gives himself over to the ethical demand for an infinite subjection of subjectivity.

Ironically, Hightower himself makes moral judgments based on smell, though he does not always function within the same ethics and forgiveness as Byron. Though by the novel’s end, Hightower will move out of his isolation to assist Lena Grove in delivering her child and will also offer an alibi to Joe Christmas, for twenty-five years he has given himself over to a solitude of contemplation about his grandfather’s death. Following Joe’s tragic demise in Hightower’s home, Hightower returns to his self-absorption: “And Hightower leans there in the window, in the August heat, oblivious of the odor in which he lives – that smell of people who no longer live in life: that odor of overplump desiccation and stale linen as though a precursor of the tomb” (318). Oblivious to his own smell, he nevertheless recalls that he has paid vivid attention to his father’s smell, which he describes as the smell of the Other, of “that man who was a stranger to them both, a foreigner, almost a threat” (475), referring to his father’s good health as alienating him from the sickly young Gail and his bedridden mother, “so quickly does the body’s wellbeing alter and change the spirit” (475). Hightower’s reflection continues: his father “was more than a stranger: he was an enemy. He smelled differently from them. He spoke with a different voice . . .” (475). For the majority of his life, Hightower is unwilling to step outside of his own self, unwilling to see himself as the Other, unwilling to accept any ethical responsibility, until this final reverie, after Joe’s death, which is phrased explicitly in terms of an out-of-self experience:

He seems to watch himself among faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the
church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl. And more than that: the faces seem to be mirrors in which he watches himself. He knows them all; he can read his doings in them. He seems to see a charlatan preaching worse than heresy, in utter disregard of that whose very stage he preempted, offering instead of the crucified shape of pity and love, a swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse, in a temporary hiatus of his own avocation of killing. The wheel of thinking slows; the axle knows it now but the vehicle is still unaware.

When Hightower finally sees himself as an Other – he who has kept himself “to and of himself” (490) and refused to see himself – he experiences it as an hallucination, though unlike his hallucination of the horses, is a vision of the community redeemed: “In the lambent suspension of August into which night is about to fully come, it seems to engender and surround itself with a faint glow like a halo. The halo is full of faces. The faces are not shaped with suffering . . . they are peaceful, as though they have escaped into an apotheosis” (491). For one too-brief moment, however, the light in August illuminates for Hightower, his own face as the face of an Other.

Of the characters in *Light in August* relying on odors to make moral judgments of the Other, Joe Christmas is the most occupied, perhaps because his boundaries are the most blurred, his past the most obfuscated. The most decentered of subjects in the novel, he is also the most sensitive to smells. The fact that he is a foreigner to himself as well as to all those around him actually figures into his hyperosmia. In *Light in August*, particularly for Joe, odors construct identity as well as language does, though the community of Jefferson categorizes Joe as an Other as soon as they learn his name, giving proof to Jacques Lacan’s claim that culture “could well be reduced to language” (148), “the letter produces all the effects of truth in man” (158). When Joe first arrives at the mill in Jefferson, his own name gives rise to speculations about his origin: “His name is Christmas,” repeats one of the mill workers. “His name is what? one said. Christmas. Is he a foreigner? Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?” (33). The
fictional situation accommodates Lacan’s claim regarding the power of words in the construction of culture and identity: “the world of words that creates the world of things: the individual is, a priori and infallibly, the slave of language” (148).

Even Byron comments on “how a man’s name . . . which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do, if other men can only read the meaning in time” (33). Yet in this instance, Faulkner tellingly relates language with odor – with how closely the sound for who a person is might be related to the smell of who a person is: “he carried it with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle.”(33). Though the passage alludes to Joe’s smell, throughout the novel, Joe smells Others, but they do not seem to smell him. His smell, like his ancestry, is ambiguous; Joe exists with an unmarked status until the novel’s end, when he is being tracked by bloodhounds. At this point, Joe’s heretofore unnoticed smell suddenly becomes the very means by which the authorities attempt to track him down, though the authorities interested in doing the tracking do not have the ability to smell the Other and so resort to using dogs. Ironically, even the dogs can’t get Joe’s scent, though they smell his shoes, which he trades to a Negro woman as part of his evasion. Joe detects his would-be captors, who could only look for his footprints since they could not smell him: “‘We been putting dogs on him once a day ever since Sunday,’ the sheriff said. ‘And we aint caught him yet. Them were cold trails. We aint had a good hot trail until today . . . . This trail is running straight as a railroad. I could follow it . . . . You can even see his footprints” (328). As Joe watches from a safe distance, his trackers beat the dogs for having mistakenly been misled by the smell of Joe’s shoes, and “he paused there only long enough to lace up the brogans; the black shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro” (331).
Joe has need of wearing another’s shoes, both metaphorically and physically. The dogs cannot identify him because he defies identification. The constructed class of racial identity cannot contain Joe Christmas. Late in the novel, District Attorney Gavin Stevens, a Harvard graduate, offers his own explanation of Joe’s identity crisis: “His blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself . . . . the black blood drove him to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there” (449). From the beginning, Joe Christmas does not know who he is. “You don’t know what you are the yardman tells him in the orphanage. And more than that, you won’t never know” (384). After his arrest in Mottstown, near the end of his life, one narrator complains that Joe “never acted like either a nigger or a white man,” adding that “was what made people so mad” (350). Wittenberg asserts that even the notion of “black” or “white” blood seems, either in or out of context, not only ludicrous but sinister . . . there are no solid grounds for assuming that he is in fact racially mixed. Joe’s appearance is fully “white,” he has been raised entirely by whites, and the sole source of information about his “blackness” is his demented grandfather, Doc Hines” (147).

Because of Doc Hines’ brutal enforcement of the world’s obsessive racial boundaries, when Joe faces those strict boundaries between black and white, he finds himself unable to live peacefully on either side of them and equally unable to ignore them. And in this interstitial space, Joe makes judgments about the smells of Others, beginning as early as five years old. Though isolated in his being, which is not yet being, his own smell does not enter into his perceptions. At this tender age, Joe is already capable of making moral judgments about the society others have constructed around him. Joe’s first sensory modality for dealing with the identification of others is through his sense of smell, and he initially orders smells along binary lines. His gender-based
classification of smells allows him to differentiate others as either male or female, that first great binary separation of all humanity. Early on, Joe’s sensitivities to odor work in his schema to know, to identify those around him. He also offers simple moral judgments about the odors he encounters:

   When the child wakened, he was being carried. It was pitch dark and cold; he was being carried down stairs by someone who moved with silent and infinite care. Pressed between him and one of the arms which supported him was a wad which he knew to be his clothes. He made no outcry, no sound. He knew where he was by the smell, the air, of the back stairway which led down to the side door from the room in which his bed had been one among forty others since he could remember. He knew also by smell that the person who carried him was a man.(135)

Because Joe associates the smell of men with security, he accepts and appreciates the male scent. Enveloped by the smell, he simply does not want to run away. “He just stood there and then a bigger garment enveloped him completely – by its smell he knew that it belonged to the man” (138). Male smells are good, dependable smells, that instill in him a sense of belonging and home. As Joe moves through puberty, however, his olfactory sense matures and his developing thoughts and emotions odorize his perceptions and judgments. When the pubescent boy from church relates to him and the other boys the details of sex, Joe says “he was graphic enough, convincing enough. If he had tried to describe it as a mental state, something which he only believed, they would not have listened. But he drew a picture, physical, actual, to be discerned by the sense of smell and even of sight” (185). Joe’s testimony seems to confirm Faulkner’s own conscious use of the olfactory imagination in his writing and his focus on the body and concrete sensory experience.

   Experience and age moves him along from fantasy to the investigative, when Joe agrees to go with the same group of church boys to meet with a girl “willing” to have sex with each of
them. Instead of this being his introduction to sexual intercourse, however, the confrontation will prove to be his first instance of what Levinas calls a face-to-face-encounter, during which he will step out of his own subjectivity to make an ethical response to an Other. Joe’s ethical response, triggered by smell, happens on the occasion of what is supposed to be his first sexual encounter, when Joe goes to a barn with the other young boys who have arranged for sex with a young black girl.

His turn came. He entered the shed. It was dark. . . . but he could not move at once, standing there, smelling the woman smelling the negro all at once; enclosed by the womanshenegro . . . Then it was male he smelled, they smelled; somewhere beneath it the She scuttling, screaming. (156-7)

Joe is initially overpowered by the sheer otherness of her smell, a smell that identifies and expresses the black and female Other. What he smells moves him to begin fighting, and he acts instinctively, first kicking and hitting the girl, then taking his fight to the boys. As he punches the other boys, he drives them off, thus allowing the girl’s escape. Her chance to get away comes unintentionally, but even so, she is able to escape from him and from the other boys. Joe goes to the barn fully expecting to participate, but, upon smelling the girl, the Other, he responds to something primal; even without the formation of intentions, Joe fortuitously abandons his own initiatives and albeit unwittingly, he takes up instead the Other’s cause, effecting for her a rescue she herself may not have recognized nor asked for. In so doing, Joe exemplifies Levinas’ description of ethics. The intimacy of this olfactory encounter demands an ethical response, and inadvertently, the unnamed girl becomes Joe’s neighbor.

Ethical responses to olfactory instances can also be located in García Márquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera*, which is not as unexpected from a work referred to by Rob Couteau as “an
anatomy of love (89). Despite the epic feel of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a novel that travels over a considerable span of time and weaves characters and families together in an intricate plot, most critical response to the novel maintains that the story is quite simply a love story. J. A. Hernandez calls the novel “Stylistically halfway between the realism of *No One Writes to the Colonel* and the fantastic exuberance of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* . . . A tender novel about old age and hope, assertive in proposing the triumph of instinct against reason” (131). Tim McCarthy identifies García Márquez as a storyteller caught up in a project to “tell about love, all kinds of love, romantic love, licentious love, married love, young and old love, mother love, family love” (23). In his review of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Thomas Pynchon applauds García Márquez’s “revolutionary” though traditional humanistic faith in a novel that makes possible a “resurrection of the human body” (47). Unnoticed is that García Márquez’s literarily resurrected body is described in terms heavy with odor in a landscape where the olfactory can and does effect ethical responses.

Set between the 1870s and 1930s in an unnamed and exotic Spanish Colonial city along the Caribbean coast of Colombia, *Love in the Time of Cholera* chronicles the lives of three main characters caught in an unusual love triangle – Dr. Juvenal Urbino, a perfectionist who represents

---

51In a review that typifies the overall reception of García Márquez’s first published novel after receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982, Carlos R. Rodriguez writes that if “*One Hundred Years of Solitude* had not secured the road to Stockholm . . . *Love in the Time of Cholera* would have done so” (Pelayo 135). In fact, García Márquez interrupted work on *Love in the Time of Cholera* upon learning of the Nobel committee’s decision, working instead on an acceptance speech in which he espouses his faith in “tellers of tales who . . . Are capable of believing anything” (Acceptance Speech), followed by the timely business of meeting the numerous public commitments of a Nobel laureate. Not until 1985, nearly three years following his award, was García Márquez’s novelistic project about “a second chance on earth” – to use another phrase from his Nobel acceptance – published.
the best of the European scientific tradition; his wife, Fermina Daza, who in her youth is described as a “beautiful adolescent with . . . almond shaped eyes” (56), and Florentino Ariza, the love-sick poet who waits “fifty years, nine months, and four days” (53) to restate a pledge of “eternal fidelity and everlasting love” to Fermina (50). Each of these characters demonstrates a penchant for smell in a society that seems bent on escaping from the stench of tragedy, and each will break free from solitude during a fragrant instance, coming to comprehend themselves as Others in the process.

When Dr. Urbino, a man devoted to science and progress – a devotion second only to his dedication to the Catholic faith – returns to his native city from his advanced medical and surgical studies in Paris where cholera has become an obsession for him, he smells “the stench of the market while . . . still out at sea” and in that moment, he “understood how the tragedy” (114) of a cholera epidemic– could and might yet – come to pass. From this olfactory experience forward, Urbino, referred to as “the personification of correctness” by Rubén Pelayo (145), commits his life to elevating the standards of public health in his native city, distinguishing himself by instituting policies to combat cholera. His signal policies stem not only from his sophisticated education but also from his ability to sniff out disease. Urbino claims a knowledge “with no scientific basis except his own experience” that “most fatal diseases had their own specific odor” (40), and his medical experience and superb clinical nose make him an excellent recorder of those who are diseased and those who are not, and so of those who are part of the healthy community and its Others.

Between the time of the traumatic olfactory experience that marks his return from Paris and the aroma-induced suicide of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, a sixty-year-old photographer friend,
Urbino experiences a lifetime of significant olfactory instances, many which demonstrate the nexus of Urbino’s heightened olfactory sense with his moral judgments about the Other. For instance, each morning, he “wax[es] his mustache in an atmosphere saturated with genuine cologne” (9), never leaving his private rooms without being “carefully shaven and fragrant with lotions from his dressing table” (48). What appears to be a careful concern for his appearance is more consistent with an olfactory paranoia. In short, Urbino is terrified of the Other; though he is recognized as a hero in the city who can sniff out disease, Urbino hides behind a wall of scent. His nose not only serves the community, it serves Urbino. His nose protects him from contamination. In fact, Urbino always carries “a little pad of camphor that he inhaled deeply when no one was watching” (8). Always conscious of the air he breathes, every morning the doctor practices “fifteen minutes of respiratory exercises in front of the open window in the bathroom, always breathing toward the side where the roosters were crowing, which was where the air was new” (9). Living during the time of cholera, he does all he can to resist the Other, who, in this case, is the diseased.

His resistance and subsequent personal isolation end when Urbino, at 81, arrives on the suicide scene at the house of Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, the disabled Caribbean refugee (and fugitive) who is Urbino’s close friend and favorite opponent at chess. The scene, the novel’s initial one, opens at dawn on Pentecost morning, as Urbino answers an urgent call from the police inspector to come to the familiar address. Stepping into the darkened house, Urbino immediately recognizes the lingering scent of bitter almonds left by gold cyanide—a scent that “always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love” (3). Urbino has visited many suicide scenes for which love was the cause. Consequently, as the police inspector approaches with a young
medical student, Urbino stops them short. “There was no need for an autopsy; the odor in the house was sufficient proof that the cause of death had been the cyanide vapors activated in the tray by some photographic acid” (5). As Urbino meditates on the countless suicide scenes he can remember, he realizes that this is “the first with cyanide that had not been caused by the sufferings of love” (5), since de Saint-Amour’s beautiful Haitian mistress passionately returned his love.

Finding a posthumous letter addressed by de Saint-Amour to himself, Urbino “allow[s] himself to be carried along by curiosity” (11).

The Doctor opened the black curtain over the window to have more light, gave a quick glance at the eleven sheets covered on both sides by a diligent handwriting, and when he had read the first paragraph he knew that he would miss Pentecost Communion. He read with agitated breath, turning back on several pages to find the thread he had lost, and when he finished he seemed to return from very far away and very long ago. His despondency was obvious despite his effort to control it; his lips were as blue as the corpse and he could not stop the trembling of his fingers. (7)

The words that he reads – like the words that Jesus writes in the sand when he convinces the would-be mob of religious zealots who would stone the woman caught in adultery to desist in their anger – are forever unknown. Even so, they not only demand the doctor come to terms with the reason behind de Saint-Amour’s suicide – it has been prompted by de Saint-Amour’s manic fear of growing old, of being Other – but also, the words, speaking forth an intimacy with his friend that he had not known before, prompted by the fragrant smell of unrequited love in the room, demand that he come to terms with his own fear of the other. The situation demands an ethical response. Finally aware of his friend’s innermost thoughts, Urbino has a face-to-face encounter, and he makes a decision that is “foreign to his usual habits” (11). Leaving the house, he orders his coachman to take him to “an obscure location in the old slave quarter” (11). Though
for the majority of his life, Urbino has protected himself from the contamination of disease and from the Other, he purposely directs that he be driven to a place in the city where neither can be avoided:

As they passed by the marshes, Dr. Urbino recognized their oppressive weight, their ominous silence, their suffocating gases, which on so many insomniac dawns had risen to his bedroom, blending with the fragrance of jasmine from the patio, and which he felt pass him by like a wind out of yesterday that had nothing to do with his life. But that pestilence so frequently idealized by nostalgia became an unbearable reality when the carriage began to lurch through the quagmire of the streets where buzzards fought over the slaughterhouse offal as it was swept along by the receding tide. (12)

Urbino breaks free from his solitude, momentarily overcoming his phobia of the poor and the diseased, to deliver news of de Saint-Amour’s demise to the passionate and faithful mistress. His friend beyond his help now, he goes to the person who might serve as a surrogate. His self-consciousness is replaced by his comprehension of being-in-the-world and a subsequent responsibility to his neighbor that transcends his fear.

Finally, there is Florentino Ariza, a man born in poverty, an Other himself, but who rises to social prominence as a self-made man to eventually become president of the River Company. Florentino, who will become one of García Márquez’s most carnal/voluptuous hyperosmiacs, meets Fermina while they are both adolescents. The first time he smells the woman for whom he will wait “fifty years, nine months, and four days” (53), he stands “so close to her that he could detect the catches in her breathing and the floral scent that he would identify with her for the rest of his life” (60). A short courtship ensues (mostly written) until Fermina is sent out of town by her father. Love and love’s smell change everything for Florentino Ariza, even in the time of cholera, and “from that time on he no longer detected the fetid reek of the bay in the city, but was aware only of the personal fragrance of Fermina Daza. Everything smelled of her” (148).
Florentino and Fermina continue to exchange letters during her absence until the relationship is finally broken off when Fermina returns home. Soon after, with her father’s blessing, she marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino.

Though he loses Fermina to Urbino, Florentino’s nose for love moves on in its pursuit of amorous conquests. Promiscuous up until Urbino’s death, Florentino’s attraction to women is frequently stimulated by if not based on smell. For instance, one of the 622 “long term” relationships which Florentino enjoys is with Sara Noriega, a woman he meets at the National Theatre on the night he loses the Golden Orchid— a prize for poetry given during the Poetic Festival. Sara attracts “his attention because of her mother of pearl whiteness” and “her happy plump woman’s scent” (195). After Urbino's death, Florentino, now an octogenarian, but who has been “love sick” for Fermina for more than fifty years, renews his courtship (mostly through letters) and eventually convinces her to go with him on a riverboat excursion down the Magdalena River. On the occasion of their first, and long-awaited kiss, however, Florentino cannot suppress a shudder; Fermina has “the sour smell of old age,” that “smell of human fermentation” (335). In an instant, Florentino is summoned to trade the fantasy of love that he has carried with him like a disease for more than fifty years; answering positively to the call, he suggests that he is trading his fantasy for the reality of an “even match.”

Through the years, Florentino has built an image of Fermina in his mind that – even as a younger version of herself – she may have had trouble living up to. Though Florentino’s failure of sight as an octogenarian might do much to make up for Fermina’s loss of youthful beauty, nothing can stop the smell of “old age” from triggering revulsion – nothing less than Florentino’s ethical response. Instead of fleeing from the repugnant odor in the moment of this face-to-face
encounter, Florentino gives himself over to something higher, and he feels instead, a happiness he has never known. The novel concludes as the couple consummates their passion during a riverboat ride on a trip that will never end, since the Captain – ironically named Samaratina, or Samaritan, the name given to the New Testament parable character who is able to answer the question, “who is my neighbor” – has decided to fly a “cholera” flag from the ship’s mast. Captain Samaratina does this in order to keep their ship from being stopped, boarded, and therefore their pleasures interrupted. Only, by the end of the pleasure cruise, no port will allow them admittance because of the flag. The ship and its passengers, now identified as contaminated, are imprisoned onboard. The fictional event bears resemblance to Lévinas’s argument regarding a new conception of man:

Man’s essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight . . . on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining. (qtd. in Moyn 100).

Florentino accepts his responsibility for Fermina; he realizes himself for who he is, and in the end, all of the ship’s passengers accept and fly under the cholera flag though it identifies them all as Others.

Both *Light in August* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* personify modern mentalities: Faulkner, harshly, through McEachern, the Calvinist; Burden, the abolitionist; Hightower, the abstract Southern hero-worshiper; Hines, the Biblical fanatic, and Grimm, the fascist – and García Márquez, more considerately – Urbino, the protagonist of European science; Florentino, the lovesick poet. Both, however, portray the essentially modern European disease of distanced observation in order to control, however good the characters’ motives might be. As García Márquez revises Faulkner, Hightower might serve as the model for a number of characters who
get lost inside of their own memories - Buendia, the Colonel, Simon Bolivar. *But Love in the Time of Cholera* signifies Otherness, most eloquently expressed at the end of the novel, when the signal flag is hoisted over the ship.
Chapter Seven
Conclusion: Rejoining the Intimacy of the Physical with Intimacy of the Universal

One of the real tests of writers, especially poets, is how well they write about smells. If they can’t describe the scent of sanctity in a church, can you trust them to describe the suburbs of the heart.

– Dianne Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (18)

If he had tried to describe it as a mental state, something which he only believed, they would not have listened. But he drew a picture, physical, actual, to be discerned by the sense of smell and even of sight.

– Faulkner, *Light in August* (185)

“Nature,” declares Allen Tate, “offers to the symbolic poet clearly denotable objects in depth and in the round, which yield . . . analogies to the higher syntheses” (38). Writing more than five decades ago, Tate, who often responded to the work of his fellow Southerner, Faulkner, was sharing some insights about another writer, Dante, and the concluding canto of *The Divine Comedy*. Tate’s comments, initially serving as part of a lecture at Boston College in 1951 before being published as a chapter in *The Forlorn Demon* (1953), extol Dante’s use of what Tate calls “the symbolic imagination.” This mode of imagination, professes Tate, “conducts an action through analogy, of the human to the divine, of the natural to the supernatural, of the low to the high, of time to eternity” (36). Noting the significance of both rational discourse and intuitive contemplation, Tate asserts that the job of the writer, despite this notable significance, is to “work with the body of this world, whatever that body may look like to him” (36). He extols the world of sense, finding fault with an Enlightenment mentality which denied man's commitment to the physical world, and set itself up in quasi-divine independence. This mind has intellect and will without feeling; and it is through feeling alone that we witness the glory of our servitude to the natural
world, to St. Thomas’ accidents, or, if you will, to Locke’s secondary qualities; it is our tie with the world of sense. (36)

Tate calls for writers to employ the power of the “common thing” with the gift of “concrete experience,” so that “we may smell it, touch it, and taste it again” (40). For Tate, however, both the power and the gift have been obscured by Euro-Western traditions and philosophical concepts which lead to an “abstraction of the modern mind” and to the worship of intellectual power.

Traditionally, Faulkner’s critics have seen his work as a representative of these same Euro-American philosophical and, in turn, literary traditions. A primary theme of this study, nonetheless, has been the revelation that Faulkner’s use of the olfactory as a focal element in his writing distances him from Western traditions partial to an Enlightenment stance and Cartesian rational systems, and so offers a unique context in which to assess the writer, his South, his modernity, and his affiliations. As this study has shown, Faulkner’s symbolic imagination celebrates the body and man’s concrete life, and so disassociates Faulkner’s work from more traditional views, while it identifies and affiliates Faulkner with the tradition of the New World novel, and in particular with Gabriel García Márquez, who has often acknowledged that through his meditations of the Yoknapatawpha saga he discovered his propensity for writing:

I was born in Aracataca, the banana growing country where the United Fruit Company was established. It was in this region where the Fruit Company was building towns and hospitals and draining some zones, that I grew up and received my first impressions. Then, many years later, I read Faulkner and found that his whole world – the world of the southern United States which he writes about was very much like my world, that it was created by the same people . . . What I found in him was affinities between our experiences, which were not as different as might appear at first sight. (qtd. in Guibert 327)
As both Faulkner and García Márquez write within the contexts of their similar experiences and work “with the body of this world” – the body available to them in each of their respective worlds, they both return to what Tate identifies as Dante’s symbolic imagination. Each develops an olfactory language that presents a fullness of corporeal reality which also delineates a form of knowledge crucial to their New World poetics of the novel. Translating the olfactory language in Faulkner’s and García Márquez novels underscores the collaboration of mind and matter in Faulkner’s South and in García Márquez’s South America. Their depictions of the changes brought about by modernity cannot be separated from the subjects and characters or localities and smells that are part of their sensory-rich, yet “Third” worlds. Ironically, the peripheral points from which Faulkner and García Márquez view modernity might best be described themselves as fragrant vantage points from which they have produced New World novels that are both realistic and marvelous – novels which rejoin the intimacy of the physical with the intimacy of the universal.
Works Cited


http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/06/15/reviews/marque-autumn.htm


“Teaching One Hundred Years of Solitude in Comparative Literature Courses.”


Vita

Terri Smith Ruckel, a native of Oloh, Mississippi, received her Bachelor of Arts degree from The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1998. In 2001, Ms. Ruckel earned a Master of Arts degree in English from The University of Southern Mississippi. At the December, 2006, commencement, she will be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree by Louisiana State University.