Subversive Voices

EROTICIZING THE OTHER
IN WILLIAM FAULKNER
AND TONI MORRISON

Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber

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For Scott

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*M*any years ago, before gender, race, and class were staples of literary criticism, I wrote my dissertation, *Endure and Prevail: Faulkner's Social Outcasts*, examining the relationship between characters outside of mainstream society and the ability not only to survive but to preserve individual dignity as well. It is therefore no coincidence that as I matured in my career, my study of Lacan and cultural studies should bring me back to my original interest in how marginalized characters speak to central social issues. This book is a product of the literary and theoretical path I have followed over the years.

Specifically, I became interested in the intersection of identity components—the psychic and the social—and the maintenance of subjectivity. My interest in this intersection, which led to my connection of Morrison and Faulkner, emerged after reading Morrison's *Beloved*. I was completely captivated by Morrison's text in the same way that I was with Faulkner's narrative. What was it about Morrison's work that recreated my reading experience with

Faulkner's, and how was this experience the same and/or different? My search for an answer led me to juxtapose the nostalgic eroticization of the other in Faulkner's texts with the absence of such function in those of Morrison.

Having focused my research interests on cultural studies and psycho-analytic theories, I proceeded to explore the texts of Faulkner and Morrison for hegemonic structures, social constructions of subjectivity, and the inter-actions between stratified segments of society. In particular, I considered how the works of both authors look to those on the margins of society to examine its center. Barbara Hill Rigney has described Morrison as a writer who "from her very marginality . . . presents a mirror to the larger culture as well as to the African American culture" (2). Likewise, Faulkner, who while writing from a position of a white male, nevertheless captures conscious and unconscious levels of "otherness" which expand the reader's understanding of the struggle to define the self and the world. Thus, the works of both Morrison and Faulkner reproduce dominant structures according to each author's own experiences in order to resist/alter them and illustrate how issues of identity are complex cultural constructs. Specifically, I sought to examine how marginalized characters, through their "subversive voices" and articulation of difference, gain agency for social change despite psychic and cultural structures that would determine identity.

While I was pursuing my own research, it was not surprising to discover other scholars linking these two authors. Most notably, in *What Else But Love*, Philip M. Weinstein explores the impact of cultural ideology on iden-tity formation, focusing on issues of race and gender. Further, the collec-tion of essays in *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned* considers the intertextuality of these authors and in-depth pairings of spe-cific novels, including several readings of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved.* Given the richness of their open-ended narrative styles, their mining of the past's influence on the present and future, and their finesse with storytelling and use of the oral tradition, the texts of these authors provide fertile ground for further scholarship. I look forward to future work connecting these two authors. ◙

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Cultural Studies, Lacan,
and the Agency of Race*

*I*n Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the title
character laments her battle to estab-
lish her identity: "there is no one to
want me to say me my name ... my face is coming
I have to have it I am looking for the join I am lov-
ing my face so much my dark face is close to me I
want to join" (212–13). Beloved verbalizes the
struggle to avoid black erasure in white society
by stating her need for recognition as accepted
subject rather than as a marginalized "other."
According to this passage, Beloved's identity comes
from the outside, from someone who will desire
her, name her, and allow her to love her dark face.
Above all, she is "looking for the join" between
her inner experience and cultural ideals. This pas-
sage encapsulates issues of racial identity that
reverberate in American literature. That is, Beloved
summarizes how socially constructed definitions
of race limit agency for those defined as "other" or
outside of the dominant culture's norms. Thus,
race can pose limitations on positive identity for-
mation. However, agency ultimately comes from
an awareness of one's socially constructed and

non-essential being. This "double-consciousness," to use W. E. B. Du Bois's term, can enable marginalized members of society to emerge as subjects.

Cultural and psychic mechanisms work together to produce such agency, as the texts of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison illustrate. Cultural studies theorists describe how language and cultural custom transmit racism and sustain a hierarchical social structure. But how does alteration within a culture come about? Cultural change occurs through the agency of non-mainstream groups—what might be considered subversive voices—in society. Cultural studies tells us about competing power structures between the center and the margins continuously at work. But cultural studies by itself does not completely explain cultural change. The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan illustrates how the works of Faulkner and Morrison describe the psychic component necessary for members of a society to produce cultural change. While the social and cultural represent a public domain, the effects of culture play out in the private or individual realm. The works of these authors both reflect and undermine the racist ideology of American culture through the conflict between cultural practice and marginalized forces. The answer to the question of cultural change lies in the psychic relationship of the dominant culture to the racialized (and gendered) other, displayed in subversive voices.

The clash between the status quo culture and its subversive voices emerges in the texts of Faulkner and Morrison. For example, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha depicts a patriarchal culture that fosters a system privileging the father and exploiting all others: "blacks, poor whites, women, and children" (Dale 324). In Faulkner's works, a nostalgia for a failing Southern patriarchy masks the power of forces that initiate change. Generally, nostalgia suggests a longing for the recapture of something lost, a yearning for the past or bygone days. This longing for something no longer available—some lost, loved object—often implies youth, promise, love, and the fulfillment of desire. Nostalgia, by providing a screen that preserves the power of patriarchal structures, serves to eroticize the other for the dominant culture. That is, nostalgia utilizes an imagined, diminished other to fulfill desire for dominant society. Lacan outlines the erotic component of desire when he asserts that "the motives of the unconscious are limited . . . to sexual desire" (*Ecrits* 142). In addition, Lacan describes the socially produced dialectic of desire: "desire becomes bound up with the desire of the Other" (301).[1] The dominant culture, as a defense mechanism, abuses marginalized groups to retain power and an imagined wholeness. By using marginalized others to

fulfill the desire for completeness, the dominant culture forms an erotic relationship, wherein the other serves to satisfy the dominant culture's needs. This satisfaction of desire nurtures and sustains the dominant symbolic order by appearing to restore what has been perceived as lost and to provide access to love or fulfillment of desire. However, beneath the cloak of nostalgia, Faulkner's texts reveal glimpses of agency in the marginalized voices. Further, the absence of a nostalgic screen in Morrison's texts highlights the subversive voices that develop agency and advance cultural change. In Morrison's work, the dominant culture's eroticized, imagined other transforms into a threatening entity and gains agency.

Lacan's psychoanalytical theory explains and elaborates these processes. His model describes how subjects struggle at once to incorporate and reject cultural differences. The psychic need to reject what is different or unlike the self presents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to social change. Desire for an imagined wholeness pushes the dominant culture to sustain current ideology in order to avoid recognition of what is lacking and to generate this completeness. Marginalized groups, in contrast, cannot avoid confrontation with what they lack. Yet Lacan's paradigm, in which a subject rejects but also needs the Other to achieve an imagined totalized self, allows for altered subjectivity. The capability for such altered identity provides hope that society will include in the future what currently is marginalized. In sum, if people need to change in order for culture to change, social theory must account for a culture's psychic reality. Lacan's theory explains the psychic forces at work with the cultural ones. It is in the intersection of the social and the psychic that individual, and therefore cultural, change occurs. These theoretical frameworks merge to explain change through the subversive voice of the eroticized other. Lacan's principles delineate the forces that steer this movement, through literature, from a nostalgic, eroticized other to a subject capable of agency.

I

Cultural Studies and Identity Formation

Cultural studies theories help to illuminate how the texts of Faulkner and Morrison give voice to the marginalized other. While the field of cultural studies is a diverse and often contested one, "[t]he designation *cultural studies* has tended to stake out an area of conflict concerning the very meaning and relation of text and context, representation and the represented,

cultural production and the world in which such production takes place" (Bathrick 320). Most sources trace the beginnings of cultural studies to Birmingham University's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies and to "two books published in the 1950s: *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart and *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams" (Sparks 14–15). With roots in anthropology, cultural studies examines a people's practice, history, and ideology. Because of its cross-disciplinary aspects, current cultural studies "draws from many of the major bodies of theory of the last several decades, from Marxism and feminism to psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and post-modernism. . . . '[C]ulture' is simultaneously the ground on which analysis proceeds, the object of study, and the site of political critique and intervention" (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 2, 5). Cultural studies considers intellectual and political matters ranging from anthropological studies to examples of popular culture; "the content of cultural studies indeed changes in response to historical urgencies and geographical sites" (Abbas 290). Relying on the cultural theory of Raymond Williams, the following study explains a culture's components and then examines how various cultural theorists consider the possibility for cultural change.

In *Marxism and Literature,* Williams describes a simultaneous interaction among residual, dominant, and emergent forces in society. Specifically,

> The residual . . . has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of residue . . . of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (122)

Thus, residual forces, usually negative holdovers from the past, remain part of dominant structures. The dominant culture filters the threat of the residual "by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion," but the emergent culture creates "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships" (123). As a result, the stability of the dominant culture is always already being undercut by the emergent one. Williams describes hegemony (the dominant culture) as "always a process. . . . [I]t does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (112). Given that residual, dominant, and emergent forces work together simultaneously, the marginalized voice (or the voice of the other for dominant society) contains aspects of the dominant voice, just as the residual plays out in the dominant. The works of Faulkner and Morrison illustrate how dominant patriarchal structures produce competing and undermining emergent forces.

Emergent powers combat the dominant and residual ones through acknowledgment of limitations and confrontation. According to Paulo Freire, to alter their condition, marginalized people must focus on "negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the 'given'" (89). He states that once people recognize situations that limit them "as fetters, as obstacles to their liberation, these situations stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality" (89). Recognition of these limitations can produce conscious change through social interaction. That is, the articulation of cultural differences creates a subject status for the other, thereby displacing the dominant structure. Gloria Anzaldua claims that the emergent society can counter the dominant one with *la facultad,* which she defines as a type of intuition, perceptiveness, or sensitivity that aids those on the margins. Specifically, "[*l*]a facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. . . . It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate" (60). This double vision of marginalized people generates the emergent culture. Both Freire and Anzaldua foreground the possibility of agency despite hierarchies of power and disempowerment. As we shall see, double-consciousness emerges as a particular form of agency.

The interacting forces in society operate in response to the fact that all members of society internalize elements of both high and low culture. Mikhail Bakhtin explains the intersection of high and low culture in language, saying that

> language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu-languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language—which are all more or less successful, depending on their degree of social scope and on the ideological area in which they are employed. (356–57)

Through language, self and other intermingle, indicating the dialogic characteristic of society. In Bakhtin's dialogic structure, hierarchies can break down. Parody presents a good example of the mixing of high and low, forming "an intentional dialogized hybrid" (76). In this way, "language . . . is in itself ever evolving and in process of renewal" (47). Further, language represents the coexistence of residual, dominant, and emergent forces in society, with "the word . . . at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word" (280). Before a word is one's own, "it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (294).[2] Cultural shifts occur when marginalized groups make the words their own in order to alter their status. The result can be that "[o]ne's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse" (348). For Bakhtin, then, language accounts for much of cultural exchange. Dialogism paves the way for empowerment of marginalized people.

Homi Bhabha furthers Bakhtin's concept of dialogism by theorizing that the concept of intersubjectivity of the "low" culture's mimicry of the dominant one enables new subjectivities to surface through the "return of the subject as agent" (*Location* 185). Bhabha calls this place of reclaimed subjectivity the site of "'enunciation,'" a "release from erasure and repression," and a reinscription of "the elements of the known" ("World" 146). The emergent culture takes shape through the "articulation of cultural differences" (*Location* 1). When those marginalized within a culture become subjects through articulation of identity difference, they begin to fashion an emergent culture. The dominant power structure recognizes this articulation of identity difference through confrontations with otherness or (as the next section will explain) through encounters with what Lacan calls "the real."[3] A weakening of the subject status of the dominant segment enables the marginalized or emerging culture to shift from object to subject status. Shifts occur as the result of a double process: the dominant structure weakens from encounters with otherness and those marginalized by society move from object to subject through rejection of a subordinate status.

Long before these theories, W. E. B. Du Bois's observations about a "double-consciousness" helped to explain the way the residual, dominant, and emergent forces coexist in evolving cultures. His work describes the internalization of these structures. According to Du Bois, an African American is

a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others [whites] . . . two unreconciled strivings . . . [and] longing . . . to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American. (8–9)

This double-consciousness, a result of the inmixing of identifications that are both immobilizing (objectifying) and enlivening (creating desire), paradoxically enables those on the margins to move from that position. The internalization and awareness of social identity highlights the psychic component of culture. As Freire and Anzaldua have suggested, this sensitivity to the way others view the self is necessary for individual agency; the ability to be both same and other at the same time allows for a shift. In contrast, the dominant consciousness lacks this double vision. Du Bois may actually describe a more commonly experienced phenomenon of splitting that occurs along other lines of difference but is exacerbated by pronounced de facto or de jure enforcements of difference in the culture. Put simply, there is nothing "natural" that creates this fissure for blacks but not for others; double-consciousness results from the internalization of a cultural formation. For example, Freire speaks of class divisions and Anzaldua enumerates gender issues. Ralph Ellison explains this movement in terms of race when he claims that "the solution of the problem of the American Negro and democracy . . . will lie in the creation of a democracy in which the Negro will be free to define himself for what he is . . . and for what he desires to be" (304). Such self-assertion and self-ownership emerges through articulation of cultural differences and its subsequent unsettling of the dominant subject status.

Yet this self-definition is problematic. bell hooks discusses the problem of black self-hatred specifically, including the "contradictory longing to possess the reality of the Other, even though that reality is one that wounds and negates" (33). This phenomenon is explained by a "defense mechanism . . . called . . . *turning against the self*," whereby individuals may turn rage toward those they fear inward onto themselves (Brenner

103). Black double-consciousness can result in this type of self-hatred. Exploring the black internalization of "negative perceptions of blackness" that leads to "self-hating" (32), hooks claims that stereotypes "are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening" (38). Projection, then, is a psychical mechanism that cultural theorists, among others, use to explain cultural behavior.[4]

A number of Faulkner scholars have relied on this theory of cultural projection to discuss race. For instance, John T. Irwin's ground-breaking psychological study of Faulkner describes projection by suggesting that "rejected instincts and desires are cast out of the self, repressed internally only to return externally personified in the double, where they can be at once vicariously satisfied and punished" (33). Similarly, Lee Jenkins claims in his work on Faulkner that blacks represent what must be repressed for whites, with whites projecting onto black action the "enactment of . . . forbidden desires" (55). Likewise, Erskine Peters says that blacks in Faulkner's texts fulfill "white people's desperate need to feel superior or . . . to establish an identity," discussing blacks as scapegoats (79). Further, Eric Sundquist describes how Faulkner's Joe Christmas "contains . . . the community's own projected desires and fears" and violence that cannot be controlled (94). Projection theory helps explain much of individual and group behavior, both of the dominant culture and the marginalized one.

To counter the persistent projection of negative attributes onto marginalized groups by dominant society, and to enable those in the emerging culture to move from object to subject position, the role of double-consciousness is crucial. The split vision of double-consciousness—the internalization of a culture's values and an acknowledgment of oneself as object—can empower marginalized people. Subject status demands the reversal of the perception of black as negative or evil. The juggling of both black and white standards equips blacks to reject one or the other. By accepting black as good, an African American can create a self as subject.

As the next section outlines, Lacan's theory of identity supplements ideas of projection and cultural forces to provide a fuller picture of the psychic component of cultural change. While cultural theory addresses large systems, Lacan's work focuses on the individual within those systems. This focus clarifies how the singularity of the subject working as agency may alter the larger system. In this manner, Lacan expands cultural studies theories by exploring the idea of lack and its relationship to what he calls the "real" and agency.

II

The Contribution of Lacan's Theory of Subjectivity

While Lacan's writings may prove difficult to decipher, his system, once decoded, offers insight into the psychical constructs that shape cultural identity. His system, which describes interactions of the "real," the "imaginary," and the "symbolic," helps explain the semiotic play of intersubjectivity. The establishment of an illusionary coherent sense of self through recognition from the world outside of the self places social interactions and culture in the forefront of subjectivity. Further, by accounting for social interaction between the dominant culture and those on the margins, Lacan's theory of subjectivity and his psychoanalytical premises help explain both collective and individual behavior. Suggesting that we are deeply social, Lacan states that

> [e]ach of us at any moment and at any level may be traded off—without the notion of exchange we can have no serious insight into the social structure. . . . [T]he truth of the subject, even when he is in the position of master, does not reside in himself, but, as analysis shows, in an object that is, of its nature, concealed. (*Four* 5)

This hidden object, the real, controls while remaining inaccessible; yet it can provide a source of agency. Lacan describes a possible interaction between an imagined autonomous identity and the outer forces that mold it.

To understand how the real can interact with the social order, a brief explanation of Lacan's terms and theory is in order. Lacan utilizes the three terms already mentioned that contribute to the construction and alteration of subjectivity: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. A fourth component, the *objet a*, contributes as well. Lacan suggests that a subject is born into the real as a body in pieces or a fragmented self. Yet while the subject's premature body is fragmented, the subject does not experience lack in the real.[5] Then, during what Lacan calls the mirror stage, the subject visualizes an imaginary self that reflects a perfect, unified, totalized image. When the mirror stage ends, the subject's apparent wholeness begins to dissolve. The subject's sense of unity crumbles because the imaginary wholeness is a virtual one, always- being interrupted by outside forces. Such forces form the organizing structure outside of the self that Lacan calls the symbolic structure. In this structure, language and laws of

society divide the self and establish it as a subject of lack. The alienation of language—through its inability adequately to express the subject or fill the subject's sense of lack—creates a need in the subject to recapture a sense of wholeness. As a result, according to Lacan, the divided subject constantly seeks a fictional unified self.[6]

In this search, the real comes to represent what is unattainable, what cannot be expressed in language, what cannot be recaptured. But the paradox here is that in representing what is unattainable, the real also brings one close to the ultimate horror of lack, the fragmented self of the pre-imaginary state. Thus while a subject will constantly seek what is inaccessible in the symbolic structure (to recapture the lost lack), this seeking also brings the subject closer to what is repressed as lack. To encounter the real can mean to encounter one's own nothingness. The real, in this sense, has two linked functions. It can give one the anxious sense that one is lacking. But it also can fill one with the desire that one might somehow be complete. To avoid fragmentation, the subject tries to avoid direct and full encounters with the real it seeks. In indirect confrontations, however, the subject is led by the encounter with the real to verify its own narcissism by using the signs of culture.[7] In this manner, the symbolic structure provides an outer confirmation, without which the subject disintegrates. The earlier example of Beloved's search for wholeness illustrates this fragmentation. In particular, race can bar a positive mirroring for blacks. Lacking a positive mirroring or identification with the "you" of her outer society, Beloved cannot find a substantial "I." Yet while the recognition of the self as other has the power to destabilize subjectivity, it is from this point of unmooring that one can reclaim and restructure an imagined identity that can facilitate more equitable social relations.[8] Cultural studies addresses the self and the other in terms of the object position of marginalized people in relation to the dominant culture. For Lacan, one achieves a sense of self through recognition of one's fundamental nothingness. The willingness to embrace this nothingness is the key factor for cultural change. Without this fundamental nothingness—the confrontation with Lacan's real—change does not occur. The real, then, postulates a void, a lack, the unattainable. Subjects are driven in an unending search for what is missing, and the imaginary and the symbolic structures produce subjectivity in response to the real.

Further, the objet a (the part of the real that survives the symbolic, the leftover piece) produces desire, the "effort to attain the missing part of one's

own being or jouissance" (Bracher 41); desire sustains the subject as subject. Thus, the real is manifested in the objet a, which represents desire both inside and outside of the symbolic and imaginary networks.[9] In its formative role, "the objet a may be identical with the gaze" (Four 272). The gaze, then, in constant conflict with the imaginary wholeness and symbolic law, plays a crucial role in subjectivity. According to Lacan, the gaze of the Other—which reduces one to object or nothingness—serves as an encounter with the real. When desire reveals itself in the form of the real—or the gaze—subjectivity disintegrates because this gaze reveals a fundamental nothingness. This Lacanian real is necessary to alter individual and cultural identity.

To summarize Lacan's system, in the symbolic, the subject is alienated from the self by language and is described as the barred subject or effaced subject. Subjects constantly strive to regain the imaginary sense of wholeness.[10] However, the only tool available to the subject is language, which paradoxically only serves to further bar the subject. Thus, the objet a—the lack in the subject that the subject seeks—becomes the cause of desire, even though it is forever unattainable. What is repressed remains inaccessible in the real.[11] As a result, the subject seeks to return to the real, to that unknowable state, through the objet a, the ultimate desire.

For Lacan, identity evolves from the interplay among the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, with all three components working together to sustain subjectivity. The lack and the attempts to recapture it in the symbolic create a constant tension, resulting in efforts to complete the lack. The symbolic realm, characterized by language, creates the subject. Lacan explains, "It is the world of words that creates the world of things. . . . Man speaks . . . but it is because the symbol has made him. . . . Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world . . . [and] they bring to his birth . . . the shape of his destiny" (Ecrits 65, 68). One is born into the symbolic structure. Further, "[i]t is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (67). The symbolic structure of the South, in particular, is a racist social order that gives power to white males and renders blacks and women subservient. To maintain the position of power, the white dominant order must perpetuate this symbolic order. Consequently, symbolic structures such as patriarchy attempt to regain, "rejoin," or fill any perceived lack. At the same time, the imaginary works in constant opposition to the gaze and the objet a in a struggle to maintain

an imagined complete vision of the self against what the Other sees lacking in the self. Thus, the Other—the defining, controlling source of self—appears in the symbolic, the real, and the gaze, in opposition to the mirrored other or self of the imaginary stage. Lacan asserts that psychoanalysis can only "treat the real by the symbolic. . . . [I]n doing so . . . [one] encounters the imaginary to a greater or lesser degree" (*Four* 6). That is, the inaccessible real is experienced only through symptoms in the symbolic structure. The symbolic structure, along with the destabilizing gaze of the Other, undermines the imaginary whole self.

In positing that identity (or subjectivity or subject status) comes from outside of the self, Lacan's theory emphasizes the constitutive role of the Other and the social dimension of identity formation.[12] Lacan writes that "the *I* is constituted at first in a linguistic experience, in reference to the *you* . . . a relation in which the other shows him . . . orders, desires, which he must recognize. . . . It is clear that at the beginning, the chances are extremely slight that he will achieve recognition for his own, for his desires" (*Seminar* 166). Lacan acknowledges that because identity comes from the Other, identity apart from the Other is not a possibility. To explain the extent of the constitutive role of the Other on subjectivity, Lacan describes the effect of language and pre-existing structures in the developing subject, saying that "we depend on the field of the Other, which was there long before we came into the world, and whose circulating structures determine us as subjects" (*Four* 246). Consequently, pre-existing structures mold the unconscious. Through the Other, the subject comes into being, for "the subject is subject only from being subjected to the field of the Other" (188). Thus, Lacan establishes that the subject is constituted in the place of the Other.

Encounters with the real, however, produced by the gaze of the Other, cause an unsettling effect.[13] The gaze of the Other acts as an encounter with the real, with what cannot be represented and what is repressed; the "real . . . [is] presented . . . in the form of that which is *unassimilable* in it—in the form of the trauma" (*Four* 55). This trauma takes shape in the gaze of the Other and facilitates momentary glimpses of the repressed. Thus, the effect of the Other on subjectivity is profound. Recognition of the position of the Other is recognition of one's own unstable self. Therefore, the gaze of the Other puts the subject in touch with the fundamental nothingness of the self, for the gaze undermines the illusion of control.[14]

In *Seminar IX*, Lacan describes the paradoxical relationship between the gaze and the eye: "In the scopic field, everything is articulated between

two terms that act in an antinomic way—on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them" (*Four* 109). Žižek explains that "the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object. When I look at an object [or text], the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it" (109). For the real to surface in literature, the text must reveal some "phallic" spot, some "paradoxical point . . . at which the observer is already included, inscribed in the observed scene—in a way, it is the point from which the picture [or text] itself looks back at us" (91). Žižek suggests that in nostalgic works, as through the naive and innocent gaze of a child, the reader or viewer "sees in the object (in the image it views) its own gaze . . . 'sees itself seeing' . . . [providing] the very illusion of perfect self-mirroring" (114). But, as Žižek explains, Lacan proposes an

> irreducible discord between the gaze *qua* object and the subject's eye. Far from being the point of self-sufficient self-mirroring, the gaze *qua* object functions like a blot that blurs the transparency of the viewed image. . . . [T]he function of the nostalgic object is precisely to *conceal* the antinomy between eye and gaze—i.e. the traumatic impact of the gaze *qua* object. . . . [T]he gaze of the other is in a way domesticated, "gentrified"; instead of the gaze erupting like a traumatic, disharmonious blot, we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing," of seeing the gaze itself. (Žižek 114)

Žižek argues that in contrast to this harmonious viewpoint in nostalgia, montage produces the disruptive gaze *qua* object through discontinuous shots, or "fragments of the real," producing a "surplus of the real" that is "the gaze *qua* object" (116). Thus, nostalgia veils the gaze of the Other while montage exposes this gaze.

Lacan says that the gaze "reflects our own nothingness" (*Four* 92). This gaze of the Other represents "some form of 'sliding away' [or what Lacan calls the *aphanisis*] of the subject" (75). Lacan uses the example of Holbein's painting, *The Ambassadors*, to illustrate this *aphanisis*. This painting, which portrays two ambassadors in their silk and ermined finery, surrounded by objects representing human vanities, startles the viewer by the inclusion of a floating object, blurred when viewed straight on, but taking the shape of a human skull when viewed from the side. Lacan says that this

object floating in the foreground . . . is there to be looked
at, in order to catch . . . the observer. It is . . . an obvious way
. . . of showing us that, as subjects, we are literally called into
the picture, and represented here as caught. . . . [W]e see
what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own
nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. *(Four 92)*

The painting embodies the gaze that operates on the level "of the desire of
the Other . . . [and] is the closest to the experience of the unconscious"
(104). This gaze defines one's subjectivity from the outside: "[w]hat deter-
mines me, at the most profound level . . . is the gaze that is outside. . . . The
Other" (106, 130). It follows that "it is in the space of the Other that [one]
sees [oneself] and the point from which [one] looks at [oneself] is also in
that space" (144). In this way, the gaze—from a place outside of the self—
reverses the imaginary whole image of the self.

For Lacan, there is a split between eye and gaze—between what a
subject sees and how the subject is seen. "[I]n the so-called waking state,
there is an elision of the gaze" *(Four 75)*. In other words, to function on
a daily basis, a subject elides the gaze. Lacan states that one adapts to the
gaze or elides it by *"seeing oneself see oneself"* (83). That is, one replaces
the gaze with one's own eye. However, the unconscious struggles with
the confrontation of the gaze "in the field of the Other" that "reflects our
own nothingness" (84, 92).

The strong influence of the Other can erode imaginary wholeness,
often causing the subject to identify with the Other rather than with the
mirrored self. Kaja Silverman elucidates what she refers to as Lacan's "prin-
ciple of the self-same body" (25):

in his account of the mirror stage, Lacan paradoxically
insists on both the "otherness" and the "sameness" of the
image within which the child first finds its "self." On the
one hand, the mirror stage represents a *meconnaissance*
[or misrecognition], because the subject identifies with
what he or she is not. On the other hand, what he or she
sees when looking into the mirror is literally his or her own
image. (10–11)

Silverman concludes that the "apprehension of self is keyed both to a
visual image . . . and to certain bodily feelings, whose determinant is less

physiological than social" (14). Thus, the effect of culture is integral even
in the imaginary or mirror stage. In fact,

the subject can only successfully misrecognize him- or her-
self within that image or cluster of images through which
he or she is culturally apprehended. . . . [T]he imposition
of . . . forms of difference [e.g. race or gender] depends
upon the imaginary alignment of certain subjects with
what is negative rather than ideal[;] the images through
which the subject is culturally apprehended do not always
facilitate the production of a lovable bodily ego. (18–19)

The sense of unified self implied in the imaginary can occur only "when
the visual imago is perceived as lovable" (20). As a result, "the disenfran-
chised subject often identifies at a distance not with other disprized bod-
ies, but with those that replicate the cultural ideal," leading some blacks
to identify with "whiteness" and certain women to identify with "mas-
culinity" (26). In a society that values whiteness, "only certain subjects
have access to a flattering image of self, and . . . others have imposed upon
them an image so deidealizing that no one would willingly identify with it"
(29). The process of deidealization accounts for self-hatred and an inter-
nalization of the self in negative terms (as we saw in bell hooks's work).[15]
The inability to achieve a presence that reflects the cultural ideal blocks
the necessary "intermediary of the image of the other which offers . . . the
semblance of [one's] own mastery" (Lacan, *Seminar* 155). Silverman joins
the cultural with the psychic in her analysis of deidealization.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White also elaborate the psychic connec-
tion to the social other:

the "top" attempts to reject and eliminate the "bottom"
for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not
only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon
that low-Other . . . but also that the top *includes* that low
symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its
own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion
of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjec-
tivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those
Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded
at the social level. It is for this reason that what is *socially*

peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central. . . . [Thus, the] low-Other is despised and denied at the level of polit- · ical organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. (5–6)

The connections and conflicts are libidinal as well as physical and material. The desire or need for the other results in an eroticized imaginary relationship to that other. Lacan explains that demand "constitutes the Other as already possessing the [ability] of satisfying" both biological needs and the need for love (*Ecrits* 286). Desire "unties the knot of . . . [demand] in the proof of love that is resistant to the satisfaction of a need" (287). Thus, desire for the other implies a "sexual relation" whereby "both partners in the relation, both the subject and the Other," are not only "subjects of need, or objects of love, but . . . stand for the cause of desire" (287). The dominant culture sustains itself by abusing marginalized groups to fulfill its needs and desire.

The ostracized position of the marginalized culture, however, enables its members to reshape the controlling culture. The loss of outer approval that accompanies the inaccessibility of a positive reflected self—the sense of nothingness—ironically empowers marginalized members of society. Lacan describes the moment of breakthrough in analysis as the point where "anxiety . . . makes its appearance" because that "is the moment when the imaginary and the real of the analytic situation are confused" (*Seminar* 188). The moment the subject recognizes the self as object, as nullified, as empty set, is the point of self-actualization. That is, the overthrow of the position as object comes from the acceptance of the unknowable real in the self and the Other. Tolerance and acceptance of the object both within and without the self—although extremely difficult to achieve—allow the marginalized to reclaim subject status, thereby altering the forms of social interaction.

Thus, marginalized segments can initiate cultural shifts through recognition of a lack and the attempts to regain what is perceived as lost. The shifts brought about by "*aphanisis* . . . [or] movement of disappearance . . . [or] the *fading* of the subject" necessitate a reassembling of the self (*Four* 207–8). But the realignment to maintain equilibrium yields an altered subject, one modified by the encounter with the real in the form of the gaze of the Other. The real in this sense coincides with what Bhabha calls the "unhomely," a disorienting displacement of "private" by "public" ("World" 141). If the unconscious,

for Lacan, is that which is lacking in a subject and "what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*," then what is uncovered, though disorienting, alters the subject (Lacan, *Four* 25). This alteration allows the subject to circumvent the gaze and in doing so to move from object to subject. When marginalized blacks and women confront the gaze and become the gaze for dominant white males, cultural changes can occur. While it is a truism that literature "reflects life," it also can envision how society could be altered through presentation of the untotalized self through the gaze of the Other. Lacanian theory delineates this critique through the gaze, or the real, that unsettles complacency with the status quo and earmarks the necessity for change. In Lacan's framework, the real is the absolute threat to culture and subjectivity because it is alienated from language or the symbolic structure. But ultimately it represents the avenue for cultural progress.

Within Lacan's system, nostalgia becomes a yearning for the *objet a*, a desire to recapture what is forever lost in the symbolic. Nostalgia represents a momentary fulfillment of an imaginary completeness or synthesis. Through the recapture of what is lost, nostalgia satisfies the need for jouissance and eroticizes the other to gain such fulfillment. The eroticization of race represses the real, allowing for an imaginary wholeness. While Faulkner's texts utilize nostalgia to maintain the existing symbolic structure, they reveal glimpses of the real through the voices of black and female characters who attain agency after confronting their fundamental nothingness. Morrison's texts, lacking the screen of nostalgia, highlight the gaze of the Other or the real. In doing so, they strip the imaginary erotic relationship to the other. By revealing desire in the form of the real, Morrison's texts dismantle the erotic body created by nostalgia. As a result, the eroticized other gains agency in Morrison's work. The texts of Faulkner and Morrison illustrate the struggle to maintain subjectivity through continual encounters with, and avoidance of, the Lacanian real, specifically in the form of the gaze of the Other.

III

Nostalgia and Eroticism: Engaging the Other in Faulkner and Morrison

Written at different historical points and from different racial perspectives, the texts of Faulkner and Morrison nonetheless reveal an ideologically racist symbolic structure and the attempts of characters within

socially constructed roles to achieve a positive self-image. Their works portray the ongoing struggle with the real in the form of the gaze of the Other, whether through a nostalgic eroticizing of the other or through a confrontation with desire. My discussion begins with the symbolic structure of the South—a racist patriarchy—and how this cultural ideology molds society's members. Specifically, chapter 1, "Patriarchy and Male Subjectivity in *Go Down, Moses*," analyzes how the patriarchal structures of Southern society shape and limit Isaac McCaslin. While Ike rejects his past in *Go Down, Moses*, he does not act to alter his culture; his withdrawal from society suggests the futility of his perspective and predicts the collapse of the patriarchal order. This chapter explores how Ike's Southern cultural and psychic structures determine and maintain his subjectivity. The text's nostalgic presentation of what the dominant society represses—the Lacanian real in the form of the gaze of the Other—forecasts the ultimate disintegration of an archaic social structure that eroticizes a racialized other.

Following the examination of Ike's subjectivity and Southern culture, chapter 2, "Desire, Subjectivity, and Agency: Women as Objects of Desire in the Snopes Trilogy," describes how patriarchy creates an image of women as objects of desire. As a prelude to the discussion of the racialized other, this chapter illustrates how nostalgic eroticizing functions to preserve and mold female subjectivity. Yet within this structure, Faulkner's texts depict the possibility of the marginalized female voice altering the dominant culture to shape the emergent one. Specifically, I look at how silenced females subvert the dominant social system and how, ironically, their position of powerlessness empowers them in the shifting of subject/object status.

Chapter 3, "'The past is never dead. It's not even past': The Emergent Culture in Faulkner's Black Voices," examines black voices in Faulkner's work, including Lucas Beauchamp, Rider, Dilsey, Luster, T. P., Versh, Clytie, Bon, Ringo, and Joe Christmas. The chapter explains how the dominant Southern culture abuses the marginalized other for its own gratification of needs; even so, the texts reveal the repressed voices that must inevitably emerge. Further, in *Intruder in the Dust*, nostalgia protects white subjectivity and filters the black gaze. This chapter discusses how *Intruder* both reenacts and resists racism and patriarchal society to illustrate the failure of patriarchal structures. The novel utilizes nostalgia to diminish the agency of emerging forces, and insightfully intimates new patterns of behavior and response.

Chapter 4, "Identity Formation: The Double-Voiced Text of *The Bluest Eye*," describes how Morrison's novel suggests that black culture both incorporates and rejects white and patriarchal definitions of subjectivity. The discussion explains how Lacan's gaze functions in Morrison's work and examines the role of Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness in black subjectivity. *The Bluest Eye* begins with how social constructions (e.g. Dick and Jane) mold identity, and proceeds to investigate the detrimental effect of black internalization of these constructions and the subsequent deidealization. Here the object of desire (the bluest eye) destroys black subjectivity when the symbolic structure of the dominant culture prevents the establishment of a lovable self.

Next, chapter 5, "Reaching an African American Voice: Black Subjectivity in *Song of Solomon*," traces this text's use of myth and the inversion of white culture in order for black characters to achieve subject status. In this novel, Milkman must reject his father's model of a white socially constructed identity to retrieve an African American one. The novel reinforces the failure of white objects of desire for black subjectivity and defines new avenues for blacks to achieve subject status. Black characters must get beyond white cultural norms to forge new identities based on their own ancestral past. Confrontation with Lacan's real enables this movement.

Chapter 6, "Destabilizing Dominant Culture: *Beloved* and the Gaze of the Other," describes how the text's presentation of Beloved as the gaze of the Other unsettles the dominant culture. Through rejection of social constructions of identity, black characters become subjects when they confront their object status. The discussion investigates how their new subject positions, found through the interaction of Lacan's real, imaginary, and symbolic, facilitate a reshaping of community.

Problems facing black communities come into focus in chapter 7, "The Disallowed and the Redeemed: The Power of the Gaze in *Paradise*." To maintain their subject status, the townspeople of Ruby attempt to confront double-consciousness by isolating themselves in a self-sufficient and self-defined all-black community. This effort to be rid of racial difference perhaps reflects a desire to be rid of projection in order to erase racism, secure a place in the dominant symbolic structure, and to obtain an imaginary wholeness. We come full circle with this novel to a black patriarchy that rests on a nostalgic yearning for the past and an eroticizing of the female other. To maintain their subject status, the black townsmen must avoid the invasion of the real in the form of the gaze of the Other. The failure of