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# How the Mind Refigures Memory: The Role of Social Construction and Fallibility in the Fictions of Faulkner, Woolf, and Nabokov

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**How the Mind Refigures Memory: The Role of Social Construction and Fallibility  
in the Fictions of Faulkner, Woolf, and Nabokov**

An Honors Thesis

Presented to  
The Department of English  
Bates College  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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by  
Rebecca Salzman-Fiske  
Lewiston, Maine  
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To Ma',  
Go practice your banjo.

And to Gramps,  
Go write your book.

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## Abstract

This thesis argues that some literary works of William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and Vladimir Nabokov both engage and represent fictional memory and support certain claims made by memorial studies that explain memories as coming into existence through a dynamic process, being transformed from their original state to incorporate knowledge learned at a time later than that of the memory's formation. The thesis examines how it is that the mind is socially conditioned into a predetermined notion of reality, maintained by collective memory. This conditioning takes place at the onset of memory formation and results in limiting the mind to a finite number of memories. Rather than continuously creating new memories, the mind compiles very few memories that conform to social reality. This aggregate effect creates the illusion that new memories are created throughout life; whereas, the idea of a *new* memory is actually synonymous with a product of the imagination, a product that is limited in most after a certain point in development. Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* exhibit the mnemonic processes of association. This thesis shows that memorial association, while helping to strengthen long-term memories, directly causes confabulation; however, what these texts, along with Faulkner's *Light in August* and Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* also demonstrate is a questioning of a learned notion of *reality*. I argue that this *reality* is an entirely subjective construct and one that prevents certain experiences from becoming memories.

## Introduction

Jorge Luis Borges writes in *Funes the Memorious* that nineteen years before Ireneo Funes encountered the story's narrator, he fell off of a horse, and "when he fell, he'd been knocked unconscious; when he came to again, the present was so rich, so clear, that it was almost unbearable, as were his oldest and even his most trivial memories" (Borges 135). The man who fell off his horse shortly afterwards to "learn he was crippled" (Borges 135) suffered an unusual disability, if that is what we are to term his malady. He possessed no ailment of the physical body but only that of the mind. On gaining consciousness, Funes understood that "now his perception and his memory were perfect" (Borges 135). Every experience, every thought, imagination and dream remained in his mind for conscious recall at will—"anything he thought, even once, remained ineradicably with him" (Borges 135). The narrative structure of this story juxtaposes Funes' unnatural ability to the normal state of the human mind. The story of Funes is told not by the man who remembers all but rather by a narrator of normal mental capacities, who writes in his first line, "I recall him (though I have no right to speak that sacred verb—only one man on earth did" (Borges 131). This man who speaks represents the normal human mind.

I introduce the story of *Funes the Memorious* in the introduction of this thesis for the purpose of questioning what it means to be unable to forget. Funes claims that "I,

myself, alone, have more memories than all mankind since the world began” (Borges 135), a statement which speaks to the vast capabilities of the conscious mind. Funes and the narrator have a reciprocal relationship throughout, in that we come to understand Funes by comparison to the narrator as we see from the narrative’s opening.

Comparatively, we initially read the narrator as one who is inadequate, a term that he bestows upon himself. He is so because unlike this one man, Funes, some of his waking moments escape his conscious thought. Yet, is that not the point, the realization that this narrator can actually participate in thought? When the mind is in a constant state of memory formation, there is no time allowed to ruminate. To participate in thought, the mind must collect a finite set of memories to coalesce into an interpretive form. Now, one may point to the fact that Funes creates a numbering system “original with himself” (Borges 135). However, rather than this signifying organic thought, this statement seems to speak more toward a necessary method to organize all of his memories. For Borges writes, “his original motivation, I think, as his irritation that the thirty-three Uruguayan patriot should require two figures and three words rather than a single figure...” (Borges 136). Thus, his “thoughts,” however we wish to construe them, are purposed for the sake of his already existing memories rather than for the thoughts themselves.

To this point, Funes claims, “my memory, sir, is like a garbage heap,” (Borges 135) a place to store the most unnecessary of items. In Borges’ *Funes the Memorious*, we look to understand the complexities of human memory. Why does the mind not normally retain all experience in memory? Is there a benefit to forgetting? Why do we forget what we forget and remember what we remember? Paul Ricoeur writes, “the function of fiction is to wrest the conditions of totalization from their concealment, to dislodge us from time

in order to bring us to its roots or first principles” (*Time and Narrative: Volume 3* 140). The point of fiction will, thus, in this thesis employ a neuroaesthetic perspective about literature to unveil principles of memory.

This thesis contends that the mind’s memories can be studied through the products of the mind, that which we can name a neuroaesthetic. Neurobiologist and pioneer of the study of neuroaesthetics, Eric Kandel, argues that the field of neuroaesthetics reveals critical connections between art, mind, and neurobiology, “Art, on the other hand, provides insight into the more fleeting, experiential qualities of mind, what a certain experience feels like. A brain scan may reveal the neural signs of depression, but a Beethoven symphony reveals what that depression feels like” (*The Art of Insight* xvi). It is thus that literature is inarguably a brilliant presentation of the inner workings of the individual human mind, and will serve as our aesthetic form throughout this thesis. In doing so, we shall look to authors such as William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, and Vladimir Nabokov to reveal memory’s complexities. This study is not the first to analyze memory through the guise of literature. Often one can find the analysis of fictional works such as those of Marcel Proust and Toni Morrison. This thesis by no means intends to suggest that the works I choose to exemplify are the only appropriate examples of a literary aesthetic dealing with memory. Nor does it mean to suggest that those works not included, such as Proust and Morrison, cannot deliver as vibrant examples of the mind’s workings. Rather, we shall strive to cite examples that have perhaps never been examined within this neuroaesthetic context and examples that complement one another, both in regard to neuroaesthetic and literary significance. This thesis will focus on the nuances of memory; shared memory, individual memory, and

collective memory will play large roles, particularly in the consideration of how social processes affect the mind and the mind's memories. Chapter One begins with a discussion of memory formation and memorial associations. Here we focus primarily on two Faulknerian novels, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a neurobiological framework of memory as it relates to mental functions and how it presents itself throughout literature. Once established, Chapter One will argue that the nature of association found in memory results in limiting the mind to a finite number of memories that develop in childhood. Rather than continuously creating new memories, the mind compiles very few memories that conform to social reality. This aggregate effect creates the illusion that new memories are created throughout life; whereas, the idea of a *new* memory is actually synonymous with a product of the imagination, a product that is limited in most after a certain point in development.

This notion will lead us into a focus of the mind's imagination, with particular attention being paid to the discrepancies between memory and imagination. How is the imagination different from a memory? How is the imagination formed and does it form from a memory? In the opening parts of Chapter Two, we focus on two works of Vladimir Nabokov: his short story, "That in Aleppo Once..." and *Speak, Memory*, as well as Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*. These works assist in analyzing the unique qualities of the imagination. What distinguishes the imagined products that we shall find in such works from their memorial counterparts is a conscious realization of a problematic aspect of the external reality. As we move into the second portion of Chapter Two, we discuss the relationship between the mind and the mind's society. Often times the reality of the mind and that of the society differ to a point that hampers an

individual's ability to comprehend. Blame for this conventionally falls on language as supplying the means by which the mind is taught to label and write its thoughts and memories in a manner that is not always true. Language is institutionalized, conventionalized, and thus desensitized within the individual mind. Though an established form of collective communication is necessary for the mind to develop past the point of object permanence, it is also later preventative to individual thought. Language prohibits individual interpretation; perception and interpretation process in the mind through linguistic strongholds and are then stored in the same manner. However, as we shall see in the minds of infants, minds that abide by conventions of a collective language are minds functioning against a natural state.

Chapter Three will examine how the mind is socially conditioned into a predetermined notion of reality and then maintained by collective memory. This conditioning takes place at the onset of memory formation and results in confusion between the individual memory framework and the collective memory framework. Texts such as Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and "A Rose for Emily" together with Nabokov's *Invitation of a Memory* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* demonstrate a questioning of a learned notion of *reality*, one that is pertinent only to the collective framework. The individual mind thus struggles to contend between the discrepancies of what the collective memory framework instructs the individual to believe and what the individual mind finds to be true on its own accord. This collective *reality* prevents subjective construct and certain experiences from becoming memories. Other experiences that do come to memory will at times be confabulated for the purposes of appeasing the individual mind. This can still be a mind under the influence of a collective framework

and is often times one that is under distress to manage properly between the two. This thesis concludes by returning to Borges' *Funes the Memorious* but now in the context of relating the text to Faulkner's *Light in August*. In the conclusion, we finalize a discussion of the vices or benefits of forgetting and do so to answer those questions posed in the above pages.

## Chapter One

### Episodic Memory and the Associative Process: *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*

Faulkner, in both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, presents us with texts saturated by intricacies of the mind. Many critics view *As I Lay Dying* as a failed novel because of its representation of convoluted and interrupted time and its series of unreliable narrators, a view that I will argue misinterprets the complex structure and narration of this text. What some have come to see as “clairvoyant” and “disengaged”<sup>1</sup> narrations are, I wish to claim, presentations of the characters’ associative memories and their working imagination. This chapter will examine how Faulkner’s fiction represents the associative properties of human memory and how these properties, cast into their respective novels, consequently reinterpret this literature. We focus on these two works of Faulkner when considering associative memory; however, this does not mean that conclusions applied are to be made exclusively to these works and this author. There are, in fact, a great many authors who actively play on association. The conclusions I offer can in many cases be easily adapted to a great number of other writings. My focus on Faulkner also does not imply that the principles concerning associative memory and the given readings are restricted to Faulkner. The case simply stands that Faulkner is one

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<sup>1</sup> Such adjectives here refer to the literary speaker (character, narrator, etc.). The distinction must be made so as to not confuse the author as being “clairvoyant” or “disengaged”. Such criticisms only refer to the author’s creations rather than the authors themselves.

writer who wrote clearly and intentionally about the activities of the mind. For this purpose, I find him to be a prime example, on of memory, to use in such an analysis.

The primary focus of this chapter will be to explain associative memory as it appears in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*. It is important to note that a study of neuroaesthetics, particularly that dealing with literature, must contend with the duality that lies between the creator and the created. That is to say, that when examining the workings of the human mind through such works as those of Faulkner, we need to realize that we can look to the mind of the character to the extent that Faulkner allows, and we can also look into the mind of Faulkner himself. To elaborate further, we can study Faulkner's Benjy to better understand how the mind associates with a disregard to temporal boundaries; however, we can also better understand that mind by considering that of Faulkner's, and questioning what mental happenings led him to create the character and the mind of Benjy. This chapter will focus on the former, while still recognizing that a study of the mind of the author, in this case Faulkner, can produce similar results. A close study of literary works will of course be central in this portion, but we must apply neurobiological theories and concepts in order to elucidate literature's own teachings about memory. We shall find when looking to understand literary minds that the mind remembers by associating.

The associations among memories allows for later formed memories and acquired knowledge to compile upon an original memory. The question then becomes whether or not this process results in an entirely *new* memory or rather a *transformed* memory—the key distinction between the two being that the idea of a *new* memory implies that the

comparatively *old*<sup>2</sup> still exists, whereas the *transformed* memory implies that the old memory does not. This section will argue that associative memories create the *transformed* memory. However, the *new* memory is not dismissed. There is a marked relationship between the associative memory and the imagined, and it is rather the imagination's product that acts in this case as our *new* memory.

In looking to association within the scheme of memory, we look to understand several very important sensations that affect human memory, the mind, and the aesthetics of the mind. By understanding association, we can come to a closer understanding of the basic ways in which our memories are organized. We can eventually come to understand how the mind distinguishes between what is "real" and what is not, and why it is that the mind will occasionally come to prefer that which is "unreal." How the mind associates helps us to understand how the mind conceives of reality. Although perhaps more importantly, understanding memorial associations will lead us into a discussion of how the mind is socially conditioned to know what is "real" before it ever experiences the "real." In examining association and applying conclusions of this examination to the works of Faulkner, I hope to show that the mind has a very set number of memories. That is to say, that past a certain point of mental development, the mind stops forming new memories and simply aggregates on and evolves a set of memories from childhood and early life. The final chapter will discuss these ideas of reality and the intentional confabulation of memories.

When considering *As I Lay Dying*, Darl is the focus of any discussion about the mind's associative properties because it is he who Faulkner creates to be an unusually

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of the "old" memory is here synonymous with the original memory given by this example.

perceptive observer and, thus, a character who is fully aware and at the mercy of his memories. Additionally, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* presents an intensely caustic narrative that is told in part through a socially bitter voice. Faulkner's Benjy, while perhaps one of the most obscure and complex narrative voices in literature, is revealing of the inner workings of the human mind. Benjy provides the reader a profound and organic view of the relationship between the character's perception of the world and his memories, both of which will lead us directly into seeing how the mind's perception is guided by association. Benjy's narration, while complex and seemingly deviate, marks critical points and nuances of his mental processes that elucidate the intricacies of the memory selection process. Memorial association will be a large focus of the Benjy character, as it arguably is in the novel.

We find that Faulkner constructs the minds of his characters to associate, and he does so because he writes to mirror the organic workings of the human mind. From the very onset of the novel, Faulkner employs Darl to present the processes of associative memory. In the Darl section, the third section of the novel, Darl moves through various levels of memory state, and as Catherine Pattern claims, each shift is "prodded by external associations" (Pattern 13). At first, a sip of water returns Darl's mind to its first realization that cedar water has a superior taste (*As I Lay Dying* 10-11). The cedar water then reminds him of drinking water at night, which reminds him of lying alone in the darkness during his childhood. Like Benjy, Darl processes and functions by associating. These two characters are not the only examples of Faulkner's associating minds; however, they are two prime examples due to the attention that Faulkner pays to them. As two forms of protagonists, Faulkner details their minds and their associations in a way

that we really cannot find in other characters. For this reason, they are to be our most apt case studies.

The narrative structures of both Faulknerian novels leave a stain of contention on our discussion. Devices such as narrating voice and form and verbiage tense and style are often times unconventional within Faulkner's novels, sometimes to a point of preventing the reader's comprehension. What we must realize is that such presentations by Faulkner do not mark failures, although many critics have argued otherwise. Stephen M. Ross offers an argument in regards to Faulkner's uses of tense that I find appropriate, and one that will be of the utmost importance when we introduce the theory of duration. He argues that "the present tense suggests greater immediacy than does past, allowing Faulkner, merely by choosing one tense over another, to submerge a character more deeply into his experience, letting the reader then sense the character's heightened psychic involvement" (Ross 35). This then suggests that Faulkner elects tense for the purpose of demonstrating the character's mental involvement in his experience, rather than for the purpose of signifying temporal difference. Ross additionally concludes that "[w]ith past tense, Faulkner can move a character in a way that is simultaneously psychological and temporal, back from an event, permitting speculation on its meaning" (Ross 35). Particularly when reading Faulkner, we are conscious of the problematic nature of a "present." Ross only further confirms that Faulkner's use of the present tense does not necessarily match the conventional present. For Faulkner, the present rather signifies a mental state, the degree to which the mind is emotionally or metaphysically involved in the experience. Faulkner's tenses thereby suggest the degree of mental detachment rather than the literal physical detachment to which we are accustomed.

Because Faulkner gave many interviews about his thoughts on a myriad of topics, we do know a great deal about his stated intentions behind his work. I preface, then, this discussion of *The Sound and the Fury* with the following excerpt from a 1957 interview. While lengthy, the following passage touches upon many points that are critical to a proper reading of *The Sound and the Fury*.

That was part of the failure. It seemed to me that the book approached nearer the dream if the groundwork of it was laid by the idiot, who was incapable of relevancy. That's—I agree with you too, that's a bad method, but to me it seemed the best way to do it, that I shifted those sections back and forth to see where they went best, but my final decision was that though that was not right, that was the best to do it, that was simply the groundwork of that story, as that idiot child saw it. He himself didn't know what he was seeing. That the only thing that held him into any sort of reality, into the world at all, was the trust that he had for his sister, that he know that she loved him and would defend him, and so she was the whole world to him, and these things were flashed that were reflected on her as in a mirror. He didn't know what they meant. (*Faulkner in the University* 63-64)

Again, here are explanatory points to which we shall return in greater detail, but for the moment we can offer a basic understanding of what Faulkner was attempting in *The Sound and the Fury*. Like many critics, Faulkner considers Benjy to be his “idiot,” a term that we must look at only through the manner in which Faulkner defined it. To Faulkner, the idiot is an individual incapable of understanding the “why,” that is to say, he cannot comprehend the connections between experiences. This line tells us that “the only thing that held him into any sort of reality, into the world at all, was the trust that he had for his

sister.” Faulkner’s observation here is exceedingly important to our discussion of Benjy’s associative memories.

Given the knowledge of neurobiology at the time that Faulkner was writing, we can reasonably assume that at the very least his writings of non-linear narration were not for the purpose of commenting on the memory’s associative properties. This account, it seems to me, is an important note in the analysis of Faulkner within the context of neuroaesthetics; for authorial intentionality should be a component of any analysis of literature. I think it first necessary to come to a conclusion about Faulkner’s purpose behind his inclusion of mental processes in his work and then discuss the validity of Benjy as a narrator. No one can say with certainty that Faulkner intended the reader to focus upon questions of the mind’s workings of memory in the context of reading Benjy, but we can still probably conclude that this was not his aim. However, the lack of authorial intentionality here does not disqualify Benjy as an excellent candidate by which to examine this phenomenon. We do, however, know from interviews with Faulkner that he did intend for Benjy to be an “idiot,” a term that to Faulkner implied a great deal of probing into the mind.

There is another supportive point to be made about Faulkner labeling Benjy an idiot. The inspiration for the novel’s title, *The Sound and the Fury*, of course comes from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, “*Out, out, brief candle, Life’s but a walking shadow, A poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more. It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing*” (*Macbeth* V.5).

Arguably, the very last line, “It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,” mirrors Faulkner’s own spoken thoughts on Benjy. Through all of this, we

recognize that Faulkner did have knowledge of very basic, rudimentary neurobiological processes. Though neuroaesthetics was not an existing field of study during Faulkner's time, we nevertheless find Faulkner to be interested in and asking questions concerning certain things that we might label as neurobiological. The fact that he wrote these ponderings into his fiction marks his novel as an early and prime example of a neuroaesthetically-minded work of literature.

We look to the opening scene in *The Sound and the Fury* as a prime example of Faulkner's incitation of associative memory. Benjy catches himself on a nail from the fence and doing so triggers a recollection from his distant childhood when his sister Caddy had to disentangle him from a fence. For the first page and a half of the novel Benjy is narrating in first person, which Faulkner's chapter head labels as April Seventh, 1928 at which time Benjy was thirty-three years of age. From the beginning, we are forced to question temporal states. Seemingly, we should consider this moment to be in the present time. However, we discover that Benjy is subtly narrating through memory—"Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence" (*The Sound and the Fury* 3). A few lines later Benjy tells of Luster saying, "'Listen at you, now.' Luster said. 'Aint you something, thirty three years old, going on that way'" (Faulkner 3). Knowing Benjy's age is possibly more important than first treating it as an incidental mention. Thirty-three years places Benjy at his oldest age in the novel, yet his narration still indicates that this moment, which is clearly the most recent to the actual present, is in the past. Thus, this moment then marks the relative present of the Benjy section. Faulkner establishes this relative present at the very opening of *The Sound and the Fury*. In doing

so, he employs a type of narration that separates the teller from the story, the sort that creates both the *point of narration* and the *point of action*, respectively, being the point in time at which the story is narrated and then the point of the material that is narrated (Franklin 57). As readers, we enter the narration from the *point of narration*, for we really have no other way to enter. But in doing so, we are reading the story by means of recalled memories.

A recalled memory is one that has experienced time, meaning that a recalled memory is very rarely in its original state. Before we turn to neurobiology for a better understanding of this point, we might first consider a personal note of A.S Byatt who in her introduction to her Memory anthology observes, “ I have a memory I think of as The Memory” (“Introduction” *Memory: An Anthology* xii). This Memory, we learn, is a moment in the East Hardwick Elementary School yard. The Memory is nothing special, but at the end of her telling, Byatt comments “I know I have added to this Memory every time I have thought about it, or brought it out to look at it. It has acquired notes of Paradise Lost, which I don’t think it had when I was five or six” (“Introduction” *Memory: An Anthology* xii). She accepts this memory to be relative in the face of time and space; that is to say, that the memory has changed due to spatial and temporal incursion. Byatt is conscious of this fact, but awareness does not prevent the alteration. This example from Byatt then demonstrates that continuing associations cue to the memory and redact its structure and information, thereby placing the memory in a dynamic state.

Neurobiologically speaking, knowledge compiles upon preexisting memories, and to this point, the issues of memory recall and retrieval prove central. Eric Kandel writes “to be useful, a memory has to be recalled” (*In Search of Memory: The Emergence*

*of a new Science of the Mind* 215). The appropriate cues must be present in order for memory retrieval to take place. The cues can be external coming from sensitization, classical conditioning, and sensory stimulus in habituation; or they can be internal, generated by an idea or desire (*In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a new Science of the Mind* 215). The mind will then associate these particular cues with an already learned experience. The neurons that work to recall the memory are the same neurons (sensory and motor) that were first activated at the moment of the memory's formation (*In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a new Science of the Mind* 215). The repetition, therefore, of intentional recall of entire experience and details from the experience helps the mind to form a long-term memory. When we find Darl repeating certain bits of narration in an almost neurotic way, what we rather see instead of insanity, is his mind working to instill the details and experience in memory. Because Darl is actively working to turn certain details into memory, we must read these details as being important to Darl. However, *ecphory*, the pre-conscious process in which retrieval cues are brought into contact with stored information, can be variant. As Tulving explains, "A great deal of evidence exists showing that the correspondence between the original event or fact and its *ecphorized* form may be highly variable, from near-perfect reproduction to glaring discrepancies" (Tulving 6). We will return to this idea of the inherent unreliability of *ecphory* and expand upon it through an application to our literary texts. But we first note on a basic level that the very fact that a memory is recalled does not certify its faithfulness to its original form.

There are several terms that need defining to carry out a neuroaesthetic discussion of association—we shall be defining these terms throughout as they become relevant to

our literary discussion. To begin, explicit memory is based on the *conscious* recall of factual knowledge and requires the medial temporal lobe and the hippocampus. Implicit memory, on the other hand, is the *unconscious* recall of motor and perceptual skills, and emotional responses. Implicit memory requires the amygdala, the striatum, and reflex pathways (*The Age of Insight* 308). Implicit memory is responsible for the beholder's unconscious recall of empathy and emotion as a response to a subject or experience; whereas, explicit memory is responsible for the beholder's conscious recall of the form and subject of the experience (*Age of Insight* 309). Kandel writes, "Regardless of whether an icon calls up a cultural or a personal meaning, the viewer's conscious and unconscious recognition of that icon recruits one of the other or commonly both memory systems of the brain" (*Age of Insight* 309). These two memory systems, implicit and explicit memory, are the foundations for associative memory. Associative memory is strongly related to the idea of top-down processing, which is an approach to information processing where the mind breaks down the entire system in order to gain insight from its compositional parts. Top-down signals rely on memory for the purpose of comparing incoming visual information with prior experience (*Age of Insight* 306).<sup>3</sup>

Encoding is the process that converts the event information into an engram, or the means by which memory traces are stored through either biophysical or biochemical changes in the brain (Tulving 6). Contrarily, *ecphory* is the process in which retrieval information determined by a cue, usually environmental, is correlated with the information of the engram (Tulving, Le Voi, Routh, Loftus 1). Encoding and engram

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<sup>3</sup> The contrary to top-down processing is bottom-up processing, where information processed through low and intermediate level vision is integrated to give rise to a complex system; therefore, forming the system through its complex parts, thus making the original systems sub-system of the product (*Age of Insight* 306).

formation are the principal components of memory *storage*; whereas, *ecphory* and *ecphoric information* are the principal components of memory *retrieval* (Tulving 6). General abstract processing system (GAPS) depicts the stages of encoding, storage, and retrieval of memorial information. There are three different kinds of concepts that fall within GAPS: observable aspects, hypothetical processes, and hypothetical states, where the states represent the products of the process (Tulving 5). The central concepts of GAPS are those discussed above, *encoding*, *engram*, *ecphory*, and *ecphoric information*. The act of remembering begins with the encoding of perceived information from an event and ends with the creation of a cognitive state. This cognitive state is that of the *ecphoric information* and is constructed by both the *engram* and the *retrieval cues* (Tulving 6).

Neurobiology and memorial studies have recycled through many different theories of appropriate classification schemes of human memory. The latest theory holds there to be five major systems of learning and memory: procedural memory, perceptual priming, short-term memory, semantic memory, and episodic memory (Tulving 11). Procedural memory encompasses skills and simple conditioning. The procedural system is an *action* system, meaning that its operations are expressed in behavior rather than cognition. The four other systems are *cognitive* systems, meaning that they mediate changes in mental processes or thought. The first of these systems, perceptual priming, is a form of learning that is found in the advanced identification of objects<sup>4</sup>. Short-term memory can also be referred to as primary memory or working memory. The process registers and retains information in an easily accessible form for a short period of time

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<sup>4</sup> Perception of an objection at Time 1 stimulates the perception of the same object at Time 2 in the sense that at the point of Time 2, the identification of the object can take less time or less information than it does with the absence of priming (Tulving 13).

following input (Tulving 12). Semantic memory and episodic memory are to be our most important of these five systems in this part of our discussion, although episodic memory will really become our principle system of concern. Semantic memory is simply the general knowledge of the world. It provides the individual with the basic materials needed for thought; whereas, episodic memory allows the individual to remember moments of his past (Tulving 13). This memory system refers to the most complex system that emerges in early childhood. It requires both the individual's self-awareness of having experienced a particular event and the contextual details that surround this event as well as the ability to recall this information at future points (Guillery-Girard B et al., 1). Episodic memory relies on the binding of different types of associations. These associations may be integrated into a single representation (Mayes et al., 2007).

Most experiences do not leave a trace in the mind; however, a few experiences are remarkable in that they alter the physical and chemical structure of the brain by forming new connections between neurons. These new neural connections are the basis of memories. Memories are only made from those experiences that excite prolonged or intense neural activity. Long-term memories are broken down into two categories, depending on the level of consciousness that is needed to recall the memory. Declarative or explicit memories include episodic memories and semantic memories and are consciously recalled by the brain. Procedural or implicit memories are the unconscious memories of "knowing how." Procedural memories are composed of automatic sensorimotor behaviors that become so deeply embedded in the mind that we are unaware of them (Carter 158). The formation of any long-term memory occurs through an extensive process. At first, the brain needs to provide intense focus to one particular

experience—the thalamus and frontal lobe are charged with maintaining focus<sup>5</sup>. This attention causes the neurons responsible to fire more frequently. A higher frequency of neural firing intensifies the experience and increases the chances of the formation of a memory. The more a neuron fires, the stronger connections it is able to make with other neural cells (Carter 158).

Moving back now to an application of these neurobiological ideas to literature, we find that throughout Benjy's section there are cues that spur the jumps in memory. These cues are naturally occurring details found in reality that when perceived indicate to Benjy's mind that it should shift back to a prior moment. We can think of these details as similarities between experiences. The experience of the "present" will trigger the mind to recognize a correlation to past experience, in turn bringing the mind's focus to that particular memory. These details facilitate the process of assimilation. In Benjy's mind these cues arguably originate from particular details found in the two memories that dictate his conceptual reality. Benjy's earliest memory occurs when he is around the age of three, presumably in early fall of 1898 (Stewart and Backus 444). He along with the other Compson children are attempting to spy in on the brunch at Damuddy's funeral. It is the following scene that is arguably the most significant in the formation of Benjy's memory and reality:

'Push me up, Versh.' Caddy said.

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<sup>5</sup> The thalamus will maintain activity regarding target of attention. The frontal lobe keeps attention fixed on target by inhibiting distractions. Generally, the frontal lobe is responsible for thinking, making judgments, making decision, planning, and conscious emotion. The thalamus is a large mass of paired gray matter that is located between the brain stem and the cerebrum. It acts as the principle relay station for sensory information coming into the brain (Carter 246).

‘All right.’ Versh said. You the one going to get whipped. I ain’t.’ He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. The we couldn’t see her. We could hear the tree thrashing.

‘Mr. Jason said if you break that tree he whip you.’ Versh said.

‘I’m going to tell on her too.’ Jason said.

The tree quit thrashing. We looked up into the branches.

‘What you seeing.’ Frony whispered. (*The Sound and the Fury* 39)

Benjy’s near obsession with Caddy and the association that he makes between Caddy and trees are two imperative components of this memory. This description of the “thrashing tree” is one that reappears throughout this scene and in moments of Benjy’s narration immediately before and after.

Benjy associates Caddy with trees throughout the narrative of his memories. However, the above moment of the “thrashing tree” is uncharacteristically violent in comparison to the rest of Benjy’s mention of trees. The specific connotation implies that fear was present in Benjy’s emotional sphere during the original experience. The connotation, however, also conveys a sense of looming anguish and threat, which thereby introduces the application of emotional desire into our discussion of memory formation. The brain is most likely to create intensely emotional experiences into long-term memories because emotion increases attention. The emotional information from a stimulus is originally processed through an unconscious pathway that leads to the amygdala, a portion of the limbic system that is exclusively concerned with emotion. The amygdala instantly assesses incoming information for emotional relevance. The

hypothalamus modulates all activation of the amygdala (Carter 125). The memory of Damuddy's funeral is inarguably a moment that forges an intense memory in Benjy's mind. Benjy's ability to recall this memory so readily and his obsession of remembering back to this moment signifies that the original experience created an intense response from Benjy's amygdala; therefore, the moment must have contained stimuli that initiated an emotional reaction.

Emotional intensity is a crucial part in the formation of many memories. Intense emotional experiences are more likely to become memories because high levels of emotion increase attention. Emotional information is initially processed through unconscious pathways that led to the amygdala<sup>6</sup>. The amygdala replays emotional experiences, and this replay then incites the encoding of memories. It is possible for some traumatic events to be permanently stored in the amygdala (Carter 158). If we consider this neuroaesthetic description in the context of Benjy, we find before us an intentionally created mind that functions with abnormal constraints. When asked what emotion Benjy inspired in him, Faulkner responded, "The only emotion I can have for Benjy is grief and pity for all mankind. You can't feel anything for Benjy because he doesn't feel anything" (Meriwether and Millgate 245). A lack of emotional response should diminish production of long-term memory. Diminishing, in terms of quantity, is difficult to measure with respect to Benjy; although, we can find that the amount of memories that Benjy's mind retains is comparatively few. What is more important in the sense of diminished memory is the manner in which the mind utilizes the memories that it does hold to understand its

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<sup>6</sup> The amygdala is located within the brain's temporal lobe, and plays an important role in the limbic system. Principally, the amygdala is responsible for controlling emotion (Carter 242).

present and its reality. In Benjy we discover these normal mental processes to be inadequate relative to social demands.

Most memories derive from events that are heavily saturated with sensory moments. Like other aspects of memory formation, the stronger the sensation, the more likely that it will be remembered. The formation of perceptions begins in the sensory cortices. It is now known that long-term memory is permanently stored in the cerebral cortex; more importantly, it is stored in the part of the cerebral cortex that originally processed the information. Memories of visual images are stored in the visual cortex and memories of tactile experiences are stored in the somatosensory cortex (*In Search of Memory* 129). All memories are stored in pieces, therefore, in order for the mind to recall a memory, the mind must engage different sections of the brain. This indicates that memories, like the brain, are partitioned.

Working memory or short-term memory must exist before long-term memory. Working memory is “held in mind” by processes of repetition (Carter 159), and is believed to involve two neural circuits. Both circuits exist for the purpose of “keeping the memory alive” until it is either forgotten or turned into a long-term memory. One circuit provides visual and spatial information, and the other auditory. The circuits encompass the sensory cortices, where the experience is registered, and the frontal lobes, where it is consciously noted. The flow of information into and throughout these circuits is controlled by neurons that reside in the prefrontal cortex (Carter 159). Working memories that are special in nature travel to the hippocampus for further processing into long-term memory. The hippocampus then starts a process known as long-term potentiation for the purpose of permanently encoding the information from the experience. Long-term

potentiation involves the synchronous firing of neurons. Synchronous firing makes the neurons involved more inclined to fire again at later times. If the neurons fire together often, they eventually become sensitized to each other—if one fires, all the rest do as well (Carter 156). The process ensures and allows for memories to be recalled through association. For example, if Benjy's visual cortex is stimulated upon seeing a nail at any given point, a neuron will fire to indicate the occurrence of this particular perception. The firing of this neuron, because it has links to other neurons, will incite the recall of the long-term memory of getting stuck under the fence.

We now move from a discussion heavily focused on neurobiological concepts to one concerned with the temporal parameters of association. As briefly mentioned, Bergson's theory of duration calls for the fluidity of time, a theory that questions the essence of a present. Our analysis must contend with the notion that the idea of the present is something that has come to a definition within the context of temporal duration and memory studies. Putting Faulkner in this context is necessary to understand his novelistic structure, and in general, serves any reading of his work. Faulkner greatly adheres to the idea of temporal fluidity, integrating the present and past. We see him do this principally through use of italics and sporadic changes in tense. To this point Ross writes, "he [Faulkner] alters verb tense for the same reasons he employs italics,...to suggest the infinite variability of human awareness" (Ross 35). Returning to the quoted passage from *The Sound and the Fury*, we can understand this "variability of human awareness" to signify the compounding nature of perception and mental processing. The mind's realization of the similarities between a perceived detail of the "present" and that of the memory dictates the degree of awareness that the mind employs in the "present" by

preemptively ordering what details the mind is to look for in the given moment. That detail, when found, will cue a memorial association, enhance mental attention, and possibly lead to the creation of a long-term memory. Variability then speaks to the infinite ways in which the mind becomes structured by experience to recognize and process presents.

*As I Lay Dying* is no exception to Faulkner's unconventional novelistic structure. Here, as in *The Sound and the Fury*, several moments occur when the plot or even the narrator seems to jump from place to place in time and space with little conceivable reasoning. To this respect, in *As I Lay Dying* Pattern writes the following:

Although Faulkner often uses past-tense narration in *As I Lay Dying*, he departs daringly from the traditional procedure by mixing his narrative modes. The book begins, in fact, with present-tense narration which continues for a significant portion of the novel...If, as in *As I Lay Dying*, the narrators are also participating in the actions they are describing, the reader plunges into a world of pure subjectivity; external chronological reality is revealed only through its impingement on the consciousness of the speaker. When only one narrator exists, such a story becomes a study of his mind; when many such narrations exist, the whole question of perception assumes paramount importance. (Pattern 3-4)

Pattern provides what I believe to be a good overview of the novelistic structure. The novel begins, as Pattern describes, in present tense. As we move through the novel, we find that this voice changes in parts, thereby leading to the question once again of how Faulkner employs his use of tense. As already stated, Faulkner relies more on tense to show the mind's relationship to the event rather than the narrator's presence along a

temporal line. In these respects, Pattern introduces a good explanation: because the narrators are seemingly participating in what Faulkner has written as present tense, we are exposed only to the actions of the external world as they relate and are relevant to the mind of the narrator. Therefore, at any moment when we must interpret with consideration of conventional temporal states, we must understand that the temporal nature of the described is guided only by the structure of the narrator's mind. Because of this, we cannot interpret time in Faulkner's novels from our own understanding of temporal patterns. We have learned these patterns; thus, this indicates that they are unnatural. And so at a subconscious level where the individual mind is free to function without esoteric influence, we find very different identities of time. The conventional patterns, which we use consciously when analyzing fiction, are lost within the individual mental attempts to understand and convey its reality.

Darl's telling of his mother's death is but a few pages long. The first few pages of the scene make it seem as if Darl is besides Addie's deathbed. The scene then breaks to a change in setting, location, and literal appearance. Italics are by no means foreign to the works of Faulkner—*The Sound in the Fury* is saturated with such—and herein we find the first example of Faulkner's italics in *As I Lay Dying*. At a very basic level, the italics signify a very strong shift in the narrative structure. It would be difficult to know how to assess Faulkner's exact intention in his use the italics. We can, however, extract the details of the passage in order to offer a reasonable interpretation as to the significance in the break. The break comes right after, "'Durn them boys,' he says" (Faulkner 49) as said by Anse in reaction to Darl and Jewel leaving to delivery wood right before the moment of their mother's death. The break itself then comes in the form of the following:

*Jewel, I say. Overheard the day drives level and gray, hiding the sun by a flight of gray spears. In the rain the mules smoke a little, splashed yellow with mud, the off one clinging in sliding lunges to the side of the road above the ditch. The titled lumber gleams dull yellow, water-soaked and heavy as lead, tilted at a steep angle into the ditch above the broken wheel; about the shattered spokes and about Jewel's ankles a runnel of yellow neither water nor earth swirls, curving with the yellow road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of dark green neither of earth nor sky. Jewel, I say (49).*

We first analyze the details of this particular section before considering the significance of the section as a whole, for the details themselves will reveal much about the workings of Darl's mind.

There are three main categories to focus upon in this section: the repetition, including the same phrase to start and end the passage, the rhetoric of negation, and the included details. "Jewel, I say" at both the beginning and end of the section implies a cyclical element to the happenings in Darl's mind. That is to say, whatever brought Darl to this break in narration remained at the end. The repeated details (yellow, earth, water) not only mark themselves as particularly important, but also implicate a cadence inherent to the moment, suggesting that the mind is in a rhythmic state of repeating the details of the event. The details themselves, as repetition shows, are important to the mind. They mark the mind's work of associating and attempting to understand a reality of dynamic markers, markers that may appear physically the same time after time but do change in purpose with regards to their varying contexts.

The negation—“Jewel’s ankles a runnel of yellow neither water nor earth swirls...neither earth nor water”—suggests that Darl’s mind is trying to reach a conclusion about what it is observing. “Neither of earth nor sky” is a conclusion of what is not based off previous experience of what was. Meaning that Darl’s mind is and can only comprehend from the memories of what it already knows, what it has already experienced. Robert Hemenway writes,

The rain and the wind are only experienced by Darl with the auditory sense, and thus the total reality of rain and wind must be created by correlating the experienced sound with the memory’s significations of those sounds, with the ‘idea’ of rain and wind. The ‘shaping’ of the lumber that the wind and rain do, therefore, is a creation of the ‘was’ of Darl’s memory operating in the ‘is’ of his consciousness, and in a purely literal sense, the lumber ‘is not’. Yet it does exist because Darl has conceived of it, and he is left to ponder which is real: the idea of lumber or the lumber filled wagon. (Hemenway 137)

Making sense of the present depends entirely on comprehensions of the past. The recognition of something that is “neither of earth nor sky” is based off of preconceived perceptions; without such, Darl would have no foundation on which to form ideas. As Hemenway states, the realization of the present state only exists from memory.

The creation of a system of belief is necessary in the process of conceiving and understanding reality in one’s own context (Sorajjakool 155). This idea led psychologist and philosopher, Jean Piaget, to develop his theory of “operational thought.” By this theory, a person moves through two processes when seeking to understand, those being the process of assimilation and the process of accommodation. Both processes describe

how individuals react and adapt to new information, and involve the process of taking the new information and fitting it into pre-existing cognitive designs. Assimilation occurs at the onset of a new experience. The mind will turn to previous experiences to comprehend the newly found experience. If the mind can find no associations between the new experience and all previous experiences, it will come to a point of cognitive disequilibrium. Cognitive disequilibrium forces the mind to then search for new knowledge. In this state of cognitive disequilibrium, the mind will turn to accommodation where it will alter pre-existing cognitive designs in order to fit the newly received information (Sorajjakool 155).

The presence of the passage from *As I Lay Dying* is now an issue unto itself. Due to the stipulations of association, we need to regard this passage by what comes before and after it. Arguably, the very existence of the passage is dependent upon temporal associations, meaning that the immediate thought that Darl had before the moment of the passage stimulated the remembrance of the actual moment. There existed a detail from the first set of narration—the scene of his mother’s death—that Darl’s mind associated with a detail in the italicized scene. We must realize that for the mind to jump from one point to another implicates a disregard to normative temporal structure; the mind must find an obvious connection between the experience in question and a memory held in any combination of memory systems. To the mind, there must exist some sense of temporal structure despite an apparent absence to the reader. In this first italicized scene, Darl’s mind is seemingly engaging its implicit memory system. We conclude this because we see no obvious physical detail connecting the previous moment to the moment in italics. In his article, “The Metaphoricity of Memory in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*”, Iorgos

Glanos talks about the manner in which Paul Ricoeur “has repeatedly shown that what guides and produces a metaphorical statement is the presence of similitude, an act of remembering the similar in otherwise dissimilar” (Glanos 4). Glanos continues by invoking Ricoeur’s notion that “in metaphors of transport, then, movement and space are possible only as names of memory...” (Glanos 4). Darl’s narration does at times give a clear shift in temporal state from paragraph to paragraph, but when considering how the mind works, guided by memories to associate one detail in the present to another in the past, this Faulknerian presentation of “broken time” becomes the most accurate representation of the interior narrations of the human mind. That is, the manner in which the individual mind narrates its own perceptions in present time.

Let us look to *The Sound and the Fury* to see how and why it is that Benjy’s character narrates in a seemingly confusing manner, for he is possibly one of Faulkner’s most renowned oddities. The following passage starts with the very opening scene of the novel, the moment at which Benjy is with Luster who is searching for his quarter. The scene then moves directly into a moment of Benjy crawling under a fence with his sister Caddy. The italics, identical to those used by Faulkner, mark the change in temporal moment.

‘Wait a minute.’ Luster said. ‘You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through ere without snagging on that nail.’

*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the pigs*

*were grunting and snuffing. I expect they're sorry because one of them got killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted. Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said. Or they'll get froze. You don't want your hands froze on Christmas do you.*

'It's too cold out there.' Versh said. ' You don't want to go out doors.' (*The Sound and the Fury* 2)

The nail moves us, as readers of Benjy's narration, to the "present" back to the past moment, or memory, of crawling under the fence with Caddy. We understand this form of narration can challenge many readers; still, this form of narration is a very clear example of the mind juxtaposing these temporal moments, which implies that it is very close to the natural manner in which the human mind functions. Questioning why it does so, we discover that the mind returns to memories to enhance a general understanding. This juxtaposition by the mind is what is known as memorial association, the process by which the mind relates observed details of the "present," most often due to believed similarity or sameness between memorial details. In doing so, the mind not only brings together the details of the memory and the moment of the "present" but the memory and the moment in their entirety.

Benjy is fully aware of his environment in this opening scene. He gives no interpretation on what he reports, but this is intentional on Faulkner's part in his effort to write Benjy as an idiot. Despite this intent, his style is clearly particular and is a style fitted in obsession. Repeated details are the structural foundation for this passage, as they are for most. When Benjy is not recanting the words of another person, he fixates. "The ground was hard," Benjy "stooped over," "Caddy said," "Caddy said," "Caddy said."

Neurobiologists now recognize that repetition of memorial details, even after the point of memory formation, fortify the memory. The mind can accomplish this either consciously or unconsciously, and this might stand as one explanation for Benjy's obsessive nature. However, what I find to be the more plausible explanation for this nature is the claim that Benjy's mind *seeks* out certain details, such as Caddy's presence or a muddy ground, rather than simply *perceiving* these details. That is to say, that Benjy's mind is grounded in a set of details, and it understands by virtue of this set of details. These details allow his mind to associate, and without them he becomes completely lost.

Arthur Kinney argues that Benjy's consciousness is fastened to two primary groups: those details that represent Caddy or accompany her—rain, trees, slippers, fire and mud or earth—and those that deal with loss or death (Kinney 142). Kinney's argument is extraordinarily well founded and supported by the text. Chapter Three will examine how Caddy represents comfort for Benjy, and how both she and this sense of loss developed in his childhood and ultimately defined the rest of his life. Benjy's attempts and successes to communicate parallel his development and Caddy's presence. Hence, one of Benjy's saddest moments follows Caddy's marrying and leaving the house. With her gone Benjy wants to communicate with the schoolgirls, presumably in hopes that they would serve as Caddy's replacements:

They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I could breathe out

again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright, whirling shapes. (*The Sound and the Fury* 53)

This passage is shrouded in “trying”—“I was trying to say,” “I tried to get out,” “I tried to cry.” The “trying” continues until he completely falls, falls off “into the bright, whirling shapes.” Reality without authentic associative markers does not work and does not make sense. Benjy’s fall simply demonstrates that trying to confuse the mind in regards to what is “real” and the significance of its associative cues with synthetic markers just throws it into a hollow abyss. That is to say, Benjy is in a constant state of assimilation. His basis of reality is stationed in his childhood, which results in him having only a very few memories that he uses for assimilation.

Pattern also points to the fact that we must contend with Faulkner’s multiplicity of narrators in *As I Lay Dying*. She contends that a structure with multiple narrators muddles truth through the variability of perceptions that the narrators present. “Truth” becomes obscure, and as we shall eventually come to discuss, this elicitation by multiple voices parallels the ambiguity of reality. In reference to the issue of multiple narrators in *As I Lay Dying*, R.W. Franklin argues the following, “Only a point of action exists since there is no narrator *per se*. Each of the minds is its own persona telling its part of the story through unconscious, involuntary narration” (Franklin 5). Franklin seems to argue that a myriad of narrators discounts the individual narrator. Perhaps Franklin wants to call upon the issues that arise when forming an image of a reality in which a multitude of narrators exists. Issues surely do present themselves due to the variance of shared interpretation of the same experience. The fact of the matter is that the varying accounts do little more than place a greater responsibility on the reader to be cognizant of the novelistic form.

The reader must be aware that an inherent variability occurs throughout this structure. But Ross, as we cited earlier, would claim this simply mirrors the nature of the human variability of awareness. Franklin also claims that the narrator tells his story through “unconscious, involuntary” narration, and is not entirely incorrect. We earlier introduced the notions of explicit versus implicit memory. These terms are once again important in attempting to explain the idea of unconscious memories.

To say that the narrator tells the story through “unconscious, involuntary narration,” Franklin assumes that the narrator is associating back to his implicit memory. But if this were the case, the narrator would rely only on emotional responses. We know that a great deal of the associations made by the narrators are stimulated by physical, environmental factors, thereby making the associations both conscious and unconscious on the part of the narrator. We already saw an example of conscious explicit recall by Benjy in the opening scene of *The Sound and the Fury*. It was the visual stimulate of getting caught on the nail that brought Benjy back to the moment with Caddy under the fence. But Benjy is the special case that forces us to question the interactions of his implicit and explicit memory systems. From the example of Benjy remembering and associating to the moment of getting caught under the fence with Caddy, it is difficult to see any evidence of his implicit memory system at work; however, at other moments in his narration, we can characterize his implicit system to be abnormally dominated.

Memorial associations are directly related to temporal theories, which is to say that to best understand how details of perception are able to cause the mind to jump from seemingly present moment experience to a past existing only in memory, we need to understand how these moments of time—past, present, future—exist and work together. I

think it necessary to consider Bergson's Theory of Duration, for this is the theory to which Faulkner himself subscribed. We know that Faulkner was familiar with Bergson's work—he recommended to Joan Williams Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (Pryse 15). In a later interview with a doctoral candidate at Princeton, Faulkner noted his agreement 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" (Blotner 563). In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson argues that the past remains present to us because of what he calls "duration" a process that he describes as "the prolongation of the past into the present" (Bergson 20), or what otherwise be known simply as *memory*. Bergson writes that our character is in effect the "condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth" (Bergson 7). Despite the fact that most of one's memories are inaccessible to the consciousness, the ruling mind is developed and defined by all memories.

According to Bergson's theory, all memories, even those of the subconscious, are inescapable and influential. Time is therefore fluid because the mind does not segregate memories by temporal markers. Rather, it aggregates all memories for the purpose of continual learning. In order for the mind to make sense of all temporal states (past, present, and future), memories must carry across yesterday and tomorrow. That is to say, all memories exist collectively in the mind as a dynamic center that drives understanding. Ross states the following, which I find to be a good summation of Bergson's idea and its connection to *As I Lay Dying*.

It is Bergson's conception of "pure duration," not linear, mechanical time...that guides Faulkner's choice and experiments in *As I Lay Dying*. Duration is the temporal dimension all experience has, but this dimension cannot always be

represented as linear progression, for time is not always felt as sequence; time, like other dimensions of our awareness, varies infinitely, and intertwines itself with all other qualities of experience—with gradations in emotional intensity, with our sense of proximity of detachment, with our sense of stasis or change.

(Ross 40)

The theory of duration, and aesthetic examples that abide by the theory of duration, allow for the juxtaposition of two temporal moments. By juxtaposing, the mind forces itself to ruminate upon the nuances of each temporal moment, and in doing so, these nuances, the memorial details, return to a seat of examination, thereby starting a process of reevaluation. When the mind returns again to these two sets of memorial details, it once again assesses the significance of the details, but this time with an evolved context of its worldly cognition.

This phenomenon of Benjy's narration clearly marks Faulkner's thoughts on time, particularly as related to Bergson's theories. In 1952 Faulkner gave an interview to a French graduate student, Loïc Bouvard, and Bouvard wrote the following:

Since we brought up Bergson, I next asked Faulkner to explain his conception of time. "There isn't any time, he replied. "In fact I agree pretty much 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."

(Meriwether 70)

To believe that time is fluid would implicate memories as responsible for defining experience regardless of time. Therefore, understanding is highly associative with the

past defining the future and the future defining the past. Understanding, like time, is continuous and evolutionary. If the present moment includes the past and the future, then collective understanding creates all moments, which is to say that the mind's learning is continuously restructured. We will later come to question whether or not this restructuring falls within these parameters.

Lawrence Bowling argues that the Benjy character's "escapes from the present" are a "mechanical function of the mind" (Bowling 554). Benjy's narration clearly indicates that his mind will jump from the past back to the present for just long enough to experience another moment of association to return him to another memory. Though the narrative form in *The Sound and the Fury* appears to the reader to be haphazard, the mental processes of the characters in fact dictate the order. Roggenbuck argues that Benjy is more fascinated with relating details of his present with memories from his past (Roggenbuck 581). More importantly, Roggenbuck argues that Benjy's detachment from his current reality "says more about his diminished interest in his current existence than it does about the limits of his cognitive abilities" (Roggenbuck 582). Faulkner's intent was for Benjy to be incapable of accepting the future,

There was Dilsey to be the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient and indomitable; and Benjy to be the past. He had to be an idiot so that, like Dilsey, he could be impervious to the future, though unlike her by refusing to accept it at all. (Roggenbuck 582)

Faulkner possessed Benjy with the power to choose his focus of thought and delineate between various stimuli on which to reside his attention. Benjy simply chooses to ignore the future. Seeing his present by eliciting recollection captivates him. Surely, Benjy does

engage with his past at an extraordinary frequency because his present can only exist if related to the past.

But what is the “present” in a Bergsonian scheme? Up to this point, we have talked about time’s fluid nature, insisting that the present, past, and future are all connected and dependent upon one another. The “present” moment is, however, the central point from which we consider memory. Although time is certainly relative to the subconscious of the mind, we only know to discuss our world through temporal labels. Benjy exemplifies how we are to understand the conceptual present in our discussion of memory. The sections dealing with Benjy’s thirty-third birthday on April 7, 1928, the point at which we begin in the novel, compose Benjy’s most recent present. It would be difficult and baseless to argue that Benjy’s “present” actually lies far ahead in the future. Perhaps it does, but the structure and analysis of the novel matters little upon this difference and to say that this moment of April 7, 1928 marks Benjy’s, at least, *relative* present is sufficient. A detailed reading of the Benjy section shows April 7, 1928 to be the moment that writes all other moments in either the past or the future, for this is the moment from which Benjy associates. Roggenbuck argues that Benjy has little involvement with his present, proposing that his “interests lie primarily in previous presents” (Roggenbuck 581). It is this captivation that illuminates this all-important relationship between Benjy’s conceptual reality and his memories.

Perhaps we initially read Benjy to be consciously bringing his present experience back to his memory in examples such as looking for Luster’s quarter to getting stuck under a fence with Caddy. But the idea of fluidity suggests that time connects both backwards (present experience to memory) and forwards (memory to present

experience). And so following the notion of time's fluidity, we need to question why Benjy bothered to start his present narration at the very moment that he did, for in doing so, he clearly marks this experience as a critical inhabitant of his mind. We must ask why it is that this moment so important. Surely, for this moment to be important there must be a reason rooted in the mind's history. Following Ross, by the idea that human awareness is variable, the memory of the nail could have very well required the mind to collect further memories in which nails were prominent details. The variability of awareness, therefore suggests that the mind does not perceive or remember every detail and every experience. What it rather retains is that which supports an already formed notion of reality; what the mind is aware of is dependent upon what the mind needs to perceive.

Critics have argued that the Bergsonian concept of duration seems to describe the stream-of-consciousness narrative style of Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, taking the narrative style of Quentin as evidence of Bergson's influence on Faulkner. The Benjy section, then, is Faulkner's attempt to envision an existence "composed of separate states with an impassive ego to unite them" (Guerlac 63). André Bleikasten writes that the Benjy section attempts to reveal the "vertical order" in which the "horizontal linearity of external chronology is replaced by a synchronic patterning of internal relationships" (Bleikson 15). Essentially, we read Benjy to be Faulkner's intentional probing of duration by presenting "what would be" in the reverse. Benjy occupies a "predurational space," or a space marked by textual duration rather than the duration of human consciousness (Pryse 17). By presenting this, Faulkner shows his reader what consciousness would look like if the human mind had the capability to separate memories from "present"

experience; Benjy's mind is one that is unable to perceive the "endless flow" (Pryse 19) of his memory states.

Benjy is an excellent example of Faulkner's belief in the fluidity of time. It is, however, an example that only fortifies the concept of the fluidity of time by means of questioning a varying temporal reality. In a 1955 interview as part of his visit to Japan, Faulkner discussed the idiot's view of time. Rather than being able to view the present, past, and future as a collective moment of understanding, Faulkner's idiot lacks the ability to recognize continuation. The idiot finds time simply to be an instant void of any markers of "when":

To that idiot, time was not a continuation, it was an instant, there was no yesterday and no tomorrow, it all is this moment, it all is [now] to him. He cannot distinguish between what was last year and what will be tomorrow, he doesn't know whether he dreamed it, or saw it. (Meriwether 147-148)

Benjy can still associate, in fact, Benjy's mind really only works through association, but his associations do not result in normal learning. This then indicates that the mind does need some temporal standards, however basic, to properly associate. Meaning, that the mind needs to be aware of the relativity of moments. It needs to see the present as the present and the past as the past. Perhaps this is because we cannot escape social context, a forcible constructor of our minds that holds heavily to temporal division. Association is purposed to further understanding, making sense of the past and the present and the future based off of an experience from a different temporal space. Benjy is able to make connections from instant to instant, but according to Faulkner, his mind does so without knowing why and without understanding the connections between moments. The failure

to understand where the connections between the associated memories originate prevents Benjy's learning.

To this idea, Suzanne Nalbantian argues that, "It would seem that Faulkner creates the mentally retarded character Benjy in order to depict an uncontrolled intrusion of memory which completely breaks down rational barriers between the present and the past" (Nalbantian 93). I find her interpretation to be well-founded. What she calls "rational barriers between the present and the past" we might rightly consider to be the connections between associated memories. Seemingly, the rationality lies in obvious temporal markers that define moments as past or present. The memory intrusion is simply uncontrolled because Benjy cannot recognize when it is appropriate to relate his present to memory because he cannot recognize the difference between a memory and a present moment.

Finally, Franklin addresses time in *As I Lay Dying* and writes, "In *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner set up an extremely difficult narrative arrangement. The fictive present is also the immediate present, and there is no other upon which to rely" (Franklin 60). He then claims, "Obviously, events cannot be alluded to until they happen, and they cannot be lived again, yet both phenomena occur in *As I Lay Dying*" (Franklin 60). But Franklin reads with the fallacy of not understanding the time in which Faulkner writes. By that I mean to suggest that Franklin appears to be entirely ignorant of Faulkner's subscription to the theory of duration. He does not realize that Faulkner writes from within the mind of the narrator. Within the mind, time is lived over and over again in memory. In the midst of memory recall, the present moment is entirely relative to the memory at hand. Therefore, it is reasonable for one to allude to events that have "not yet happened." What

Franklin does not consider is that the mind, just as Faulkner embodies it, does not operate on the same temporal frame as the external world because the mind operates from memory. We, therefore, have two distinct levels of time: the temporal sense of the mind and the temporal sense that we as readers have as active participants within the external world of the mind or the collective world, each of which performs within its own charges. We cannot apply the principles of time used by the external world to the sense of time that exists within the mind, and vice versa. This, however, is just what Franklin does in his reading. What we discover through the study of literary association is that the mind does in fact need a basic sense of time to function within the parameters of an established collective reality.

## Chapter Two

### **Imagination, Conventional Language, and Processing Reality: *Speak Memory*, “That in Aleppo Once,” *To The Lighthouse***

*“But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.”*

—Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”

#### **The Imagination and Reality**

Franklin cites the utterance of Addie’s final words as an example of his point of contention, saying: “Addie’s final words are uttered at the end of section eleven (Peabody 370). They are given again in section twelve (Darl 371) after half a page of elapsed time has been relieved as a present” (Franklin 60-61). The final words of Peabody’s section eleven are as follows: “I leave the room. Beyond the porch Cash’s saw snores steadily into the board. A minute later she calls his name, her voice harsh and strong. ‘Cash,’ she says; ‘you, Cash!’” (*As I Lay Dying* 46) Faulkner rewrites almost the same line a few pages later, this time through Darl’s voice: “‘You Cash,’ she shouts, her voice harsh, strong, and unimpaired. ‘You, Cash!’” (*As I Lay Dying* 48) The only difference between these two lines is the addition of “unimpaired.” The addition suggests something rather special that Franklin never mentions, which we shall come to through the following observation: despite his realistic narrative style, Darl was not present at his mother’s

death. What, then, makes Darl able to give an account as if he were in the room for this mother's last breath? Additionally, what does his absence suggest about the inclusion of "unimpaired"? By definition, "unimpaired" is quite synonymous with the other two preceding adjectives, but in this context, it implies something that the other two words do not. Peabody was present at the moment of Addie's death, and thus we can safely assume that he heard her last words himself. Darl on the other hand, can only hear his mother's words through hearsay and his imagination. "Harsh, strong, and unimpaired," describe the manner in which Darl's ears supposedly perceived his mother's voice. These are subjective adjectives, meaning that they depend upon the beholder of Addie's voice. Darl never heard these words; "Harsh, strong, and unimpaired" are, therefore, describing the degree of strength that Darl hears these imagined words. Compared to Peabody's experience with Addie's last words, "unimpaired" suggests that there is nothing in Darl's mind impeding his image of his mother's last moments. His emotional mind has painted the image well

I begin our second chapter with the continuation of our discussion of *As I Lay Dying* to demonstrate the direct connection, yet apparent differences between memories and the imagination. As we saw in the previous chapter, the process of association creates an aggregate effect within the mind. It may appear as if the mind is continuously creating new memories, but it is rather compiling new information with past information to produce a transformed memory. In this chapter, we discuss the evolution from memory to imagination and the socially imprinted issues, being conventional language, surrounding imagination. Ultimately, we shall come to discover that unlike thoughts resulting from associations, the imagined represents a *new* memory, or at least comparatively so. By *new*

memory what I really intend to suggest is that unlike memories formed by association, memories dependent upon the fluidity of time, the imagination is the result of the mind piecing together bits of maintained memories. Association changes the nuances of memory for the purpose of appeasing the reality of the relatively present moment. Principles of association transform original memories to adapt to the dynamic temporal context, making time critical to associative memories. We will start with time in the context of the imagination, and by doing so, find that it is still important but in a manner very distinct from that of association.

This chapter questions what happens when the mind refuses the stipulations of association, when rather than attempting to understand through the accumulation of similar memorial details, the mind ignores correlation. Memory works by associating to the past, compiling aspects of a new experience with memorial details. These details help to make sense of the “present” experience, and indicate which aspects of the present experience are important for the mind to remember. But what happens when these associations do not occur? Does memory exist at all, and if so, what form is it in? Memory does exist in the absence of association; however, it ceases to form in new. What rather materializes is the imagination, the portion of the mind that disregards association for the sake of learning through a medium void of esoteric influence.

Vladimir Nabokov in this chapter is our primary example of the imaginative presence in literature, and we analyze such works as *Speak, Memory* and “That in Aleppo Once....” Later we turn to writers such as Virginia Woolf and Meena Alexander to see literature’s imagination as an artistic form that is cathartic for the mind. A discussion of these two women will reveal the necessity of imagination over simple association,

following Nabokov's proclamation that the imagination dies in most minds after childhood. Before turning to these authors, I would like to start once again with Faulkner and his critics who will place in context and further elaborate upon the connection between associative memory and imagination.

Lewis Leary is that critic for us to gain insight into the affair of memory and imagination. Leary claimed that much of Faulkner is "determined by memories or traditions of a past from which his outlook and activities derive" (Leary 3). Whether or not we accept this statement as true, the claim is obviously pertinent to this discussion. Superficially, this comment may appear to have little to do with the imagination, and perhaps Leary in no way intended it to be, but we shall come to find in further analysis of this quotation that not everything we believe to be memory truly is. In questioning what *is* memory, we reveal the qualifications for differentiation, and finally a definition of memory's antithesis. But to start, I believe it necessary to go through Leary's entire argument of the spectrum of Faulkner's memories: he states that Faulkner believed there to be four different versions of the past, and a definition of all four would best precede any in-depth analysis of his works. There is first the *mythical past* that is handed down by scripture and folk memory. This describes a time when the world was young and primitive, an edenic time before man spoiled the world with his disobedience. Next comes the *real past*, which is simply that of historical events. The *real past* is followed by the *legendary past*, the third version that encompasses memories handed down "from father to son." Whether or not those "legendary past" memories actually occurred, they are so believed to have happened that they come to form a sort of tradition (Leary 3). The last and fourth is the *remembered past* that describes all that every individual has lived

through—all that one knows, for having lived through it and having had consciousness of the experience, which certifies its existence (Leary 4).

If we assume Leary to be correct and Faulkner did have a notion of four distinct types of memory, then there are several implications with which we must contend. First and foremost, Leary points to Faulkner as simply having memorial ideas. He additionally emphasizes ideas of collective and social memories. However, according to Leary, memories for Faulkner do not necessarily derive from actual experience. That is to say, that supposedly the truth of the memory is not definitional to the memory itself. Be this true, memories then have a sort of reliance on a belief state as suggested by the fact that false accounts have the possibility of being claimed as remembered “truths.” Therefore, the providence of memory does not rely on truth, at least not a literal truth though perhaps a *believed* truth. From these ideas we realize that Faulkner is expressing an early idea of what we have come to call *social construction*. We also come to see an important notion from these classified memories in *mythic memory*. Leary writes of a Faulkner who was fully accepting of memories that came from a place of ambiguity. That is to say, the validity of such mythic memories could never be proven, but we nonetheless hold them to be authentic memories.

These distinctions force us to question what is “real” in the realm of the remembered; although, before reaching that point we need to first consider how it is that the mind remembers the possibly “unreal.” The mind can either intentionally or unintentionally create false memories; however, intentional or not, both lines of confabulation imply that an original memory once stood as “true.” We need to be careful here with words such as “true” and “false” because in the context of memory what is

“true” and what is not is entirely subjective. Memories are created from a basis of how the mind perceives a moment or experience. Details are the units of perception that allow the brain properly to store the gathered information. No two people are ever going to remember the same moment in the same way because no two people will ever have the same experience with that moment, and no two people will ever perceive the exact same set of details. Therefore, the memory stored in their mind of that moment will differ if only ever so slightly. Let’s take the image of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. Three people may spend one minute standing in front of the painting, studying what they believe to be every detail. After they walk away, we could ask them to speak of their memory of the painting. One man may tell us that in the foreground there was a woman smiling without showing her teeth. Another man may tell us that the woman had a cloak draped over her left shoulder. And the last man may tell us that behind the woman ran a river. Now, no man is wrong but very clearly each subject shares a very different memory of what he saw. This same result will occur every time that we perform such a task. For reasons that we will come to discuss, the human mind and the human brain are very individualized entities. We, therefore, need to be very careful about terms of truth when talking about bodies that collectively define conventional truth.

As I stated in the previous paragraph, a confabulated memory, or a falsified memory, regardless of the reason for it being so, implies that the process took an original memory and transformed it into a new memory in order to replace the old. There is another option for a sort of *intentional* falsification that purposely morphs multiple original memories into a singular product of the mind, this being imagination. In some instances, there is a very thin line between an imagined image and a confabulated

memory. The distinction, however, is critical to make for we cannot have a complete analysis of memory without considering the imagination. All that is imagined originates from memory. That which is imagined is the result of the mind's *conscious* and *intentional* manipulation of a multitude of memories. To best understand the imagined and its workings and relations to memory, I would like to start here with the line between confabulated memories and the imagined. Leary spoke of the *legendary past*, which as he defines it is any memory without conceivable origin. The *legendary past* claims there to be memories that we simply *believe* to be "true" rather than being able to point to the moment in time from where the actual memory came. If we cannot find the memory in our own existence, how can we really know the memory to be a memory? Leary speaks of *tradition* in his definition of the *legendary past*. *Tradition* implies the memory to have come from a line of narrative retellings. While the current holders of the memory may stand centuries away from the source, the nuances of the memory from the *legendary past* promise actual existence of the source. And so while the current memory that comes from the *legendary past* may be substantially transformed from its original state, its provenance does still define its place as a memory.

These ideas about an inherent tradition in the *legendary past* speak a great deal to the ideas of shared memory and common memory. Tradition connotes a sense of history, the compilation of time's happenings upon one another, a sense that is the foundation of shared and common memories. Avishai Margalit defines common memory as an "aggregate notion." By this he means that the common memory "aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually" (Margalit 51). An episode of common memory can also occur

when a given population of people have a rate of remembrance of a certain moment that is an overwhelming majority (Margalit 51). A shared memory is different in the respect that individual memories are not compiled. A shared memory “requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode” (Margalit 51). These notions will become far more important when we begin our conversation of social construction, the formation of memory, and the place of reality in Chapter Three, but I think it here important to introduce these terms due to their relation to the idea of the *legendary past*. We can see that these examples of shared and common memories, which have the possibility of exemplifying Leary’s *legendary past*, derive from memory. While it may be a collection of memories, the important distinction to be made here that differentiates these things of shared and common memories and the products of the *legendary past* from an imagined item is that each began from *one* explicit memory, and if we were to look back far enough, we would be able to find the source of this memory. The question is what sort of memory is this memory from the legendary past? Because time prevents confirmation of the memory’s validity, we must say that this memory is falsified to some extent. However, one who possesses a memory from the legendary past will not see it to be false. This is because that memory from the legendary past and the collective and shared memories are engrained in the teachings of society. One then learns this “memory,” possibly adapts it to his own mind, and is unconscious of its false nature. This *unconscious* aspect further distinguishes this collectively confabulated memory from a product of the imagination. With memories from such origins as the *legendary past*, we must realize that not only are there multiple sources, but that the intentional purpose of the cohesion of these sources is

to create something unreal. I here mean to refer to any aspect of the collective reality, the sphere and power that teaches these collective and shared memories to the individual mind, that is “unreal” or unfounded in experience. We shall discuss the false collective reality further in Chapter Three, but for now it is important to know that the collective sphere will often support confabulated memories to protect the collective reality image.

With what I believe to be an adequate context for imagination within the discussion of memory now settled, I turn to Nabokov, starting with his short story, “That in Aleppo Once...” This is a seemingly strange narrative of a man who is writing a letter to a friend to tell the story of divorcing his wife. The man is on his honeymoon with his wife when he gets off of a train at a rest stop. When he returns, he discovers that the train has left without him. He then must search out his wife, eventually locating her only to realize that she has left him for another man. His story deteriorates until he reiterates the statement that he made at the very beginning of his letter, “I am positive now that my wife never existed. You may know her name from some other source, but that does not matter: it is the name of an illusion” (“That in Aleppo Once...” 241)<sup>7</sup>. This story is far more complex than it may perhaps seem, and I believe this complexity to lie in Nabokov’s provocations of memory, beginning principally with association and then leading into the imagination.

We have already called attention to the narrator’s claim in the beginning of this short story that his wife “never existed.” Basing a story on a wife that “never existed” perhaps calls into question the narrator’s sanity or insights into his use of imagination.

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<sup>7</sup> This edition of “That in Aleppo Once...” come from *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* Collection, edited by John Updike and Katrina Kenison. It will be this version that I cite throughout.

This is an important device on the part of Nabokov that I believe crucial to the discussion, but due to the nature of its implications I find it more appropriate to return to the “existence” of the wife at the end of our discussion on “That in Aleppo Once....” I would rather like to start with the following statement of the narrator, one that I believe is a model example of memorial invocation.

But I cannot discern her. She remains as nebulous as my best poem—the one you made such gruesome fun on in the *Literaturnye Zapiski*. When I want to imagine her I have to cling mentally to a tiny brown birthmark on her downy forearm, as one concentrates upon a punctuation mark in an illegible sentence. (“That in Aleppo Once...” 242)

Our first question needs to be why the narrator seems to be forcing himself to remember or *imagine* his wife, despite the fact that it becomes incredibly apparent later on in the story that what he really wishes to do is forget she ever existed. We must also consider why it is that he claims he “cannot discern her,” and what it means that “she remains as nebulous” as his best poem. Before immediately addressing all of these questions, I take a moment to mediate on the narrator’s diction in this passage. He says, “When I want to *imagine*,” but why this word *imagine* rather than *remember*? Perhaps one could argue that the narrator here uses “imagine” as a word synonymous to remember and is simply musing over his desire to recollect an image of his wife; however, I would rather like to argue that Nabokov consciously and purposefully made this choice in diction.

We find Nabokov to be a man who is very aware and knowledgeable of memorial nuances. Thus, simply assuming that he uses “image” and “remember” interchangeably is a shortcoming on the interpretation of his work. In *Strong Opinions*, we find an interview

conducted in September of 1966. As the introduction to this interview explains, Nabokov did not like to “talk off the cuff,” so he either wrote all of his answers down or dictated them to the interviewer (*Strong Opinions* 62). In this particular interview, Nabokov tells of his belief in imagination’s connection to memory, or he rather tells imagination to be a sort of memory where associative memory nourishes the imagination. We need to realize this passage to be looking introspectively into the mind of Nabokov, meaning that all the conclusions that Nabokov draws must come from self-analysis. He writes,

I would say that imagination is a form of memory... An image depends on the power of association, and association is supplied and prompted by memory. When we speak of a vivid individual recollection we are paying a compliment not to our capacity of retention but to Mnemosyne’s mysterious foresight in having stored up this or that element which creative imagination may want to use when combining it with later recollections and inventions. In this sense, both memory and imagination are a negation of time. (*Strong Opinions* 78)

From this statement we can see at the very least that Nabokov was very much cognizant of the distinctions to be made between memory and imagination. We, therefore, cannot simply assume that his narrator’s statement of “When I want to remember her” is a reference to mere recollection. For the moment, I simply wish this interview passage to stand as evidence of Nabokov’s awareness of the existing distinctions.

Establishing that this image of the narrator’s wife, which he desires to conjure, comes from the imagination forces us to question the origin of the nuances of the image. As we saw earlier in the interview from *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov insists that the imagined is dependent upon “the power of association,” which is clearly corroborated in

our passage from “That in Aleppo Once....” The narrator claims, “When I want to imagine her I have to cling mentally to a tiny brown birthmark on her downy forearm,” suggesting that not only is the imagination dependent upon association, but also there is an inherent practice of forcing particular associations when drawing upon the imagination. Nabokov’s narrator insists that the only way that he can imagine his wife is to call upon this very particular memory of her brown birthmark. Why this birthmark? At no other point in the story does he mention the brown birthmark, and so it seems in no way to be of any conscious importance to the narrator. It is also curious that the narrator seemingly attaches no actual memory to the birthmark. He generates an image of his wife based from the idea of the birthmark, yet he does not consider this image to be a direct memory.

The birthmark is certainly responsible for cuing the image of his wife as we saw the nail to act as a cue for Benjy’s mind to associate and remember back to the moment of getting stuck under the fence with Caddy. But this birthmark is not the same; we rather see its appearance in this story to be drastically foreign in comparison to those cues of association we saw in Chapter One. Unlike the nail or the smell of trees, the birthmark appears only once. It has no quality of repetition by which to nominate it a marker of associative memory, nor does it have temporal expansion—meaning, that we do not find the birthmark to reappear in various yet distinct moments. An absence of temporal expansion suggests that the birthmark was only once ever relevant to the mind of the narrator. Never did it act as a connector and foundation of memorial association and later learning. There was no compiling of information related to birthmarks. In fact this birthmark hold no plurality. It stands alone in one moment in time, and because of this, as

already hinted to, the mind of the narrator must force any recall of the birthmark and any related information. Forcing a mental image reveals two important things about the workings of the literary imagination: conjuring the imagination is seemingly unnatural and the imagination works with disregard to the temporal parameters needed by association. These two ideas are actually rather related. The unnatural disposition of the imagination is due to the fact that the mind must actively work to disregard its temporal present and return back to seemingly unrelated pasts. All of this implies that the image of the wife is fake or is not reproduced from an actual lived experience. In questioning the imagination, we do not look to question the validity of the image—validity determined by whether or not the mind ever actually perceived the image from its external environment. We question why we find the incitation of the imagined to be the remembered. Perhaps his wife did not have a brown birthmark on her arm, perhaps he never even had a wife, but the details do not matter as much as the reason why they are present in the story.

Understanding why the narrator imagines his wife through her birthmark is an understanding that we shall come to in time and further analysis, and so at this time I would like to take a moment to return to the very opening of “That in Aleppo Once....” The narrator opens his letter with a brief telling to his friend of how he had seen their friend, “good old Gleb Alexandrovich Gekko,” crossing the street some few days prior. Gleb Alexandrovich Gekko mentioned to the narrator that he seemed to think that the friend, the recipient of this letter, had been betraying “our national literature.” The narrator is clearly only writing to this friend because of the interaction with this Gleb Alexandrovich Gekko, who gave the narrator the recipient’s address. This then leads the narrator to continue on to his story, saying,

“I have a story for you. Which reminds me—I mean putting it like this reminds me—of the days when we wrote our first udder-warm bubbling verse, and all things, a rose, a puddle, a lighted window, cried out to us: ‘I’m a rhyme!’ Yes, this is a most useful universe. We play, we die: *ig-rhyme*, *umi-rhyme*. (“That in Aleppo Once...” 241)

The story starts off with an association to a time when the narrator passed the days as a poet. This association is curious in the fact that it directs the mind to a time where art pervaded all mental faculties. At this time, his art, being literature, guided every perspective and interpretation. A time such as this allowed all to appear favorable and comprehensible, particularly when collected for the purpose of transforming into verse. Surely this time was preferable to the moment at which the narrator writes this letter since he comes to say at the end of this paragraph, “But just now I am not a poet” (“That in Aleppo Once... 241). This line informs us that something has happened to the mind, something that has dismissed the former mind of the artist.

The notion of the artistic mind thus becomes critical to the understanding of the imagination. Nabokov writes of his childhood and claims that all of the Russian children of his generation “passed through a period of genius” (*Speak, Memory* 14). What he then says I believe instigates a very provocative argument about human imagination: “Genius disappeared when everything had been stored, just as it does with those other, more specialized child prodigies—pretty, curly-headed youngsters waving batons or taming enormous pianos” (14). To Nabokov, the mind of the genius is clearly parallel to that of the Artist, yet it is simultaneously the undeveloped mind of the child. Be this the case, the mind will generally lose the ability to imagine well before it reaches physical maturity.

Now, this marking moment “when everything had been stored” is surely the moment when the genius dies in most. Arguably, this moment is synonymous with the infiltration of social construction, or the moment at which the mind is taught how to think.

Seemingly, Nabokov is arguing that in most cases, artistic talent is lost when a foreign entity enters the mind. It may be difficult to recognize social influence as “foreign,” but we must remember the natural state of the mind—the period of time when the mind is innocent, before it has had any interaction with potential influencers. From this we find a supplement to the answer of why the imagination is unnatural: we are taught to remember, not to imagine. And so the imagination may be the natural disposition for the immature mind, but once memory infiltrates, and the mind develops, the “natural” state shifts. Nabokov writes the imagination to be the natural state of the infantile and adolescent mind, but he also writes this in most instances to be a terminal state. As we will discuss in the following chapter, this “natural” state really ends when memory formation begins. This suggests that the infantile mind, or the socially undeveloped mind, the imaginative mind, dies with the intrusion of social influence and construction.

There is a clear connection to what Nabokov is calling “genius” and innocence. To push this a bit further, I question if this “genius” is not really synonymous with the ability to imagine. In a way, innocence allows for the virtuous mind to process and react on a level that is far beyond that of the “mature” mind. Social interaction ruins the unique qualities of the mind that revels in creativity. This mind of the child genius is simultaneously the mind of an Artist. This Artist is uninhibited by social pressures of how he *should* express himself—shortly, we shall come to discuss the failures of the teachings of conventional language on self-expression and thereby the imagination. By

being unrestricted, he can freely draw his reality without stipulation. Nabokov shows that some individuals clearly never lose this genius or they never lose the ability to imagine. Really in order to retain genius and maintain imagination, one must reject the limitations of expression imposed by social conditioning.

However, Nabokov makes one other crucial point about the genius of the mind. Genius only disappears “when everything had been stored,” suggesting that genius, or imagination, disappears when the mind has become full of all its memories. In the previous chapter we found that Benjy developed a set of memories early on in his life. These memories, while changed through his life to varying degrees, remained the only memories that he ever possessed. At a point in development, one that occurs quite early on, the mind has captured all of the distinct memories that it will ever contain. After this point, the mind gains no more *new* memories. Certainly, the mind then participates in learning processes and at the end these memories are far grander and complex than their original form; but the quantity of the mind’s basic memory outlines will reach capacity. In part, the imagination must allow the mind to return back to its primal state where language was undefined and created entirely within the individual. This state ignores the taught conventional language but also ignores time in the sense that time requires the present to build upon the past. The imagination depends upon time in all the ways that association does not, by simply ignoring that there is cognitive and intellectual growth to be made. And so what we should recognize about the involvement of time in imagination is this need to return to a state that ignores social construction.

Applying these notions to “That in Aleppo Once...” the narrator surely stands as a corrupted soul, a fact of which he is very much aware. He is rightly displeased that he can

no longer relate to his art. Whatever has torn him from this “genius” that Nabokov speaks of has damaged him just as much as the absence of art that the intrusion left behind. At the very end, the narrator writes to his friend,

You, happy mortal, with your lovely family (how is Inès? how are the twins?) and your diversified work (how are the lichens?), can hardly be expected to puzzle out my misfortunes in terms of human communion, but you may clarify things for me through the prism of your art. (“That in Aleppo Once...” 249)

Foremost, this image of the prism of art suggests the reflective nature that art provides for the mind of the beholder and the mind of the artist. A prism receives plain light and expels this light in a nuanced form of extraordinary color. Can we not say that the prism metaphorically takes in the mundane to release brilliant artistry? We shall consider the prism to be symbolic of the genius mind; thereby, suggesting that the mind of this “genius” is able to create sense of the world in ways that the mind of others cannot, principally due to its artistic capabilities. In this passage there stands a comparison between he who has lost his artistic genius and he who been able to maintain it. He who has sustained his mind with “genius” cannot possibly understand the misfortune that causes one to force an image of the brown birthmark when he wishes to imagine because one with a genius mind is still innocent to the issues of any reality. However, this is an extreme case in that this individual would be one who avoided social influence and interaction. There is then the more likely occurrence of the individual who is able to return back to his imagination despite having a mind full of memory. This individual employs his imagination to make sense of all that he experiences in the esoteric world. One with a completely artistic and imaginative mind may be innocent, with an

implication of naïveté, however, is he the only one capable of fully comprehending all that the mind experiences? This narrator suggests so. He is the only one with a clear unimpeded view of his mind. Once the collective sphere is introduced to the individual mind, the genius is inundated with unnatural materials. The aspects that once defined the genius are muddled and eventually forgotten.

In Chapter One we talked a great deal of the relevance of time in memorial studies, and throughout this chapter we have as well hinted upon time's importance to the creation of the imagination. As we have also alluded to, time and imagination have a very distinct relationship comparatively to time and memory. For this reason, I would like to spend some time focusing upon this relationship between time and the imagination, giving particular attention to the differences we find between the two relationships. Since in Chapter One, we put the discussion of time in the context of Faulkner and his writings, we shall now do the same with Nabokov. Like Faulkner, Nabokov also subscribes to Bergsonian theory (Mattison 36). To this note, Laci Mattison writes, "Not only does Nabokov demonstrate how the combination of memory and imagination is integral to understanding Bergsonian intuition, but through the performance of this insight we also discern the complex temporal layering of space in Nabokov's writing" (Mattison 38). Nabokov writes to display the temporal matters of both memory and time, but these are of course separate concepts. While there are exchanges between both the imagination and memory, as we have seen, the specific identifying markers require different interactions with time, as Mattison alludes to.

In his novel, *Ada*, Nabokov wrote, "Physiologically the sense of Time is a sense of continuous becoming...Philosophically, on the other hand, Time is but memory in the

making. In every individual life there goes on, from cradle to deathbed, the gradual shaping and strengthening of that *backbone of consciousness*, which is the Time of the strong” (*Ada* 142-143). This notion of time speaks more to that which accompanies memory, however, I find it necessary to present it now as we begin a discussion of time in the context of the imagination with respect to the writings of Nabokov. These words expressing the gradual and dynamic nature of time in memory are to be our foundation for a comparison between time in the context of memory and time in the context of the imagination. In an interview, Nabokov stated there to be “all kinds of time” (*Strong Opinions* 185). There is the time that we apply to events measured by clocks and calendars, this being applied time. Nabokov claims that this applied time is “tainted by our notion of space, spatial succession, stretches and sections of space. When we speak of the ‘passage of time,’ we visualize an abstract river flowing through a generalized landscape. Applied time, measureable illusions of time, are useful for the purposes of historians and physicists” (*Strong Opinions* 185). This is our conventional time, the time of the clock. This is the time that exists in our minds as an artificial form. We know applied time because it is the time that we are taught to live by. However, this is not the form of time that is embedded in our minds.

Applied time is of course not the only existing form of time, nor is it the only one that Nabokov names. Nabokov provides a beautiful definition of time that highlights the inherent need for artistic creation in an adequate construction of memories. He writes,

Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, Time free of content and context, this, then, is the kind of Time described by my creature under my sympathetic direction. The past is also part of the tissue, part of the present, but it looks

somewhat out of focus. The past is a constant accumulation of images, but our brain is not an ideal organ to constant retrospection and the best we can do is to pick out and try to retain those patches of rainbow light flitting through memory. The act of retention is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic re-combination of actual events. The bad memoirist re-touches his past, and the result is a blue-tinted or pink-shaded photograph taken by a stranger to console sentimental bereavement. The good memoirist, on the other hand, does his best to preserve the utmost truth of detail. One of the ways he achieves his intent is to find the right spot on his canvas for placing the right patch of remembered color.

*(Strong Opinion 186)*

We forget most of what we experience. As Nabokov writes, the “brain is not an ideal organ to constant retrospection;” all that it can do is pick out little bits of time’s memories of the conscious mind. What we then do with these bits of time and how we appropriate them determines their value. From this passage, we find Nabokov to distinguish between the good and the bad memoirist. The bad memoirist retouches his past for the appeasement of his emotional mind; whereas, the good memoirist does all to preserve the past in every detail, even those saturated with trauma. These perhaps seem to be obvious definitions, but what comes out of them is Nabokov’s claim that “The act of retention is the act of art.” Art presents the truth of the past, even embracing all misfortunes. And so the good memoirist is the Artist, the individual who invokes his imagination but still sees that his imagination is dependent upon the past. We’ve already concluded that the imagination can stand alone in time, meaning that unlike memories that function by relating cues of the present to the same markers in the past, imagination

occurs in a present void of cues. Like we saw in “That in Aleppo Once...,” there was nothing in any present environment that brought him to an image of his wife. He had to *force* an image of her brown birthmark. The imagination recognizes time in the same manner as memory, in that it sees that which occurred in the past to be a memory; however, it does not regard the past as something to be altered.

Apart from time’s responsibility to the imagination, I want to speak briefly about Nabokov’s claim that the “genius” or imagination is naturally occurring in the mind of the child. In the following chapter, we will come to speak about the infantile mind, memory formation, and society’s influence by means of social construction on the two. Here I address the mind of the child in the context of the imagination. According to Nabokov, the imagination leaves the child once the mind has retained all of its memories—we saw this earlier. To continue along this line of discussion for the purpose of further explicating nuances of the imagination, Nabokov’s own accounts of his childhood are inundated with imagined experiences. In *Speak, Memory* he writes,

A dreamier and more delicate sensation was provided by another cave game, when upon awakening in the early morning I made a tent of my bedclothes and let my imagination play in a thousand dim ways with shadowy snowslides of linen and with the faint light that seemed to penetrate my penumbral covert from some immense distance, where I fancied that strange, pale animals roamed in a landscape of lakes. (*Speak, Memory* 13)

Described in language that ultimately comes to fill the mind and kill the imagination, this passage is coated in words that bring a notion of a sublime memory, yet one that is also very nebulous in nature, making it very clearly “unreal.” We know this memory to have

come originally from the imagination even without Nabokov's telling. It comes from a "dreamier and more delicate sensation," a space in the mind that recognizes the memory as very separate from the external environment; it is, however, this external environment that makes memories such as this "unreal." The first time that Nabokov's mind lived this experience, we must assume that it seemed entirely real to him—it has only faltered from this individual sphere of reality due to arrival of memory. What then sets the imagined apart from the remembered is the intrusion of memories formed from a foundation of esoteric influence, and really, corruption that attempted to rewrite what was "real."

The philosopher and phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl invokes the central philosophical premise of "strong, unalloyed belief in the reality of experience" (Ender 225). Husserl claims that our trust in memories derives from a belief in the existence of the world that we perceive. We sustain this belief by believing in the reality of our experience in the world (Ender 75). In speaking of Husserl's theory, Jean Guillaumin writes, "[Memory] invokes a particular form of complex belief, which is founded on a more general characteristic of consciousness: 'originary belief,' 'pure belief in the strongest sense' in the reality of experience. In the experience of remembering, the assertion of reality is posited in the past" (Guillaumin 9). Thus, in order to remember the mind must believe in the reality in which it exists. From this we can also conclude that the mind must believe the reality of the spatial environment and the teachings of this reality. Furthermore, we must say that the reality must be well-defined in order for the individual mind to believe it, with a logical structure that the mind can perceive and make sense of. Arguably, to be "well-defined" the mind must be able to locate the reality within a spectrum of space and time. Evelyne Ender writes, "The representations that

Woolf has imagined for us, with their high degree of realism, feed this same desire for an unambiguous reality” (Ender 75). As we move now into a discussion of Virginia Woolf’s work, I would like to begin by questioning the charge of Ender’s statement. Foremost, the imagined stands apart from memory in its holding of an ambiguous reality. We can extrapolate from Ender, that the imagination is purposed to make sense of the reality. This does imply that the imagination can only exist when the mind starts to question the validity of the reality in which it remembers. The imagination must then work to understand the anomalies that first troubled the memory.

Ender writes, “Woolf richly illustrates the link between memory and the faculty of the imagination, by letting us see how images enable her to build memory scenes” (Ender 47). She is not necessarily incorrect in this assertion, however, I find her to be a bit too vague for us properly to make an argument in full agreement of her assertion. We can accept Ender’s argument if she is arguing that Woolf engages the imagination to clarify the realm from where the memory comes, although continuing on in her writing by no means corroborates Ender’s support of this point—“We have, of course, no other evidence for their existence than her words; for unlike neural patterns, which can be shown on a screen when a perception or a memory occurs, mental images escape our recording, measuring, or imaging devices” (Ender 47-48). Regardless, the questioning of Ender’s argument does lead us nicely into an analysis of Woolf’s work, particularly *To the Lighthouse*. This novel is considered to be not only one of Woolf’s best works, but also her novel that speaks best to the notions of memory and imagination (Nalbantian 80). In looking at *To the Lighthouse*, we will further evaluate this relationship between memory, imagination, and reality.

From now until the end of the chapter, we focus on Woolf. In regards to *To the Lighthouse*, we are to find the mind of Woolf, the creator of the novel, to be just as important as that of Lily Briscoe's, Woolf's creation and unmarried painter. The novel itself is divided into three sections, ending with the moment in which Lily finally completes her painting and Woolf her novel. For now, we turn our focus to the beginning of the third section<sup>8</sup>. This section takes place a decade or two after the first section, in a post-WWII world where most of the characters are absent or dead. Mrs. Ramsey, a protagonist of the first section has died, and is memorialized only by Lily's memory. Within this section, there is one particular passage on which I wish to focus. The section begins with Lily wanting to ask, "D' you remember, Mr. Carmichael?" (*To the Lighthouse* 96), which she repeats several times. This thought spawns a long moment of recollection, in which we almost seem to be located again in the first section of the novel. Lily's memory completely envelops the narration, resulting in a form that once again questions the "present"—"Is it a boat? Is it a cask?" Mrs. Ramsey said. And she began hunting round for her spectacles. And she sat, having found them, silent, looking out to sea. And Lily painting, steadily, felt as if a door had opened...." (*To the Lighthouse* 96) It is really at this moment that Lily truly takes on her role as a painter. By this I mean to suggest, that as this artist, this possessor of "genius," Lily is now charged with inciting her imagination to not only paint a picture in order to remember the past, but really to make sense of the past's memories. To this point, Ender writes of "Time Passes," the third section, to be the moment at which Mrs. Ramsey's death becomes readily and mysteriously apparent. "Lily Briscoe, meanwhile, who is present throughout the

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<sup>8</sup> The third section is entitled "Time Passes"

narrative, takes on the role of a witness, rememberer, and mourner...that [which] will commemorate the invisible presence is ultimately hers to take up” (Ender 213).

As Ender states, Lily’s role as an artist becomes synonymous with that of the “witness, rememberer, and mourner.” An idea which we see a strong presence of in the following passage:

Lily stepped back to get her canvas—so—into perspective. It was an odd road to be walking, this further, until at last one seemed to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea. And she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there. Now Mrs. Ramsey got up, she remembered. (*To the Lighthouse* 97)

Lily here intentionally turns to her imagination by stepping back to retrieve the canvas. We find reason for this in all the turmoil passing around her. “D’ you remember?” marked the moment in which Lily’s past returned with issue. And so she turned to her canvas for catharsis. This catharsis comes in the form of the blue paint, a blue paint that reflects the past. Although, is *reflects* correct? Perhaps more appropriate would be to say that the blue paint instigates a rewriting of the past. Nalbantian writes, “Common to both the writer Woolf and her character the painter Briscoe, there is the retrieval of memory through the means of respective art” (Nalbantian 81). Art does not retrieve the memory, rather the memory retrieves the art and in doing so begs for reflexive clarification.

In all the examples we have seen, memory precedes imagination—Nabokov’s narrator in “That in Aleppo Once...” needed to remember the problematic birthmark to form any image of his horrid wife and Lily Briscoe only turned to her canvas after experiencing emotional turmoil with her relationship to the past. Supporting this claim, the passage from *To the Lighthouse*, eventually comes to the following,

And this, Lily thought, taking the green paint on her brush, this making up scenes about them, is what we call ‘knowing’ people, ‘thinking’ of them, ‘being fond’ of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same. She went on tunneling her way into her picture, into her past. (*To the Lighthouse* 97)

She paints because she knows her memories to be untrue. Seemingly, it was only the canvas that revealed the true nuances behind the problematic nature of these memories, for it was only after her turning to the canvas that she was able to see reason. By turning to the canvas Lily is able to make changes to the falseness of “‘knowing’ people, ‘thinking’ of them, ‘being found of them,’” and we will see this truly illuminated in the closing scene of the novel.

## **Conventional Language and Reality**

I wish to shift now from talking directly about the purpose of the imagination to why it is that the imagination is necessary and what the exact problems are that lead to any disbelief of a reality. We have already briefly touched upon the fact that social conditioning teaches the mind a structured language that limits self-expression. Particularly, in the context of imagination, I consider this to be an idea that we need to explore in some depth. We begin with Virginia Woolf in what follows as the fallibility of society's language. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Virginia Woolf recorded a program with the BBC entitled "Craftsmanship." In it, she spoke of the fallacies of the English language, or rather the inability of such to accurately articulate the mind's word. The entire piece is arguably fascinating, but I find there to be a notion of particular delight, one that Woolf employs multiple times throughout her talk, that "words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind" ("Craftsmanship" 2). In the most basic of senses we can say that Woolf is here arguing for the fallibility of conventional language in the translation of mental processes. The issue of language is paramount in the consideration of most any literary topic, but given the speaker of these above words, I find it most appropriate to examine the issue of language in the context of the writer and her mind. In order to do so, we will first create a theoretical framework from which to consider the nuances of language in its workings with communications and mental translations (again, how is this related to imagination?). When building this framework, we engage the words of the writer so to best capture the experiences that language can languish upon her mind. From here we

consider the theoretical conclusions that we come upon through the practices of Virginia Woolf, Meena Alexander, and Lily Briscoe (as a creation of Virginia Woolf, but still brilliant example of the woman Artist); all of this hopefully to come to answer how language treats the mind and the mind's imagination.

It is important to qualify that we are talking about a strict adherence to language, a language that is taught as the proper means of expression. We will come to talk in more detail about the social construction of memory and reality, but we need to here realize language to follow a similar birth. We are taught our language, how to write, speak, and think—in fact, it is believed that memory formation cannot begin until the mind learns language—but because language too falls victim to the powers of social construction, language limits our abilities of expression based on what the respective society has deemed appropriate in its collective memory. We label this means of collective expression “conventional language.” To assume that all forms of expression fail to actually present what the speaker desires to convey would ignore art. However, it is important to question what it is that we are even taught to think through this conventional language. Kandel explains that certain studies of individuals with developmental disorders such as dyslexia and autism have shown that individuals with language disabilities may still have the ability of artistic expression. This then suggests that despite both being methods of “symbolic communication,” visual art and language may not be intrinsically linked in the brain; Kandel then postulates that the human ability of artistic expression predates that of spoken language (*The Art of Insight* 485).

For the sake of determining the exact fault of language, which I believe it necessary to first do in this analysis, I offer Woolf's quotation on the residency of words a bit of context. She says:

It is words that are to blame. They are the wildest, freest, more irresponsible, most unteachable of all things. Of course, you can catch them and sort them and place them in alphabetical order in dictionaries. But words do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind. If you want proof of this, consider how often in moments of emotion when you most need words we find none. ("Craftsmanship" 2)

We here find two principal ideas: the culpability of words and the absence of words in moments of intense emotion. Foremost, we must grapple with why we are to blame words. The suggestion of the immense power that belongs to words, yet the condemnation of its misplacement, yields the view that words cannot make sense of the mind's intricacies. Arguably, we try but fail to put the neurological firings that comprise a thought into understandable form. Language, words, are our understandable form, or so we are taught. This notion is important when considering that no thought originates in this design. Social teachings instruct us to translate every conscious thought into an intelligible object that we can communicate to the self and then the external world. This object, as Woolf alludes to earlier in her talk, is the sentence, the novel, the written page, anything set in linguistic structure that expresses thought.

When we attempt to objectify the intangible, we end with a product that is lacking meaning. It is most interesting that Woolf exemplifies the failing of words through the expression of emotion. Out of all the mind's faculties, why does she call upon emotion? In doing so she is arguably invoking a great sensitivity in the matter of emotional

expression. It is emotional expression that is evidently far more potent to the being than all other of the mind's nuances. But now why is it that words fail us so harshly? For Woolf, the conventional language has become stale. We, as speakers and communicators, are essentially desensitized to the individual word. There is the potential of accurate linguistic expression, for "[i]t is only a question of finding the right words and putting them in the right order. But we cannot do it because they do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind" ("Craftsmanship" 6).

Perhaps it would now be best to question what words have really become. We have noted the human mind now to be desensitized to the word; meaning, that as communicators we are immune to the power of the tools that we are taught to use for expressing. I would like to call to the ideas of Viktor Shklovsky whose theory on language, art, and *defamiliarization* is highly relevant to this part of the discussion. Shklovsky wrote, "If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic" (Shklovsky 17). He speaks to the universal issue of stale perception. As humans, we train our minds to function in patterns—as we shall come to discuss in the conclusion. In doing so, the once fantastic becomes the now mundane. We choose to complicate, thereby forgetting the nuances that articulate our appreciable lives. Our language is principally culpable. Shklovsky explains how desensitized perception is directly related to meaningless linguistic expression.

Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time and compares that with his feeling at performing the action for the ten thousandth time, he will agree with us. Such

habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed. (Shklovsky 17)

In language, we accept normalcy and convention. We do not attempt to stretch the word to our idea; we rather fit the idea to the word. As we shall come to discuss, this is not a phenomenon foreign to the memorial realm. This is what we are taught to do. This is how we are taught to think, and so our thoughts have not only been burdened with the quality of innate incompleteness, but also stand to repeat this damnation. Woolf alludes to the fact that in part, our words are meaningless because collective memory has saturated them to a complete aridity.

We have overused them, words that is. Although perhaps better said, we rely too heavily on memory for the word's definition. As Woolf says in the opening of "Craftsmanship":

Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties of writing them today—that they are stored with other meanings, with other memories, and they have contracted so many famous marriages in the past. ("Craftsmanship" 4)

*Your* word relies upon what *he* already said, and in saying it, he decided what it was to mean. One has the ability to repeat the word, but it will do no justice to the thoughts, for it's been used once already. It's done and has gone stale. The process proceeds very basically as follows: an individual perceived an unnamed object centuries ago and labeled and defined this object based on his interpretation of his perception. Society then ingrained this definition in its "dictionary," so that today when we speak the same word,

we contend that we call upon the very same definition, or rather *interpretation*. What is a word's meaning if not an interpretation? The problem holds that the individual mind is unique—no two will ever rest upon that very same interpretation. Hence, we develop this social “dictionary,” but what we can really refer to as linguistic collective memory, does not suit the unique quality of human thought.

Language holds obvious social purposes. Kandel writes, “the capability of the human brain for language and storytelling enables us to model our world and to communicate those models to others” (*The Art of Insight* 443). Simply stated, we empower language as our means of communication. That is not to say that this language is fully apt to its job, but simply that it is the way we engage in social construction. Nancy Gray writes that “[a] language of one’s own that is also language itself is not invented or so esoteric as to be inaccessible but a process of contextual experience, like subjectivity...[I]anguage and experience become interactive, so that words are not merely symbolic but also experiential” (Gray 5). Gray here posits two points: language, even that which may appear to be adverse, is in fact accessible due to the simple fact that it is language, and language is the means by which we convey experience. Gray’s second point is somewhat ambiguous, but her argument seems to be that language is the means by which to convey experience from the individual to the external world as well as from the individual to the internal self of that very individual. Gray, it seems to me, simplifies both issues far too greatly. She assumes that the individual has control of the language that they speak; that is to say that the individual holds every word to be the true and appropriate to articulate one specific sentiment. Now, we know this to be an impossible phenomenon, especially when the judge of accuracy is a society that is made up of such

persons with every such mental composure. In order for language to be “one’s own,” that one person must have agency and understanding over his language, an impossible metaposition to achieve.

The second scenario really speaks to the fact that the brain stores and recalls memorial nuances in a way that is palpable to the mind. That is to say, that the brain translates the biophysical and biochemical markers of a memory into a language that the mind consciously speaks. Surely this translation foregoes some amount of meaning in its process, however, we have been conditioned to remember in no other way. We come to remember in words. Perhaps remembering in words holds some amount of sense since one first consciously perceives the memory’s experience in the same manner. All conscious thought occurs in the language that the respective environment first teaches the mind.

As Woolf says in “A Letter to a Young Poet,” “The poet is trying honestly and exactly to describe a world that has perhaps no existence except for one particular person at one particular moment” (Woolf 218). The notion behind this quotation is critical to the understanding of this current discussion. Woolf here names and recognizes the uniqueness of perception; however, and more importantly, she projects an awareness of the inherent agency found in language. She describes her own process, and on that very basic level, a process that all writers experience—the ability to manipulate language to an idea, be that a theory, an image, or a lyric. One purpose of art, then, is to capture a moment, an experience that belongs to the Artist. We will return to this question of what art is and how it is related to language, but first I think it necessary to continue questioning why we structure our language upon such a fundamentally faulty system of

definition. Perhaps the issue at hand is not so much the search for an answer as to why we rely so heavily on language for expression, but rather the need for an acceptance of the fact that the language we have entrusted to translate and communicate our thoughts will never be able to do so completely. As Woolf cited, many times at moments of utmost emotional desperation, words are absent. But can we rather say, nonexistent?

Meena Alexander, an author, poet, and professor who was raised in India and Sudan, went to England for her graduate studies and afterwards moved to New York where she got a job at a university, married, and started a family. A great deal of her work focuses upon issues of immigration and identity and the impacts of those two issues on the writer's subjectivity (Maxey 1). Additionally, she also writes much about her struggles with language, that is, issues concerning translation from one language to another (be it English to French or Malayalam to English), and she also tells of her pains simply to capture words.

Sometimes words flee from me. And I fall through a dark door, into a zone where consonants and vowels vanish, when syntax bends into broken hooks, like so many pieces of jagged metal. I feel at such times as if I were walking in between the tracks of languages, much as one might walk between the rails of a train line and touch the stone beneath, bloody dirt over which the lines of transport are laid.  
(Alexander 259)

Let us look upon these words such as “dark,” “vanish,” “jagged,” “bloody,” and “broken.” They mark a level of obvious pain. This level functions to present Alexander's realization of her inability to communicate with language. What is interesting here is her assertion that she is the victim when words leave *her*, not anyone else. She suffers, not

those who stand outside of her mind waiting to hear her voice. Alexander's description is unbelievably provocative; her words in their absence have abandoned her in a state of utter despair.

This image of the trapped, and really tortured, author invokes nothing more than the confirmation of language's inadequacies, inadequacies that create a duality in this idea of being lost—one side being the failure to communicate with the external world and the other being the failure to communicate with the self. Alexander explains that “sometimes I have felt that I was translating from a place of no words—translate in the early sense, of transporting across a border” (Alexander 259). Well, then, what is there? If there exists a place with no words, what is there in instead? For surely we need words because we have trained ourselves to *be* within words. As I have already articulated, we train our minds to think in words. Despite the mind's capabilities of performing far beyond the limitations of words, we have restricted our conscious thoughts to these words. And so what does happen when there are no words? I arrive at one more question that I think may lead the rest of this discussion—when words cannot appropriately express an emotion or thought, do they really exist at all? Or rather, should we assume that they do not exist so that we do not attempt dishonorably to articulate that which we desire to communicate?

As I made the distinction earlier, we have been talking about *conventional* language—words, sentences, letters—all of which are surely fine to communicate ideas in some situations. This is again just the form of language that conditions our mind to consider itself as the socially proper means of conversation. *Language*, at least conceptually, is not limited to this sort of formal structuring of words. The purpose of

language is to communicate, again with the world and with the self. We should for no reason assume that communication must occur through only one medium, especially one that is often inadequate. What about a painting, or poem, a dance or song? What about art? Why do we seem to assume that art is not often a more appropriate alternative to conventional language?

Woolf and Alexander speak a great deal about the troubles that language brings them, but we do find them both offering an alternative, a remedy. Alexander turns to poetry—

It seems to me that the lyric poem is a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world. To make a lyric poem I have to enter into a dream state. But at the same time, almost by virtue of that disconnect, it becomes a very intense location to reflect on the world. (Alexander 284)

Woolf furnishes a very similar statement in “A Sketch of the Past,” focusing upon an *artistic* form of language to free herself from the binds and pain in which conventional words have often left her.

...it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real but putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. (“Sketch of the Past” 72)

By taking control of the words that have otherwise plagued her, Woolf turns the charge of the words into her catharsis; in fact, both women do. They turn to the very words that drove them to the depths of pain into art.

Here I think it important to now ruminate on what art really is and the purpose that art has for the human mind, and a good starting place is with the psychologist, Rudolf Arnheim, who writes of the presence of society in the viewing of art.

With the turn towards psychology, the theory of art began to take cognizance of the difference between the physical world and its appearance, and subsequently, of the further difference between what is seen in nature and what is recorded in an artistic medium...What is seen depends on who is looking and who taught him to look. (Arnheim 75)

I think it also important to note that Alexander writes in her memoir, *Fault Lines*, that she found it nearly impossible to write about certain moments such as her father's death. She instead created poems to liberate these moments, writing, "Bit by bit I realized that the form of the poem offered something I needed, a translation out of the boundaries of the actual, a dance of words that might free me from my own body" (Alexander 121). She does attempt to write about some of these particular moments in *Fault Lines*, the moments she claims are easier to put into verse, but she does so with very obvious difficulty.

For example, the remembrance of her grandfather's sexual abuse marks an intense emotional response by Alexander. She extracts a bit of the memory in her memoir, but the result is highly broken, disorganized, and really ineffective when juxtaposed to the same moment in her poem, "Black River, Walled Garden." In the poem she writes, "Who could I tell about the library?/ What grandfather did with fingers, lips, and thighs,/ within the sight of Bibles, encyclopedias, dictionaries" (Alexander). This account is far more intimate, descriptive, and telling than the broken version from her memoir—"His library

with the theology books and books of Gandhi and Marx and Lenin. The tea desk where I had to lie down as he touched my body” (Alexander 240). In *Fault Lines*, Alexander attempted to focus upon everything but the actual focal point, that being, the sexual abuse by her grandfather.

Art, for Alexander, thus becomes her catharsis from conventional language and the traumas of her reality. Still holding the same purpose of communication, her art, in the form of poetry, allows her to not only accurately express that which needs to be expressed but also provide a therapeutic release that her other structured words cannot possess. Likewise, in writing about *To the Lighthouse*, Ellen Tremper remarks about Woolf “...and thus enable her to make art in a different way, for language has a reflexive effect on its maker” (Tremper 5). Turning words into *art* creates understanding of the most intimate self. What we then find is the ability to reflect upon the self and the reality of this self. When restriction of expression is muted, we may arguably ruminate upon the memory’s image rather than focusing upon articulating the details of the memory for the purpose of comprehension. Art, without the rules and structure of conventional language, permits the mind to release without obligation. This is a complicated phenomenon that we have really yet fully to understand, but if not from personal experience, we can see from artists such as Woolf and Alexander that art and the imagination can succeed where simple words cannot. Thoughts are not restricted to an agreed upon form that all are taught to understand; rather, art’s words, the imagination, are concerned foremost with making sense of the world.

What then is this art? It is very much a sort of language, though nothing similar to this conventional language, which we have been examining in the previous pages of this

chapter. I wrote previously that art might have the power to substitute when conventional language is insufficient. Here I wish to address this possibility. Shklovsky wrote that art fights against defamiliarization. Art allows the mind to portray what it sees instead of what it has been taught to see.

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficult and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky 21)

This idea of art making the “unfamiliar” is paramount. By this idea, art is a teacher but a teacher who teaches all that the lessons of society’s social conditioning classes left out. It shows us something new and tells us why this something *is*. Art transforms convention for the sake of the individual, the soul of the individual. Art invokes well-being amidst a stifling world.

Woolf and Alexander both show us that they have decided to manipulate their conventional language into an imagined language. Of course, this cannot be said to be the case simply because the women are writers. Surely many writers do not use their words as art, nor do they consider them to be so. Their status as artists comes from the active desire to write their words into a cathartic medium. Woolf develops a beautiful statement about her relationship with her art, one I believe to greatly corroborate this current argument, and also one that renders sense to her creation of Lily Briscoe. In regards to writing, she states:

Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. (“A Sketch of the Past” 72)

Art for Woolf clarifies two concerns, one’s world and one’s self. Woolf’s nonfiction writings certainly speak to this notion, as we have seen, but her fiction is perhaps an even more powerful example of art’s triumph over conventional language.

As a source of Woolf’s fiction, I turn to *To the Lighthouse* and Woolf’s Lily Briscoe as dual complements to Meena Alexander the poet and Virginia Woolf the writer—all in regards to the notion of art as a more appropriate means of communication when simple words fail. Tremper argues that Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse* from a base of personal experience. In reference to the elaboration of “ordinary experience,” Tremper posits that “[t]his elaboration represents her conscious reworking and rewording of those fleeting impressions in the Golders Green. It becomes the medium through which she expresses her profoundest idea” (Tremper 5). On June 23, 1923 Woolf wrote in her diary of a moment spent with Mary Sheepshank in Golders Green.

The fresh breeze went brushing all the thick hedges which divide the gardens. Somehow, extraordinary emotions possessed me. I forget now what. Often now I have to control my excitement- as if I were pushing through a screen; or as if something beat fiercely close to me. What this portends I don't know. It is a

general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me. Often it is connected with the sea & St Ives. Going to 46 continues to excite. . . . The sight of 2 coffins in the Underground luggage office I daresay constricts [?] all my feelings. I have the sense of the flight of time; & this shores up my emotions. (Woolf Diary 11:246)

This moment shows itself to be remarkably influential to Woolf's emotions. A multitude of the details from this entry find their way into *To the Lighthouse*, arguably on both a conscious and unconscious part of Woolf to bring new sensation to her experience. The presence of details found in the mind's emotional cellars in work that we consider fiction speaks greatly to the artist's participation in her own imagination and the necessity of her imagination to understand her world. All these details of Woolf's experience, the inspirations for her creation "shore[s] up my emotions." The very source for her art is stored within the walls of her mind's emotion-controlling amygdala. As we have already seen through the example of Alexander, words find it most difficult to express moments of intense emotion. Arguably, any language other than her artistic form would have left Woolf with a lacking portrayal of this experience in *Golders Green*.

*To the Lighthouse* ends with Lily's completion of her painting that was a work-in-progress for decades. There was a great deal that had to happen to Lily's consciousness before it was able appropriately to coalesce the actual experience and the blank canvas. "Questions about the nature of life, the importance of relationships and choices, must be posed and answered before one can 'see' as an artist and interpret the world for others" (Tremper 14). I take issue with Tremper's argument that questions must be *answered* before one can be an artist. Looking at the artistic examples of Woolf and Alexander in

addition to their firsthand accounts of dealing with art, it is, I believe, the *unanswered* questions that generate the art. Surely, a wonder is not art's only inspiration; however, it does not make sense to assume that every artist is all knowing. Factually, the artist or the genius knows no more than her audience. She is simply more aware of the questions that need to be posed. And more importantly, I find that Woolf and Alexander teach us that the purpose of art is not actually to come upon answers, but rather to relish comfortably enough in oneself to be able to see what it is that needs answering. The artist is aware that conventional language cannot convey or make sense of the workings of her mind. In Mikko Makela's opinion, "It becomes clear from Lily's tiring battle to signify on canvas that at the heart of the novel lies the uneasy question of whether the signifier can ever satisfyingly express the signified" (Makela 236). I am not sure that any works of Woolf or Alexander ever speak to this concern. It will surely always be the artist's struggle to "satisfyingly express the signified." What Woolf and Alexander do suggest is that the simple fact that the artist has moved beyond accepting the failure of conventional language proves, at least partially, her triumph over words.

The concluding passage of *To the Lighthouse* speaks strikingly to many of the ideas that we have discussed up until this point, thus, I think it appropriate to share the passage in its entirety.

Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas.

There is was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it

was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (*To the Lighthouse* 117)

We must principally see Woolf in this passage rather than Lily Briscoe. Until the last line Woolf continues to write in the third person, and then ends with herself in the first. And so the line “I have had my vision” has a dual speaker—the obvious Lily Briscoe, and Woolf who came to artistic completion through the writing and creation of this character. The moment is intimate. Lily has completed “her picture” and Woolf her character. Woolf concluded her piece with the simultaneous completion of a literal work of art. This passage contains a clear indication that this painting was the only possible form by which to express the vision at hand, the purpose of which was to generate sense for the self. Lily struggled for years and only reached her final brushstroke when she realized that *she* was satisfied, that *she* had found the answer in her art. This moment has a dual significance. The painting signifies successful artistic expression by Lily, whereas, Lily signifies successful artistic expression by Woolf and relief from collective reality.

## Chapter Three

### **Infantile Memory, Collective Memory, and Confabulation: Rethinking *The Sound and the Fury*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Speak Memory***

“Except I can’t remember anything before I was about 4 because I wasn’t looking at things in the right way before then, so they didn’t get recorded properly.”

-Christopher, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*

Chapter One examined explicit memory, being that form of memory that consciously recalls people, objects, and places of experience. We now return to explicit memory, if only briefly to reevaluate these memories in the context of what they mean in the recalling process. To summarize from Chapter One, explicit memories allow the mind to travel spatially and temporally, and conjure up events and emotional states that “have vanished into the past yet somehow continue to live on in our minds” (*In Search of Memory* 57). Recall of explicit memory is very much distinct from that of implicit memory in that because explicit memory is episodic in nature, it is easier for the mind to “falsely” conjure details. Kandel explains:

But recalling a memory episodically—no matter how important the memory—is not like simply turning to a photograph in an album. Recall of memory is a creative process. What the brain stores is thought to be only a core memory. Upon recall, this core memory is then elaborated upon and reconstructed, with subtractions, additions, elaborations, and distortions. (*In Search of Memory* 84)

Kandel concludes this passage by posing the rhetorical question, “What biological processes enable me to review my own history with such emotional vividness?” (*In Search of Memory* 84). That the nature of the mind rewrites the presentation of the explicit memory each time it remembers, or so Kandel urges us to accept. This chapter, then, discusses why and how it is that the mind transforms its memories in such a way. Such transformations of memory lead to a great many outcomes, all of which impact our analysis of literary texts. Why such memories are feigned during recall becomes our first point of discussion. To answer this question, we consider the beginning of memory in the human mind: infantile memory. From here, we will discuss social conditioning and construction, and conclude by asking what both these processes impart on the mind and in what ways they shape it. We lastly turn to the topic of memory transformation and confabulation and examine how and why forgetting is not only a part of memory but also why the socially conditioned mind is sometimes forced to forget.

In the previous chapter, we spoke briefly about imagination in the mind of the child, paying particular attention to citations from Nabokov and Woolf. We return to these two literary figures, but this time, inquiring more on the nature of infantile memory. Previously, a passage from Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory* told of remembering from imagination, a “cave game” where the building was done with bedclothes. We return to this passage to find Nabokov declare the paramount importance of childhood memories such as these.

How small the cosmos (a kangaroo’s pouch would hold it), how paltry and puny in comparison to human consciousness, to a single individual recollection, and its expression in words! I may be inordinately fond of my earliest impressions, but

then I have reason to be grateful to them. They led the way to a veritable Eden of visual and tactical sensations. (*Speak, Memory* 13)

In claiming that his earliest impressions bring about this “veritable Eden of visual and tactical sensations,” Nabokov is citing these adolescent memories as the foundation of his memory system. Eden is suggestive of a locale of origin, a beautiful origin where the mind and its memories have yet to become clouded with hideous experience. Thus, it also suggests a sentiment of innocence attached to these earliest impressions, an innocence marked by the absence of any infiltration to validate the memory as a place in an esoteric realm.

But what becomes of these memories? Nabokov tells us that certain adolescent memories act as a sort of infrastructure in his individual memory framework but surely something must happen to these memories, for we cannot rightly assume that the mind preserves them in their original state. The mind created these memories by the individual memory framework. However, at this point in the development, the mind had really not experienced the collective memory framework. After the point of formation of these individual adolescent memories, the collective memory framework intrudes. Once this occurs, the mind creates its memories from neither the individual memory framework nor the collective memory framework; it is rather forced to find a point of coexistence for the two. Although, before delving into a discussion of the exact implications of this phenomenon, I continue with Nabokov’s examples and his earliest impressions. In regards to these “earliest impressions,” Nabokov writes the following,

Nothing is sweeter or stranger than to ponder those first thrills. They belong to the harmonious world of a perfect childhood and, as such, possess a naturally plastic

form in one's memory, which can be set down with hardly any effort; it is only starting with the recollections of one's adolescence that Mnemosyne begins to get choosy and crabbed. (*Speak, Memory* 13)

If adolescent memories are "naturally plastic," as Nabokov insists, they are then malleable in response to future experiences. Given that these adolescent memories are representative of a perfect world, they provide a certain sense of catharsis for the mature mind, one that is perforated with social obligation. As means of relief for the mind, these childhood memories are not far removed from the effects of the imagination.

Like the imagination adolescent memories are charged with placing the mind in a state removed from the confusion and constraint of the esoteric invasion of the collective memory framework. The individual memory sphere is thus defined as those memories that were created at the point of mental development that predated social incursion. These memories, partially because we find them to be so vastly different than those formed later on in life, are memories that form their own particular reality. In considering how memories affect the mind, we must consider what the mind believes to be "real" or "true" and thus, what the mind considers to be "reality." Consider that we have two different spheres of memories, those constructed by a society and those that are essentially organic and innocent, making two different spheres of reality. I nominate these the sphere of collective reality and the sphere of individual reality. To speak of these two spheres, I imply that by definition they are entirely separate, particularly in reference to the individual sphere of reality. That is to say, that though individual memories coalesce to form the collective memory, or the collective sphere of reality, we realize that their intermingling extends no further. But, as highlighted in the previous paragraph, these

adolescent memories are supposedly plastic, indicating that they struggle to keep their integrity. In struggling to keep their own integrity, they simultaneously struggle to maintain the reliability of the individual sphere of reality. Because of this, the individual sphere of reality is presumably depleted as the mind moves farther and farther away from its point of adolescent experiences. It is depleted in the quantity of memories that structure the reality and as well as the strength, and therefore, the believability of the memories.

Let us look to the concluding line in the Nabokov passage cited above—“it is only starting with the recollections of one’s adolescence that Mnemosyne begins to get choosy and crabbed” (*Speak, Memory* 13). In many ways, this line reiterates what we established in the previous paragraph, but we can interpret the line a step further and complicate the issue. To claim that the *recollection* of childhood memories brings Mnemosyne to the point of being “choosy and crabbed,” Nabokov suggests that it is not the adolescent memories themselves that cause the disjointed nature of the individual reality sphere, as compared to that of the collective reality sphere, but rather the process of remembering these experiences and bringing them back to the forefront of the mind. In every process of recollection, the mind is reevaluating the experience in memory through a different perspective than it held at the time when it turned the experience into memory. Once the mind has reached maturity, these differences in perspective vary relatively little to those between the mind pre-maturation and post-maturation. Therefore, *recollection* of the earliest impressions is really the mind examining the original experience through a perspective that was entirely foreign to the mind at the point of memorial inception. Surely, the mind then struggles to understand and contextualize its earliest impressions

because the realities in which the memory was first formed and the reality in which the mind now lives are estranged.

In *To the Lighthouse*, we find Woolf presenting a very fascinating argument in regards to adolescent memory. As already mentioned, *To the Lighthouse* is divided amongst three sections. The very first section begins with Mrs. Ramsey promising her six-year-old son that tomorrow they will visit the lighthouse. Some pages and argument later, Mr. Ramsey declares that in fact, “There’ll be no landing at the lighthouse tomorrow” (*To the Lighthouse* 6). His son is disappointed, but we move on in the story. Some subdivisions later, Mrs. Ramsey thinks again of the possibility of bringing her youngest son to visit the lighthouse the following day—“In a moment he would ask her, ‘Are we going to the Lighthouse?’ And she would have to say, ‘No: not tomorrow; your father says not’” (*To the Lighthouse* 36). Mrs. Ramsey then worries that her son will continue to think that they “are not going to the Lighthouse tomorrow,” but more so than worry, she thinks that “he will remember that all his life” (*To the Lighthouse* 36). This thought apparently plagues Mrs. Ramsey for some time because Woolf writes a few lines after this initial mention, “No, she thought, putting together some of the pictures he had cut out—a refrigerator, a mowing machine, a gentleman in evening dress—children never forget” (*To the Lighthouse* 36). The idea of the child never forgetting becomes an obsession of Mrs. Ramsey, as proof in the following passage:

Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example. And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—‘Children don’t forget, children don’t forget’—which she would repeat

and begin adding to it. It will end, it will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord. (*To the Lighthouse* 37)

Apart from this obsession that Mrs. Ramsey clearly has with the supposed permanency of the adolescent mind, she insists upon the importance of adapting one's adult behavior for the purpose of presumably protecting the child from his own memories. Through the eyes of Mrs. Ramsey, "...children never forget. For this reason, it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed" (*To the Lighthouse* 36).

This example from the novel illustrates a few key things about the interaction of this work with our analysis of memory. Foremost, Mrs. Ramsey projects a particular conviction throughout all of these lines regarding the fact that children never forget. The obsessive nature portrays a sense of urgency, one that when put in the context of her actual words suggests that it is an urgency to protect the children from possible implications of never forgetting. Overall, her tone tells us that there is a problem with the apparent fact that children never forget. Let us look to Mrs. Ramsey saying that one must simply wait for the child to go to bed. In doing so, she implies that the role of the adult is to shield the severities of the collective reality from the child. Once the child goes to bed, once he is no longer in the room, the adults may interact with their reality without precautions. Although, as Mrs. Ramsey says, it is a relief when the children go to bed because their memories are no longer in danger, suggesting that certain memories carry a loss of innocence. The relief of children in bed is relief in knowing that the children are no longer susceptible to memories and experiences that will never leave their minds.

In speaking of the child who never forgets, we are not really speaking of the child who forever remembers the time his father did not let him visit the lighthouse. No, rather we are actually talking about the child who was corrupted by the negative emotions that came along with his disappointment of his father not permitting him to visit the lighthouse. It is not a coincidence that Mrs. Ramsey frets about her son remembering *this* moment as opposed to another. For the child, his father denying him the chance to visit the lighthouse that he so desires to see marks an obvious moment of disappointment and perhaps despair. Mrs. Ramsey does not worry about her son “never forgetting” moments of joy because they become moments of positive shaping. However, memories with negative associations mature the child’s mind and in doing so bring him farther and farther away from his individual sphere of reality and closer to the collective sphere of reality. By this suggestion, Mrs. Ramsey clearly recognizes this collective sphere of reality to be much different from Nabokov’s perfect world created by his earliest impressions. The collective sphere of reality can arguably not ever be so perfect as that of the individual because of its very nature of collectivity, the myriad of restructured individual experience is bound to become disjointed within such a packed space. Perhaps his mind will remember the actual incident with his father, although perhaps not, but neither is important in the grand scheme of the child “never forgetting.” What the child actually retains from the expanse of his existence is this corruption that results from the memory. The mind of the child is supple; therefore, to say that it “never forgets” is really to point to the fact that it starts to absorb corruptive aspects of negative experiences with the collective sphere. These memories that the child “never forgets” is what he becomes.

When living within a society, it is an inevitability that the individual will eventually enter into the collective sphere of reality. It is simply unavoidable. Because of this, Mrs. Ramsey's reaction to her son's "never forgetting" seems a bit extreme. She knows that her son will eventually come to be a parcel of this corrupted world. As hard as she tries, she cannot keep him innocent forever. Due to this reason, I believe there to be an inherent duality in this passage from *To the Lighthouse*. On one level, one that is more apparent and superficial, Mrs. Ramsey is worried about the well being of her child. However, I find it more fitting to interpret Mrs. Ramsey in this passage as reacting to her own personal experience of "never forgetting." Seeing the possibility of her son falling from his individual sphere of reality into "corruption" causes Mrs. Ramsey to reflect in a way that forces her see herself. At this point in her life, Mrs. Ramsey surely has a nuanced perspective of the individual mind within the collective sphere of reality, and thus can surely see its problematic nature. Her frantic and obsessive response, then, is really a delayed reaction to her own mental maturation and realization that she has fallen victim to those childhood memories that she can never forget.

Turning now to *The Sound and the Fury*, we find that the impacts that Benjy's first memory has on his mind are remarkable. As already stated, the moment created and defined particular environmental stimuli as necessary for perceiving future moments of reality. The theory of *ecological perspective* explains a natural neurobiological process that occurs in all infants throughout their development of forming memories, a process that substantiates Benjy's memory of Damuddy's funeral. The ecological perspective states that,

...at each point in development, infants of all species epitomize a successful evolutionary adaptation...[where] they rapidly learn the relationships that define their niche and confer survival and reproductive advantage...To meet each new set of ecological demands, infants select particular aspects of episodes to learn and remember until their niche changes again. (Rovee-Collier and Cuevas 168)

Following this theory of ecological perspective, Benjy retained details from this memory in order to understand his surroundings. At the moment of Damuddy's funeral, Benjy's ecological perspective defined him as an intellectual equal to his peers. The understanding that Benjy gained solely from this memory was altered at a later point in his life by accommodation, but the particular details of the episode remain in Benjy's consciousness. The theory of ecological perspective states that the child selects elements of the episode for the sake of understanding his environment. The theory then implies that the child maintains the episodic aspects until he redefines the image of his environment. In the case of Benjy, I think it most appropriate to follow this theory loosely. By examining his narrations, we find that Benjy preserves the episodic details of this first memory throughout his life. Rather than dismissing primary details, as the ecological perspective would suggest, Benjy's use of them compounds his initial concept of reality. Despite mild transformation of his conceptual reality, Benjy continues to respond to stimuli from his first memory. We see Benjy state the phrase, "Caddy smelled like trees" through out his thirty years of narration. His conceptual reality evolves from the point of Damuddy's funeral, but he maintains his initial markers for memory selection.

To answer the question of the relationship between the mind's selectivity of memory and the conceptual reality, we need to understand which article the mind forms first. The mind begins to retain memories at some point after the age of 18 to 24 months. The neural underpinnings that are responsible for encoding, storage, consolidation, retention, and retrieval of memories for our experience develop very early in life, prior to the point at which the mind can store memories; however, our experiences are not available to later conscious recollection unless formed sometime after 18 to 24 months ("On the Importance of Studying Early Memory" 6-7). Mark L. Howe explains that, "the emergence of memory early in life is essential to the flexibility with which infants adapt and learn about their environment" (Howe 6). The emergence of memories is a fascinating point in the life of every human that arguably marks the point at which the infant has enough of an understanding of reality to nominate sensations into mental perceptions.

Memories that form early on in development are usually fragile and rapidly forgotten, a phenomenon referred to as childhood amnesia (Li et al. 2). Li et al. pose a question that is directly related to Mrs. Ramsey's passage, "Specifically, if early experiences cannot be explicitly recalled, how can they influence an individual's functioning later in life" (Li et al. 3). The authors claim their question to remain unanswered, however qualify it by saying "there is an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting the idea that early experiences are critical for later functioning" (Li et al. 3). It is possible that infantile memories exist later on in development in "traces," suggesting that at least some parts of these "forgotten memories" exist beyond the point in time where the memory is overtly expressed, being childhood and infancy (Li et al. 4). Studies

have shown that an enduring memory trace from an infantile or adolescent experience can influence subsequent behavior despite a lack of consciousness of the experience (Frankland et al. 5). Still other studies have suggested that infantile forgetting is due to retrieval failure, however, this is not an accurate explanation for all cases of infantile amnesia (Frankland et al. 4). Li et al. proposed infantile forgetting to occur through two phases. In the first phase, “the memory is no longer explicitly expressed, but can be recovered if an appropriate reminder treatment is given prior to test” (Li et al. 8). With this said, if the memory remains in a dormant state for long enough, it could decay to the point where it is no longer represented in the brain. In other words, infantile forgetting can be due to retrieval failure or storage failure (Li et al. 10).

Freud first used the term “Infantile amnesia” over 100 years ago to refer to the early period in life “when memories that are formed tend to be short-lived or become inaccessible after a relatively short time frame” (“Infantile Amnesia in Human and Nonhuman Animals” 1-2). “Infantile amnesia” refers most particularly to the human’s inability to remember early experiences as maturation unfolds (“Infantile Amnesia in Human and Nonhuman Animals” 2). As previously mentioned, the brain has all of the facilities to form memories prior to when infantile amnesia subsides; however, there is an absence of external basis of environmental understanding that prevents any working memory from forming into a long-term memory. Howe argues that the termination of infantile amnesia “like changes in other areas of memory, is most likely controlled by alternations in the basic processes of encoding, storage, consolidation, retentions, and retrieval that drive memory across development....” (3) In between birth and the age of approximately two years, the child gains some sort of ability that allows his memory to

fully function. In order for memory to properly form and function, the mind needs to contain a foundation on which to create the memory; that is to say, the mind needs to first have a comprehension of the implications of all sensations. For this to occur, the mind needs to have an understanding of language in order to give a label to various sensations.

Without language, the mind would have no sense of markings on which to substantiate stimuli. The formation of language should suggest an additional layering of one's conceptual reality. Arguably, it is the formation of a conceptual reality that allows the child to form memories. Howe states that, "Of course, it is not clear what such narrative comparisons tell us about memory of those experiences... can be talked about once language has developed" ("On the Importance of Studying Early Memory" 2). The stage of infantile amnesia ends with the ability to form memories based on techniques of linguistic labeling. Howe later states that, "for humans, the period of infantile amnesia is also one in which language skills are relatively impoverished; and the acquisition of language was thought by some to herald the end of infantile amnesia" ("Infantile Amnesia in Human and Nonhuman Animals" 11). The end of infantile amnesia marks the formation of the conceptual reality. Society has constructed the child at this point so that he has a well enough grasp of language on which to then create his notion of his world.

Siroj Sorajjakool explains that the infant, the being without a concept of reality, is driven by "unconscious instinctual needs" (Sorajjakool 154). She then goes on to argue that,

The infants identify themselves with the perception of the world... Life at this level lacks conflicts. The emergence of conflicts takes place when children learn to distinguish themselves from the external world and others surrounding them.

This emergence of consciousness is also the emergence of the ego-self...I believe that the ego is there for the purpose of interacting with the external world, the external reality. Through the interaction between the child and the external reality comes the formation of a belief system. (Sorajjakool 154)

With the emanation of the “ego-self,” the individual is then able to interact with his environment in a way that allows him to understand the world from the place that he has within it. The concept of self-identity is critical in a person’s concept of his world or his reality. Growth of comprehension best occurs through comparative approaches by which the individual must first be able to identity himself as part of the world before he can understand the world itself. Sorajjakool denotes her “belief system” to represent the same entity as the “conceptual reality.” Sorajjakool’s “belief system” encompasses the individual’s understandings, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and images of the world, as does the conceptual reality. With this parallel drawn, Sorajjakool then states that, “the belief system becomes the filter through which the child sees the world” (Sorajjakool 154). The individual first inherits his notion of reality, what the world is and what the world is supposed to be, and the rest of his perceptions are filtered through this notion. His concept of reality born from his conceit to the ego-self directs his perceptions—his perceptions, which become his memories.

To better understand infantile amnesia, we must also understand the development of the infantile mind. Doing so will help us better understand how the mind constructs its image of reality. Piaget writes, “To understand how the budding intelligence constructs the external world, we must first ask whether the child, in its first months of life, conceives and perceives things as we do, as objects that have substance, that are

permanent and of constant dimensions” (Piaget 1). The idea of memory development and the construction of a patterning reality really come down to first rely upon the development of a scheme of perception, as Piaget alludes to in these lines. In order for the child to remember, as with any individual, he must be able to perceive and interpret these perceptions in a way that the mind understands. In many respects, perception is dependent upon labels and language, as evidenced by the fact that infantile amnesia begins to significantly fade with the outset of linguistic learning (Piaget 20). Piaget alludes to the notion of object permanence in the above lines, being the understanding that objects continue to exist when we they cannot be observed (Piaget 39). Object permanence, a key part in mental development, is really the remembrance of an object, the ability to “perceive” an object when it is not present; but in order for one to remember an object one must first know what the object is. Meaning, that one must have the language to not only label but to describe the object. Without such language, the mind cannot make sense of the reality in which this object exists. This very much gets back to the idea we discussed in the previous chapter of conventional language. While conventional, and really collective, language may prevent the mind from fully understanding its reality. The mind also would be entirely unable to perceive details of this reality without some semblance of the language that the reality uses itself.

Piaget explains that object concept is far from innate and is constructed in stages, of which he outlines six. The first stage, reflex schema stage (0-1 months), marks the earliest moments of the development during which the baby learns how the body can move and work. Vision is blurred, the attention span is short at best, and object permanence is completely absent from the mind during this stage. Primary circular

reactions stage (1-4 months) is the point at which babies first notice objects and begin to follow their movements. Babies will continue to look where the object once stood after it has been removed, although this lasts for only a few seconds (Piaget 20). This stage is especially marked by responses to familiar images and sounds and anticipatory reactions to familiar events, thus indicated that the infants' reactions become less reflexive and more purposeful (Piaget 25). At 4-8 months the infant will move into the secondary circular reactions stage when he will begin to reach for an object that is partially hidden; however, if the object is completely hidden, the child will make no attempt. It is believed that the infant learns to coordinate vision and comprehension during this stage, though novel behaviors are not yet imitated (Piaget 38). The fourth stage (8-12 months), coordination of secondary circular reactions, is deemed the most important stage for cognitive development. It is at this time that the child learns causality. Object permanence appears, as the child begins to retrieve an object when it is entirely concealed (Piaget 44). During the fifth stage (12-18 months), tertiary circular reaction, the child is able to retrieve an object when it is hidden several times in varying locations, but cannot locate it when it is outside of the perceptual field (Piaget 48). The sixth stage, invention of new means through mental combination (18-24 months), marks full development of object permanence (Piaget 50).

Though this sixth and final stage by no means marks the end of infantile development, it does show the need for the mind to understand spatial and temporal concepts when forming memories and understanding its reality. As Piaget claims, "The problem is closely connected with that of space. A world without objects would not present the character of spatial homogeneity and of coherence in displacements that

marks our universe” (Piaget 2). Looking to an application of this idea, we saw in the first chapter that a great deal of Benjy’s associative markers are defined by tangible objects, objects which presumably define a portion of his reality. Thus, in order for Benjy to understand the reality, he needs first to understand these objects, and then to perceive them later on in life. As discussed, the scene of the schoolgirls marks a crucial point in Benjy’s life in that it was a distinct shift in his reality. Caddy arguably acts as one of these markers that define Benjy’s reality. Once she left, his notion of the world was confused, and so we saw him trying to grab onto different, yet somewhat similar objects, for the purpose of redefining his reality.

Benjy describes the “thrashing trees” through a collective first person subject—“*We* could hear the tree thrashing,” “The tree quit thrashing. *We* looked up into the branches” (*The Sound and the Fury* 30). This voice is extremely atypical in any narration that Benjy gives. Rarely does he employ “we” over the “I.” In most instances he narrates from a voice that seems to be an almost third person narrator. Not necessarily by choice, but Benjy’s narrations usually draw him as distant from the action. But in this *first* memory, Benjy stands together with his brothers and Versh, looking up at his sister. The peculiar use of the plural first person suggests Benjy’s feeling of camaraderie. At such a young age, people would yet to have defined his attributes as entirely “idiotic.” He was still just as “normal” as the other boys whom he was standing next to. This moment creates a reality in which Benjy was treated as a “normal” individual and not some blubbing idiot who can’t control his crying outbursts or recognize his own name. This impression of Benjy did not last long beyond this moment. It certainly ended well before he was five years old, as we will see at the moment when Benjy is renamed. However,

this initial impression, while false in nature, did give Benjy an identity that aided in socially constructing his conceptual reality. The identity eventually disintegrated, but the recollection and obsession of the particular moment in which this identity was palpable suggests that the reality associated with this identity did not perish.

Benjy creates his ego-self in two stages. His first memory of Damuddy's funeral, as already discussed, adheres to his initial image of his ego-self. The distinction that the memory *adheres* to the image of the ego-self rather than *creates* the ego-self is crucial to make here. Benjy's notion of ego-self had to have formed long before this moment. In order for a memory to form, the individual must hold a conceptual reality, which develops after they have gathered his ego-self. This memory simply represents the first stage of formation of Benjy's ego-self. The second stage of his ego-self compounds upon the image formed at the very end of his period of infantile amnesia, a stage that is represented through the memory that Benjy has of his renaming.

Benjy's mother decides to rename him in late 1900 when he is around the age of five (Stewart Backus 444), which occurs approximately two years after Damuddy's funeral. This scene, like most others in Benjy's narrative, appears in parts. The first piece that Benjy tells of this moment is through the following conversation:

*What you want to get her started for, Dilsey said.*

*Whyn't you keep him out of there.*

*He was just looking at the fire, Caddy said. Mother was telling him his new name.*

*we didn't mean to get her started.*

*I knows you didn't, Dilsey said. Him at one end of the house and her at the other. You let my things alone, now. Don't you touch nothing till I get back. (The Sound and the Fury 56)*

This first description only alludes to the moment of his renaming. Benjy doesn't explicitly describe the moment itself until a few pages later. This removed description still presents a stimulating detail that Benjy took from the experience. "*He was just looking at the fire.*" The image of fire, bright glowing objects, pervades Benjy's narration. The following description of his name-change reappears a page after the first. This time the description is void of any allusion to the renaming itself. We can only conclude that this description is referencing the name-change scene because of the details.

This separation of the telling of the memory, and really allusion to the actual memory its self, demonstrates a present time narrative partitioning of a singular memory. Arguably, the partitioning of Benjy's memory illuminates the particular stimuli from the memory that guide Benjy's perceptions later in life. When reading the following description of the name-change scene, the last two lines hold particular importance in the objects that Benjy developed as markers of his reality.

*I could hear the clock, and I could hear Caddy standing behind me, and I could hear the roof. It's still raining, Caddy said. I hate rain. I hate everything. And then her head came into my lap and she was crying, holding me, and I began to cry. Then I looked at the fire again and the bright, smooth shapes went again. I could hear the clock and the roof and Caddy. (The Sound and the Fury 57)*

This is very clearly a moment of overt emotional distress. His sensations are guiding the narration to the point where Benjy himself seems to be an esoteric figure. The cognitive processes of consciously selecting stimuli from his environment are entirely absent. Instead, the details of the clock, and the rain, and the fire, all seem to come into his consciousness with a sort of confusion. All of these stimuli are simply present without Benjy's ability to comment on why or how. His mind has selected these particular stimuli from its subconscious concept of reality.

At the moment of his renaming, Benjy inarguably alters his notion of ego-self. Following the argument made by Sorajjakool, Benjy's conceptual reality would evolve with a change in his ego-self. From the portions of Benjy's narration that temporally proceed the moments of Damuddy's funeral and Benjy's name-change, we can see that the conceptual reality that resulted from the joining of these two moments distinctly selects memories for the purpose of supporting the conceived notion of the world. Benjy's memory of "the gate scene," which happened around 1910 (Pryse 43), epitomizes the guidance of Benjy's selective reality. The two memories of Damuddy's funeral and Benjy's renaming exhibit a clear thought in Benjy's mind of Caddy as a maternal figure. Benjy has a decisive connection to Caddy—a phenomenon that was arguably born from the moment when Benjy was looking up at Caddy while she sat in the tree and when Caddy comforted Benjy in the midst of his crisis with his ego-self. The gate scene only occurred because of Benjy's desire to see Caddy. The desire for the object defines the object itself. Therefore, Benjy's desire to see Caddy, who is an important stimulus in his conceptual reality, confabulated her existence for the purpose of appeasing the emotional desire and supporting Benjy's notion of the world.

The stimuli born from Benjy's selective memory plagues his reality often times to the point of self-imposed disturbance. The marked stimuli categorize all sensations that enter Benjy's brain. The brain then selects which sensations to perceive based off of the encoded guides of the conceptual reality; however, certain sensations will not always properly depict the esoteric world. The mind is so conditioned to associate certain stimuli with particular meanings, that it will often times misguide itself for the appeasement of desire. This gets back to the idea of Piaget's theory of "operational thought." Piaget's *accommodation*, implicit in the theory of "operational thought," is the result of the mind's conditioning. As Piaget theorized, the mind fits new information to an already contained notion of reality. The gate scene in *The Sound and the Fury* perfectly demonstrates this phenomenon.

They came on. I opened the fate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright, whirling shapes. (*The Sound and the Fury* 53)

The image of the "bright, whirling shapes" relates to Benjy's memory of his renaming when staring at the fire. Benjy is experiencing a moment of sensory overload that arguably resulted from his mind's confusion of the supposed purpose of the marked stimuli against the actual design of the episodic stimuli. His mind is so conditioned to assume all sensations of fiery or bright objects to indicate one thing—the epitome of

Benjy's conceptual reality—that when his present experience fails to properly associate with memories that did meet the conditions of his social reality, and thus he cannot comprehend his present. The question now stands if the mind *intentionally* misguides itself in accommodation or if new information is subconsciously altered.

## **The Divide between Reality and Collective Memory and Individual Memory**

As already alluded to, there are distinct guiding principles of association that connect Benjy's narration despite its disjointed chronological order. These principles of association will ultimately elucidate the relationship between Benjy's memory and conceptual reality, but we must first consider the elements of any reality. What is Benjy's reality? How does the reality defined Benjy's persona? What formed his conception of reality? In her article entitled, *Theories of Personality: Interpretations of Reality and the Formation of Personality*, Siroj Sorajjakool asserts that the key to understanding human personality is not in reality itself, but that the act of grasping reality leads to the formation of personality (Sorajjakool 144). There are many different theories on what reality actually is. All theories do contend that whatever reality is, it is a subjective experience. Plato suggests that reality can be described through the notion that the "idea" of a chair is the real chair itself and every concrete chair is only the representation of the real (Sorajjakool 144). This would implicate that the mind attempts to "fit" every image that the brain perceives into a preconditioned image of what that "real" object is.

The concept of reality defines perception, but our conception of reality is also a personal construct. Immanuel Kant postulated that reality is the "thing-in-itself" (Sorajj145). Sorajjakool describes Kant's theory in regards to reality:

Our understanding of reality is our personal construct. There is, for Kant, no knowledge without sensations, and therefore all we can know is not the thing-in-itself but that which we perceive through sensations. All we perceive are

sensations of the thing-for-itself, but never the thing-in-itself. Nevertheless, the mind is not something passive which merely awaits the registration of sensation upon it...The mind is active. It actively organizes different information received through sensations into the phenomenal world. This innate, dynamic aspect of mind Kant calls the *a priori*...We live in a real world but we interact with the world as perceived by us. (Sorajjakool145)

The mind works to fit all sensations and perceptions of environmental stimuli into a collective image of what the mind *already* believes the world to be. The mind seeks to gratify a desire to fulfill the notion of what is reality. In order to do so, it selects sensations from the environment based off of this preconceived notion of reality. All sensations and perceptions are directed at corroborating this notion.

The inherent dependency between memory selection and one's conceptual reality is fallible—Benjy's memory of the gate scene proves exactly that. The possession, however, of a conceptual reality is unavoidable. The birth of a conceptual reality lies in what is referred to as, *collective memory*. One can think of a collective memory as a *shared memory*. As Avishai Margalit explains in his book, *The Ethics of Memory*, “A *shared memory*, on the other hand, is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode” (Margalit 51). Arguably, collective memory imparts a desire in the human mind to communize the human experience. Historical precedent breeds a desire for shared experience, a concept congenital in collective memory. Humanity nurses its progenies to live by a conceptual reality. A conceptual reality, while individualized, is socially constructed. From the collective

memory generated by historical precedent, humanity, or society, propagates a technique for conditioning the minds of every individual.

Faulkner wrote with a clear consciousness of the social implications of his time. As previously mentioned, there were profound social studies at the time of the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* looking at the signs of idiocy. Susan Donaldson asserts that, “Faulkner, like so many other writers of his generation, had begun to look up from his own aesthetic preoccupations and become attuned to the social and economic misery engulfing his own community and that of the country at large” (Donaldson 105-106). Faulkner infused relevant social and historical context into his character of Benjy. Yet even more important is the fact that historical and social contexts are impossible to avoid. Faulkner wrote with such a background because this background consumed him, just as it does every individual. The degree of consumption is certainly variably, but it is nonetheless universal.

In an attempt to better understand how one deals with the conceptual reality, Sorajjakool writes that,

...every interpreter remains a contextual being who lives and moves within the bounds of socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological environments. Each seeks to understand the whole from a particular point, the infinite from the finite, the universal from the individual. Each possesses a drive to move beyond the environmental limitations, and, although one may achieve a great deal of this “beyondness” and objectivity, it is never a fully objective beyond. (Sorajjakool 147)

The desire to understand and contend with the world is innate; however, the construction of how one is to come to his belief of understanding is not. A conceptual reality is purposed to force the individual to view the world through particular stipulations. The individual creates the conceptual reality, but his unavoidable social context cultivates him to construct his reality in a certain manner.

The mind selects memories from a preconceived notion of reality. This conceptual reality is an inherent part of the human experience—social governances construct the child based off of predetermined criteria to bare a notion of his world. The collective memory established the principles of social construction by recalling important experiences and beliefs from history that were critical to the human experience at the time. Individual memories, such as those that we see in Benjy's section of *The Sound and the Fury*, comprise the collective memory. The process is thus entirely cyclical in nature: the individual selects and creates memories based off of classifications that the conceptual reality marked. The conceptual reality is a product of social principles of construction, all of which the collective memory draws. The collective memory goes back to the individual to extrapolate and conjoin individual memories into a shared memory of the human existence.

Individual memory has pervaded our discussion up until this point. What we need to realize is that individual memory is complemented by the existence of collective memory, both of which are inextricably tied. And so at this point, we shall turn to collective memory for the sake of exposing the origins of individual memory as well as certain manipulating forces. Maurice Halbwachs was a French philosopher and sociologist who is considered to be the father of collective memory. It is in this chapter

where the concepts and principals of collective memory will prevail discussion. To start off on collective memory, I start with Halbwachs and his questioning of what would exist in the absence of a collectivized influence on memory, where all memory is entirely subjective and individualized to the mind's holder. "What is the model of the purely individual state of consciousness? It is the image—detached from the word, to the extent that it refers to the individual and the individual alone" (Halbwachs 170). This image would be something without context, or a context that derives only from what the individual mind can organically interpret from its immediate environment. "This image is the abstraction made from the general significations of all that surrounds this individual, from relations and ideas: that is, from all those social elements that we decided at the beginning of our hypothesis to disregard" (Halbwachs 170). An image cannot derive from the body—its origin lies where the object of the mind's perception stood. Because an image cannot derive from the body, "it can be explained only by itself" (Halbwachs 170). But surely an image never explains itself.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, language creates meaning from a previously written interpretation. Despite the fact that this definition must be subjective and unique to the original mind, a society adopts it as communal. As we have discussed, the mind remembers through means of this language. No memory, therefore, is without the authority of social context. We shall never require an image to explain itself because as Halbwachs so argues in the introduction to his *On Collective Memory*, "one may say that memory depends on social environment" (Halbwachs 37). A great deal of this is due to fact that people normally acquire their memories while physically in a social setting; however, and more importantly, it is while in the society that people recall, recognize,

and localize their memories (Halbwachs 38). This now implies a great many things, the most important of which being that, associations, as alluded to in the first chapter, are entirely dependent upon a *social* context. This is to say, that while an individual past is important for the recollection of a memory and the success of association, the individual past cannot escape the hand of the social past. And this, for sake of argument, suggests that the degree to which the social past is dependent upon the individual past is largely skewed away from the society.

Chapter One talked about the process of individual memory formation through association. Association creates a memory framework for the individual memory. Following this idea, we now speak to the framework of a collective memory. As we saw in the opening of this passage, individual memory is entirely dependent upon collective memory. The mind interprets individual perception prior to memory formation from social teachings that bring a context on which to lay these interpretations. Contrarily, the collective memory is also dependent on the individual memory, for the collective is made up of individual memories. Halbwachs writes, “One can now concede, if one so desires, that various capacities for memory aid each other and are of mutual assistance to each other. But what we call the collective framework of memory would then be only the result, or sum, or combination of individual recollections of many members of the same society” (Halbwachs 39). Collective frameworks are dependent upon far more than a coalition of various individual memories. The frameworks of the collective are static throughout time, meaning that the precepts that determine selection are generally aspects dependent upon time. To this point, Halbwachs writes,

It is necessary to show, besides, that the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks, are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (Halbwachs 40)

This distinction between the memory framework and the actual memory, especially in talk of collective memory, is critical. The collective framework determines what aspects of the respective epoch define the collective memory. While the details of collective memory are certainly temporally variant, the principles that bring them to memory are not.

Apart from the actual memories, the frameworks that create these memories within a social context are now important for us to understand as we move forward in this discussion of memory within the public sphere. By a collective framework, an individual memory would have to abide by certain thoughts that “flow according to the order which the thoughts of society follow in their course” (Halbwachs 44). Society thinks by totalities; it associates one notion to another and then groups these into complex representations of person and event, which in turn are comprised of still even more complex notions (Halbwachs 44). Collective memory then follows a framework similar to that of the human mind. Associations build to form memories that comprise this memory, or history of the community. The memories, themselves, are based entirely on

the happenings of history; however, historical events are also entirely dependent on memory.

The human inclination towards a conceptual reality is restricting. Memory selection, as instated by one's conceptual reality, limits perception. Freud postulated that the mind delineates perceptions by deciding which events would result in "hostile memories" in the mind. Freud deemed this concept the "repression pathway," where the simple difference in the storage of desirable and hostile memories was the creation of non-plastic and plastic synapses (*The Art of Insight* 56). By this theory, the mind simply blocks all memory circuits that are considered to contain hostile memories. Whether or not we believe Freud's theory, his insight does suggest the neurobiological disposition to physically structure the brain in a way that only recognizes certain memories. The memories that the brain does recognize are selected by subjective denotations of "hostile" or "non-hostile." In order for the brain to make these distinctions, it needs to first have a conceptual reality to infiltrate these categorizes.

## **Confabulation: The Transformation of Memory**

When examining a moment of memory told from the narration of the original subject, we must contend with many fallacies that structure any given memory. We can best understand the process of memory by breaking it down into parts. The first part is that of selection when the brain, which is designed to store information that will be useful at a later date, selects certain perceptions to transfer from working memory into long-term memory. All perceptions that are not selected pass through unnoted without leaving a mark on consciousness. Within the selection process, *lay-down* occurs, a step in which the selected experience is associated with relevant pre-existing memories and then retained for an appropriate period of time in order to enhance understanding furnished from both past and present memory. After the formation of long-term memory, the brain can call upon *recollection*, or the stimulation of memories, by associating that memory with present experience (Carter 154). Memories undergo a process of change each time they are recalled. Greg Miller theorizes that “it may be impossible for humans or any other animal to bring a memory to mind without altering it in some way” (Miller 2-3). The alteration of memory is referred to as *confabulation*.

Confabulation describes the materialization of memories and experiences that never happened (Nahum et. al 2524). The idea of confabulation is wildly important for our discussion as it gets to possible reasons of why certain memories may come to be falsified. As we shall come to find, even under the guise of confabulation, there are still a multitude of possibilities as to the existence of “unreal” memories. Before coming to

speak specifically about confabulation, we must realize that all people use their knowledge of the world to fill in missing elements of experience—details they were unable to perceive originally—when forming memories. This occurs during perception and again during recall (Johnson, Raye 137). If the individual is cognizant of the fact that he has filled in certain pieces of information, then we do not consider the memory to be distorted, only that the individual is making inferences from incomplete information (Johnson, Raye 137). If the individual comes to believe that the “fill-ins” actually occurred, the memory is falsified. Marcia Johnson and Carol Raye write that if the individual comes to believe a manufactured detail of a memory to be true there has then “been a failure of ‘reality monitoring,’ a failure to distinguish between perceived information and internally generated information in memory” (Johnson, Raye 137). “Source confusions” is an important term to the discussion of confabulation and refers to misattributions that include source and reality monitoring errors. Scientists have developed the source monitoring framework (SMF) to determine how people differentiate between what is real and what is false experience (Johnson, Raye 137).

As Johnson and Raye write, “there is no single piece of information that invariably marks a memory as an accurate reflection of the past” (Johnson, Raye 137). However, there are several ways in which scientists have taken to monitoring what individuals remember. Although, foremost, it is important to realize that construction does not necessarily imply that any information was lost from a memory, which is to say that perceptual representations and constructed understandings of events might persist in memory but are performed under entirely different conditions (Johnson, Raye 137). Typically, memories from different sources, be it spatial or temporal, differ in their

phenomenal qualities. Memories from experienced or external events typically include details of time, spatial arrangement, emotional response, sensory percepts, and participants. Whereas, memories of thoughts and imagined events typically have less lucid information to these points; however, they do tend to have more information on the cognitive processes involved—such as intention, planning, etc. (Johnson, Raye 138). SMF balances such differences by evaluating memories for their match with the expected characteristic from a given source. Memorial details are correct often enough to preserve our belief in the validity of reality, but can still prove to be incorrect.

Similarities between memories and products of the imagination are actually key factors in memorial confusions. Perceptual or semantic qualities of one memory that are activated in association with a similar *imagined* event can make the imagined event seem to be a memory from actual experience. Johnson and Raye explain to this point that “When events are highly similar, it is critical that encoding and consolidation processes incorporate (or bind) distinctive features into an episodic representation” (Johnson, Raye 139). Interestingly enough, though perhaps not surprising, the information that the mind fills in is sometimes the information most likely to be remembered falsely. Even if at the time of generation, we know the inferences we are making to fill in memory holes to be false, we can likely forget the integrity of this information later on and recall it as a “real” detail (Johnson, Raye 139).

Examples of confabulations can vary in believability and purpose. It is quite possible and likely for some confabulations to resemble “real” memories. An early theory behind confabulation posited that “confabulation stresses the inability of confabulating patients to retrieve events in their appropriate temporal context” (Fotopoulou et al.

2180). This view suggests that those susceptible to confabulating may have lost their “temporal signposts” that normally allow individuals to “retrieve events in their proper temporal order and context” (Fotopoulou et al. 2180). This theory has since been revived in three different versions. Dalla Barba et al. suggest that confabulation is utilized by those who have lost the ability to establish personal temporal consciousness (Fotopoulou et al. 2180). Another theory suggests that those who confabulate their memories are unable to relate to their present and current reality. Lastly, Johnson et al. proposed that confabulation arises due to a reality monitoring deficit where individual cannot distinguish between “various past memories, as well as between real and imagined events” (Fotopoulou et al. 2180). Collectively, these theories suggest that spatial and temporal criteria of reality do not properly guide retrieval when memories are confabulated. We proposed a similar theory in Chapter Two in the context of the imagination. Because of this, it is important to clarify that imagined experiences and confabulated memories are not the same. An imagined experience comes from intentional and conscious doings of the mind; whereas, confabulations are by definition unintentional manipulations of a “real” experience.

In recent years, Armin Schinder proposed four different possible forms that confabulation can take. The first is the gap-filling account, which contends that “confabulations emanate from a desire to fill gaps in memory to avoid embarrassment” (Nahum et al. 2525). By this form, confabulations reflect a desire to embellish a situation of that was originally amiss or displeasing. This would speak to the ability of the emotional spheres of the mind to manipulate “reality” for the purpose of emotional pleasing. However, confabulations can and have been documented with dark content

(Nahum et al. 2525). Continuing forward, the executive hypothesis proposes that confabulations arise from the combination of amnesia with dysexecutive syndrome (Nahum et al. 2525).<sup>9</sup> The third theory, the monitoring hypothesis, holds that confabulations arise from impaired processes involved in “the evocation and monitoring of memories” (Nahum et al 2525). In this model, confabulations are the result of the activation of faulty memory followed by deficient monitoring of the recovered memory. Unlike the other two models, these confabulations are very much the results of post-memory formation events and maintenance. The last hypothesized model relates back to the issues of temporal and spatial labeling. As the name suggests, the temporal hypothesis attributes confabulations to a disturbed sense of time and temporal relations in memory (Nahum et al 2525).

Having discussed confabulation at some length, it is fitting to turn to our literature and find confabulation’s application. At this point, simply due to the nature of this particular neurobiological subject and the nature of our literary examples, we take a slightly different approach. Confabulation stands by its definition as being an *unconscious, unintentional* falsification. For this reason, it is exceptionally difficult to identify confabulation within literature, as it may at times be in life. Particularly when looking to works of first person narrators as we have seen in *The Sound and the Fury*; *Speak, Memory*; and “That in Aleppo Once...,” it is nearly impossible to detect an

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<sup>9</sup> Dysexecutive refers to a series of symptoms, usually resulting from brain damage, that are related to cognitive, behavioural, and emotional issues. The symptoms tend to present together. It was used to be believed to affect only the frontal lobe of the brain. This theory no longer stands, but does speak to the truth that the frontal lobe is usually most affected. Many of the symptoms can be found to be direct results of impairment to the central executive component of working memory, which is responsible for control and inhibition (Nahum et al. 2527).

example of confabulation. Rather, we place the idea of confabulation within the context of literary examples such as these so that we may make a reader aware of the bias of the mind. The well-read reader knows of the possibility of narrator bias; however, the notion of confabulation speaks to the truth of the neuroaesthetic in that it may at times be impossible to determine the reality of the experience because the mind is capable and susceptible to changing the reality after it has passed. Thus, confabulation adds a level of reality to the mind. This is a level that conceives a reality that is not, but believes it to be just as valid as that which actually is. This level is a false reality protected by memory. We should find many parallels here between confabulation and the imagination. Both create “unreal” experience due to distasteful reality. We, however, must not read confabulation and imagination as the same. They employ distinct levels of consciousness and thus function under different parameters. Because the imagination works consciously and intentionally, it is aware of the problematic nature of the reality in which it works; whereas, confabulation recognizes the issues without conscious note to their existence. Perhaps we can say that the issues before the imagination are more glaring because of this reason; however, it would then also seem fair to argue that confabulation works to hide the most problematic issues from the mind before they can reach consciousness.

With these notions of confabulation in mind, I turn to Faulkner’s short story, “A Rose for Emily.” A well-known Faulknerian piece, “A Rose for Emily” tells the story of the discovery of Homer Barron’s body forty years after it was assumed that he had deserted Emily Grierson. The townspeople discover the body after Emily’s death and find “what was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him

lay that even coating of the patient and bidding dust” (“A Rose for Emily” 6). This is a story in which the themes of the dust and decay prevail. Aubrey Binder writes, “but it is Faulkner’s use of dust imagery that provides the key to understanding the role of the past and the manner in which it lingers in the present” (Binder 5). This dust covers every object in Emily’s home, thus representing Emily as an archaic being. The image of the dust works to protect the past within the present, allowing the past to maintain its original prosperities that were once appropriate but now obsolete in the present. Really, the dust prevents decay, which changes and erodes objects of the past, allowing them to become relevant to the present. However, “dust covers but does not ruin” (Binder 5). As one coated in this dust, Emily is herself an individual who is temporally out of place in her society. Her dust obscures her presence, as we see in the fact of her townspeople viewing her as an enigma. In doing so, we find Emily to be a figure of temporal and spatial confusion.

“Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town” (“A Rose for Emily” 1). In decades past, Miss Emily was in some sense an icon, it seems. But the idea of tradition signifies unchanging qualities. In the context of Emily, these qualities show themselves to be rightly inappropriate for social living. Though more so than that, Emily refuses to acknowledge the changes made by the natural progression of time. We learn, for example, that in 1894 Colonel Sartoris, the mayor at the time, had invented a decree stating that Emily’s father had loaned money to the town, and because of this she was excused from paying taxes. Well this time passed, as did Colonel Sartoris, and Miss Emily’s paying of taxes became an issue, and so a deputation arrived at her door, after which the following ensues:

Her voice was dry and cold. “I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves.”

“But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn’t you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?”

“I received a paper, yes,” Miss Emily said. “Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff...I have no taxes in Jefferson.”

“But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see We must go by the—“

“See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson.”

“But, Miss Emily—“

“See Colonel Sartoris.” (Colonel Sartoris has been dead almost ten years.) “I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!” The Negro appeared. “Show these gentlemen out.”

(“A Rose for Emily” 2)

This moment is arguably the first in which Emily’s tendencies towards confabulation become apparent. Before, we discussed the issues that arise when attempting to locate moments of confabulation in fictional works that employ first person narrators. Faulkner wrote “A Rose for Emily” through an omnipotent narrator. That coupled with the issues of memory, reality, and time that Faulkner embeds in this story allow “A Rose for Emily” to be the perfect example in which to see confabulation in literature. When we return to the above passage, we cannot read Emily to be intentionally lying to the town officials for the sake of saving money; she rather seems to be delusional. Colonel Sartoris died ten years prior, yet she is adamant that the town officials must speak with him. Miss Emily

simply refuses to acknowledge any detail that does not please and corroborate the unwavering reality in her mind.

One may give the argument that Miss Emily is simply insane. The details of the story, however, indicate that Faulkner was writing a far more complex image. As we saw some pages ago, one possible explanation for confabulation is the mind's inability to recognize temporal markers. Possibly, Faulkner creates Emily as the extreme epitome of this idea. She is a "tradition" but one that is so entrenched in the past that she cannot function in the reality of her time. The memories that her mind forms from the experience of her should-be-present take the details of the collective memory framework of the present, a framework that directs the actions of the society, and attempt to bend them to her own individual memory framework, which is operating under drastically different principles of time. The result is delusion. Yet she continues on in her own past. "Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse" ("A Rose for Emily" 5). However, refusing changes, or denying changes, really only presents issues for Emily due to the inescapable company of her society. For example, Faulkner writes,

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them. ("A Rose for Emily" 5)

In part, Emily's confabulations are heavily due to her inability to recognize time, reasons for which we will come to disclose shortly. However, had Emily been able to avoid the gaze of her collective, she would have no issue with time. Time only appears through the device of the collective; thus confabulation only proves necessary when the individual mind is under influence or in the presence of a collective.

What we then discover about "A Rose for Emily" is that the inability of the mind to recognize temporal makers can only cause confabulation when the mind is in conjunction with the collective memory framework. This is also to say, that time only exists outside the individual mind. Pages ago, we concluded that the mind must recognize temporal markers in order to accurately process experience into memory. To say that time only exists outside of the individual mind does not refute this conclusion, despite what it may seem. Rather, we see that the mind needs temporal markers because the experiences exist within the collective framework. Therefore, in order to interpret and process the details of these experiences, the mind needs to abide by the principles that created the details.

The moment of Emily denying the death of her father is one of the sadder moments of the story and the most crucial for understanding the reasons for her confabulation. Faulkner writes,

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were

about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly. (“A Rose for Emily” 3)

The death of her father surely marks a moment of intense emotional response, and despite denying her father’s death the towns people “did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will” (“A Rose for Emily” 3).

So rather than being crazy, Emily responded naturally. Her creation of a false reality in which her father was still alive calmed her emotions. It appeased her mind so that she may continue living in a reality that was satisfying. The death of her father was chronologically the beginning of Emily’s confabulation. Once the townspeople buried her father, she was sick for some time. Then the summer after, Emily met Homer Barron, to which the narrator says, “at first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, ‘Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer.’ But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*” (“A Rose for Emily 4)<sup>10</sup>.

Forgetting is a device to assuage the emotional truths of a harmful reality. Really, forgetting is no different than confabulation. We find Emily to insist upon remaining in past. In doing so, she forgets or denies the continuation of the reality that occurred past her point of emotional distress. Emily’s confabulations leave her in a moment, one that is really void of temporal markers, before the death of her father. Arguably, the emotional

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<sup>10</sup> Noblesse oblige is the concept that nobility extends beyond entitlements and requires the individual with such status to fulfill social responsibilities (Binder 7).

trauma of her father's death was so severe that her mind altered the truth before she became aware and in doing so forever prevented the progression of Emily's reality.

And so Emily's mind stuck her in a steadfast, false reality. As previously mentioned, the case of Emily is extreme. The mind often does not go as far in its confabulations to reach all aspects of reality, but the extremities of this case allow us to see the rational of falsification. Emily's emotional dependency on her father returns to her earliest impressions and parallels Benjy's obvious need for his sister Caddy. When the minds of both Emily and Benjy were at their earliest stages of defining reality, they fixated upon the existence of their father and their sister, respectively. Because these moments occurred more or less simultaneously, the father and the sister came to mark the realities of which Emily and Benjy were first accustomed. As we concluded in Chapter One, the memories acquired from these realities act as the framework for all individual memories; the conceptual realities developed during these early stages of development work in the same manner. And so, when such large defining markers of reality disappear, what is the mind to do? For Emily, her mind is to refute the change in reality. It ignores the evolution for sake of maintaining an emotional equilibrium where the mind is still supported by all that it knows to be true, for certainly, once the markers of reality change, the reality changes. And once the reality changes, all of the mind's memories become obsolete.

## Conclusion

### Why Memory Believes Before Knowing Remembers

In Faulkner's *Absalom and Absalom*, Rosa Coldfield claims that there is no such thing as memory because it is most often incorrect and false—"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: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream" (*Absalom and Absalom* 143). Such an assertion claims that the brain has little or no power to bring back the past, and yet it does, or tries. Coldfield does not claim that the brain holds no image of the past. Instead she suggests that the past ascribed as memory is faulty because it depends solely on the desires of the present brain. Are we to read all memory, then, as dependent upon nothing more than desire, desire that is ever changing with the shifts of space and time? Is desire not too inconsistent to be the determiner of the past? With the end of every action comes a new desire that will eventually dispense with the next. Desire is thus continuous, but in its continuation it is dynamic and shifting towards a point of satisfaction that in the grand scheme will never come. Surely, for this reason, if memory is determined to be just "what the muscles grope for," then how is the resultant sum not to be "incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of a dream"?

In a note about desire, Jacques Lacan suggested that “enjoyment comes from the repetition of the past because doing so represses the anxiety of lack” (Schreiber 71). This is to say that the repetition of history provides comfort by allowing the mind to know there to be an absence of uncertainty. “Lack” comes when the mind is aware that something is awry or simply missing. However, if the mind follows a predetermined pattern, one that is ensured by a fixture to repetition, there can be no lack, for the mind knows nothing in existence outside of the pattern. The pattern inscribes a framework in the mind of what is true and what is not, a reality in essence. Enjoyment, thus, comes from a strict adherence to a predetermined image of reality. Lacan elaborates by stating,

Desire is a relation of beings to lack...It isn't the lack of this of that, but lack of being whereby the best exists...Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the experience of desire....Relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness. It is desire which achieves the primitive structuration of the human world, desire as unconscious.  
(Lacan 223-224)

The society of the individual determines what the individual is to desire before the individual even reaches the point of emotional capabilities. By determining the collective framework of reality, as we discussed in Chapter Three, the collective indirectly determines what the individual is to desire. “Desire is a relation of beings to lack,” meaning that desire marks the comfort that the individual feels from knowing a certainty in regards to his own reality. At the same time, the desire of the collective is what structures the collective sense of reality. As Lacan says, “It is desire which achieves the

primitive structuration of the human world,” suggesting that there must be a leveling of desire—those that are primitive, existing in the mind before any ordering of the collective reality and those that result from collective influence.

The second form of desire then really proves to be more of an adaptation forced upon the individual for the purpose of maintaining and protecting the collective framework of both memory and reality. The “desire” of repetition insures the continuation of the collective existence. Since this desire is learned after interaction with the reality that is to be repeated, we must see this form of “desire” as far from primitive because the mind learns this “desire.” We can question the place of true primitive desire—does it come to interact with learned desire? Is it ignored or reformed with the intrusion of social construction? We can rightly think of these primitive desires as we can think of our individual memories and the memories of our earliest impressions. Nabokov told us that the earliest impressions create our memorial platform on which all memories are to stand. However, after introduction into the collective reality, we constantly transform these earliest memories to meet the criteria of our spatial and temporal changes. As Halbwachs explains,

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had.

(Halbwachs 31)

Our earliest impressions do form the memorial platform, as Nabokov suggests in *Speak, Memory*, but with increased exposure to an esoteric world, the parts of this foundation are constantly altered to maintain its initial structure or notion of reality. To be clear, this foundation of reality is the reality of the collective sphere. During early stages of life and development, this collective reality is complemented by an individually-created reality. As the individual mind progresses throughout time, the individual reality weakens and loses relevance.

In early chapters we discussed how repetition helps increase the prospect of the experience settling into long-term memory. Repeated recall of the experience once it has become memory creates the scenario we see presented by Halbwachs. Each time the mind recalls a memory it does so within a distinct temporal and spatial context. This context, as we have mentioned before, affects the manner in which this memory is interpreted upon recall. With varying contexts comes varying interpretations, and these interpretations then become part of the memory. This means that every time the mind recalls an experience, it alters its memory ever so slightly, leading to the loss of “the form and appearance they once had.”

As the mind then develops to a social standard of collective memory, the individual memories stray farther and farther from their original reality. Should this lead us to say that as the mind develops it becomes more inclined towards the imagination for the purpose of clarifying the inherent confusion of a false reality? Nabokov suggests the opposite to be true—one becomes further removed from genius as one progresses away from the earliest impressions. When one is in the earliest stages of development, he is most removed from his society due to an inclination to imagine. The collective reality is

at best a foreign concept, and all that is real depends solely on what the innocent mind perceives. Additionally, memories do not form at this time because the mind is ignorant to language. Simply, the mind is in a floating state where there is nothing real but nothing that is unreal, for no words exist to label such. Then slowly the mind learns a few words. Object permanence solidifies, and the mind can call upon an object from memory, but first, collective reality tells this maturing mind what it should call the object. In doing so, the mind begins its induction into this collective reality. The more time that passes from this entrance into the collective sphere, the more the genius dies. From time to time a strong mind may perceive issues within this collective reality, and it will then return to its genius state. But as the mind ages, it loses its strength. This weakness dismantles the level of consciousness that was once able to question the validity of the collective reality. The more the mind ages, the more time it spends saturated in the collective reality. Eventually, it becomes saturated to a point where the integrity of the individual reality framework completely disintegrates. What is left is a mind at the full mercy of collective repetition for the sake of desire, and a mind comfortable in a collective reality that only focuses upon a very small portion of a large reality.

Reductively, we can say, the collective sphere teaches the mind to distort. We cannot argue that distortion is a natural tendency for the mind, although many might. Due to the great tenacity and strength that the collective sphere employs in promising that the individual mind becomes a parcel of the collective, it is easy to ignore the changes that the mind has accumulated from its earliest state. Faulkner's *Light in August* is a wonderful exemplification of this idea. Eileen Bender argues that in writing the novel, Faulkner seems to intend his setting to serve as an "unearthly backdrop...for the

objectification of delirious associations and interpretations” (Bender 7). The most common reference to *Light in August*, in regards to any sort of memorial studies, particularly with regards to these issues of distortion, is Faulkner’s opening paragraph of Chapter Six, which reads the following:

Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstewnpacked compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacent chimneys streaked like black tears.  
*(Light in August 119)*

There is surely a great deal to be said about this paragraph. Critics such as Wolfgang Schlepper argue that “it’s overall meaning is clearly that the past is not something finished and done with, but plays an important part in man’s life” (Schlepper 182). There is a point to be made for such an argument, but I believe Schlepper to fall short of Faulkner’s true intent.

This opening paragraph of Chapter Six seems deliberately to exclude any allusion to one particular person, a device that suggests the universal nature of the subject matter. However, what exactly is the subject matter? Schlepper writes that the paragraph obviously “has something to say about ‘memory,’ without, however, offering an

immediately intelligible and conclusive statement. Apparently, there are two sources of ambiguity in the three sentences, one being of syntactical, the other of a semantic kind” (Schlepper 183). The greatest amount of confusion appears in the third sentence with its lack of subject. Schlepper suggests that “memory” as the subject of the first sentence is the subject to apply to the second and third sentences. Doing so would bring about an interpretation that mirrored many of the concepts and conclusions that we have discussed throughout this thesis. The first sentence, “Memory believes before knowing remembers,” invokes the idea that one must first believe the reality in order to remember the reality. But he expands upon this idea in the second sentence, saying, “Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders.” When ascribed to memory this claim reasons that the mind eventually comes to believe all memories without first questioning if the reality from which they come is true.

This is again the tired mind, the one that forgets how to critique. The mind that “believes longer than recollects” and “longer than knowing ever wonders” is a mind entrenched in the collective memory framework. At this stage in development, the individual memory framework is no longer. The questioning of a problematic reality taught by the hands of an archaic collective memory has ceased. Now the mind just sits and accepts with the full protection of the collective sphere. The collective sphere at this point protects the mind from itself or what it once was. Although, perhaps we would better say that the collective sphere *prevents* the return of the individual memories. In doing so, the memories become trapped in this “big long garbled cold echoing” building, which Faulkner describes beginning in the third sentence. This place, whatever it may be, is desolate, to say the least. This imagery of the memories building, really the mind, as

“sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own” powerfully suggests the sources of the mind’s corruption. If we think back to the dust in “A Rose for Emily” that trapped the mind in an archaic state and prevented it from functioning properly with its collective sphere, we see a parallel with this soot. The soot is not coating the mind in so much as an archaic quality but darkening it with corrupted filth that acts as a film blocking out reason. We must find it now coincidental that Faulkner coats the socially aged mind in a substance impenetrable to any “light of knowledge.”

This mind that believes before it remembers has come to coat itself in soot—“sootblackened by more chimneys than its own” placing partial blame on that individual mind. Faulkner blames the individual mind for succumbing to collective corruption. In taking part, the mind further buries itself. Coming to the last lines of the paragraph—“out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacent chimneys streaked like black tears”—we find the lenses of perception to be part of the principal issues to this aged corrupted mind. Metaphorically, the “bleak windows where in rain soot...streaked like black tears” indicate that the media of perception (the mind’s senses) are blocked and distorted. The mind cannot question the issues of the collective reality because the mind cannot perceive these issues, or so suggests Faulkner. Does the collective sphere then teach the mind how to perceive? Or do misconstrued notions of reality and poorly confabulated memories eventually cause the mind to falsify its own perceptions? The origin of the false perceptions is out of our hands to conclude; however, it does demonstrate that the corrupted mind is in a hopeless state. When we are to blame the building’s windows we find that the memories are ill-fated even before their inception because the mediums of

perception are obscured. When the mind cannot properly perceive, it cannot remember an accurate image of reality.

Is it then better for the aged, corrupted mind to forget? Let us think all the way back to *Funes the Memorious*. Funes was *crippled* by his infinite remembrance. To forget is to adapt the mind to the natural progression of the individual-collective relationship. While increased exposure of the collective sphere damages the individual frameworks of reality and memory, it still allows the individual to participate in knowledge. To forget is continuously to be able to know. To remember with no end is to collect experience for a purpose that will never come before the perceiving eye.

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