



Reading William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha in the COVID-19 Era: Face Masking, Lockdown and Free Bodies



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Abstract

Caught in the dilemma of the real and the fictitious, one can only wonder about the connection between literature and the Covid 19 global pandemic. As a researcher interested in the writings of William Faulkner, I cannot help drawing analogies between the writer's fictional Yoknapatawpha and our current Covid 19 situation. In the gendered reactions to the pandemic-imposed reality, Yoknapatawpha is always resonant. Masculine rejection of face masks and the ideology underlying such a reaction, the mandatory lockdown which consequently led to rising domestic violence in addition to the popular slogan "My body, my choice" which went viral in social networks are all a reiteration of the narrative of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha. Drawing analogies between our contemporary real world and Faulkner's fictitious county will lead to the conclusion that western cultures and societies have reproduced the same patriarchal ideologies and practices that governed Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, turning the writer's narrative world into a universal world that cannot be anchored in place or time. The paper will study the three phenomena as social realities that echo Faulkner's fictitious county while referring to psychoanalytical and feminist theories.

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1 Introduction

William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County is often interpreted as a microcosm of the American South. However, because Faulkner's narratives tackle human and universal, experiences, Yoknapatawpha County goes beyond the contours of place and time and turns into an open realm that blurs boundaries between reality and imagination. In our contemporary world and the current COVID 19 situation, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is still echoed in some symbolic, conscious or unconscious, practices performed by either males or females in western societies. Males' resistance to face covering, domestic violence against women, and female resistance through the body are common phenomena that have emerged during COVID 19 times. These practices interestingly and ironically echo a masculine ideology governing Faulkner's patriarchal Yoknapatawpha. Probing the startling similarities between Faulkner's fictional world and our contemporary COVID 19 era leads to the conclusion that Yoknapatawpha is ever-present despite the difference in times and places. This paper deals with some reactions against COVID 19 rules, such as wearing face masks, domestic violence, and resisting lockdown, and argues that such gendered reactions are already relevant to Faulkner's fictional county. Feminist and psychoanalytical theories will be referred to in developing the paper's thesis statement (Meduri et al., 1989; 1996).

Covid 19, face-masking, and stereotypes of masculinity

In "Facemask Art and Pandemic Politics" (2020), Edwin Coomasaru talks about an emerging conflict between the practice of face covering and manhood at a social and cultural level (3). Mandatory face coverings in many western countries faced the dilemma of the wish to restrict the spread of the virus, whilst also allowing the established masculine liberties, as stated by the British health minister¹. At the political level, there was an apparent resistance to face-covering by such male world leaders as Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. "Studies conducted in America found that men are less likely to wear facemasks, fearing them to be 'shameful, not cool and a sign of weakness'" (Coomasaru 3).

In "The Condoms of the Face" (2020), Emily Willingham argues that "during the COVID-19 pandemic, a small but incredibly loud segment of U.S. society has adamantly refused to wear masks. Many of them are men, who seem to view masks as emasculating face condoms that must be rejected." (1) Willingham points out that the male rejection of face masks is a reiteration of men's resistance to condom use when HIV emerged in the United States because of an underlying "masculine ideology" that requires men to ascribe to "adventure, risk, and violence" as a way of establishing their masculine subject (2). In such an ideology having a bare face is the performance of power and masculinity though toxic. Willingham notes that much of the masculine rhetoric around COVID-19 is constructed upon war semantics. Through words like 'fight' and 'battlefield' war is evoked as a masculine gendered domain (Aguilar & Appleton, 2001; Stephan et al., 2012; Boothroyd et al., 2009; Judith, 1993).

When he rejected masks, Trump became a masculine model to imitate. "Donning a mask would mean wasting their investment and the perceived fruits of all that self-compromise. So, they go maskless" (Willingham 3). In doing so, American males strive for a sense of belonging through their masculine ideology and performance. However, Willingham argues, there is a sense of irony in American males' maskless performance, these men "think they are manifesting the ideal of the rugged, individualistic American when their refusal traces in part to a fear of what other people will think about them" (3). Blindly controlled by a masculine ideology, "they mistake their refusal to protect themselves and others as a mark of character when instead, it's a mark on their characters" (3). Respectively, in "Toxic White masculinity, post-truth politics and the COVID-19 infodemic" Jayson Harsin highlights the irony underlying the maskless masculine performance, arguing that "a particularly White, masculinist genre of political 'truth-telling' has assisted the confusion, false belief and casualties of COVID-19" (2).

Harsin emphasizes the controversial nature of the masculine maskless performance through the notion of 'Emo-truth'² in masculine politics and performances which are masculine self-destructive as more men than women have died from such "adventure, risk, and violence" and "the causes are as much (or perhaps even more) cultural as they are biological" (Harsin 5). As a political performance, Emo-truth is an example of toxic masculinities' aggression. The problematic masculinity showcased in some popular COVID-19 responses (Trump, Bolsonaro and Orban, most spectacularly) is often described as 'toxic' or 'fragile', meaning threatened by anything associated with perceived femininity; it is further associated with physical strength, sexual conquest, a lack of any emotions signifying vulnerability, domination, control, and violence. (3-4)

Seen from a psychological angle, masculine maskless performance relates to notions of power and virility. Psychologists like Lynda G. Boothroyd and Lisa M. DeBruine talk about facial masculinity as a signal of "heritable

immunity to infectious disease, because only men with strong immune systems can withstand the immunosuppressant effects of high levels of circulating testosterone necessary to develop masculine features” (DeBruine et al. 1355). As a physical object that is both personal and public, the face operates as a powerful mark of identity. Being maskless, masculine face symbolically linked with hegemonic masculinity (Chabrier, 1993; Cox, 1986; DeBruine et al., 2006; Dillman, 1989; Fetterley, 1978).

In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), Thomas Laqueur states that the appearance of genitals remains the most reliable indicator of both reproductive capacity and gender identity (31). Laqueur draws on Freud and Lacan’s postulation that the phallus is the main marker of sexual and gender differences. According to Freud, in the absence of the physical marker of masculinity, either through lack of invisibility by clothing, other body parts substitute the phallus in establishing masculinity. “From hair to feet, swords to neckties, any number of objects might stand for the phallus” (McKinney 71). Symbolizing power and dominance, masculine facial parts like the beard and the nose act as obvious phallic symbols that resist covering and invisibility.

In this respect, a plausible conclusion is that COVID-19 might radically reshape ideas of masculinity, as it calls masculine sovereignty into question and as face-covering becomes part of daily lives, the pandemic will lead to a change in the conception of gender issues in profound ways, for “it may reshape how we think of vulnerability as collective rather than individual” (Coomasaru 3-4). Accordingly, the next part attempts to trace the Covid 19 echoes in William Faulkner’s *Yoknapatawpha* and reach the conclusion that rejecting face covering is due to a masculine conviction that a major component in the human face, the male nose, demonstrates a performative gender role and identity as it “can sniff out gender from body secretion even when we don’t think we smell anything on the conscious level” (Zhou 1092). Reference to smell in Faulkner’s texts is indeed echoed in American males’ rejection of face-covering masks.

Nose performance and Sense of Belonging:

In Faulkner’s *Yoknapatawpha*, the smell is a silent code that establishes gender stereotypes, relations, and rules. Male characters strive to conform to their masculinity through the production or adoption of gender-performing scents. Faulkner’s *Yoknapatawpha*, smelling of masculinity, associates very specific odors to the patriarch, and any deviance in gender role performance can immediately be smelled, recognized, and judged without words (Gwin, 1990; Hallpike, 2011; Obeyesekere, 1998; Irigaray, 1985).

In *Light in August*, when Joe Christmas was taken out of the orphanage at an obscure night, the narrator states that Joe was sure that the person who was taking him was a man because he smelled him: “He knew where he was by the smell [...], knew also by the smell that the person who carried him was a man” (127). The repetition of the verb “knew” and its association with the smell is indicative of the efficacy of such a nonverbal medium as a way of achieving knowledge and articulation. Furthermore, the way Faulkner’s male characters olfactorily perceive each other is indicative of a sense of power, violence, and belonging. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin’s father is recurrently described as smelling like cigars:

It was a summer of wisteria. The twilight was full of it and the smell of his father’s cigar [...], the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr. Compson’s letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin’s sitting room at Harvard. (23)

The smell of cigars is an idiosyncratic mark of masculinity which stands for male overwhelming dominance and virility in Faulkner’s texts. Besides, Thomas Sutpen’s father smells like alcohol, another odor relating to masculinity and highlighting *Yoknapatawpha*’s masculine freedom.

Male characters equally replicate the smell of their gendered environment. For instance, in “Dry September,” the man Miss Minnie Cooper started to date “was a widower of about forty [...], smelling always faintly of the barbershop or whisky” (66). Similarly, in *Light in August*, the men Joe met at a restaurant all have the same smell of “cigarettes” and “barbershops” (178). In the same way, in *The Hamlet*, the store where the men meet has a peculiar scent “radiating a strong good heat which had an actual smell, masculine, almost monastic – a winters’ concentration of unwomaned and deliberate tobacco-spittle annealing into the iron flanks” (137). The masculine-gendered space and masculine-gendered smell are indicative of a sense of belonging and conformity to sociocultural norms in Faulkner’s South.

Odors associated with violence and hostility are always linked to masculinity, sending silent messages that such features pertain only to the patriarch. In *Light in August*, Mr. Hines is depicted as having “that quality of outworn violence like a scent, an odor” (343). War violence is similarly a smell able distinctive trait of masculinity. In *The*

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Unvanquished, Bayard smells war in his father's sweat: "Then I began to smell it again [. . .], that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now" (10). Bayard's description of his father's smell is gendered as it inscribes the father into the paradigm of masculinity constructed upon violence, potency, and dominance. In the same way, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin and Shreve smell the "powder" and violence of the civil war equating it with glory, for it is a distinctive masculine scent telling about power and domination (Johnson, 1995; Kumar, 2020; Laqueur, 1992; McKinney, 2016).

Interestingly, male characters breaking the codes of masculinity are immediately revealed by their smell, which is a silent interference of a patriarchal system to restore a natural order and secure masculinity. Male characters' sexual deviancy in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is characterized by the inability to use the nose and smell. For instance, in *The Unvanquished*, when Bayard Sartoris walks into Redmond's office, a man who did not play a part in the civil war, he immediately notices the total lack of smell: "There was no smell of drink, not even of tobacco in the neat clean dingy room although I knew he smoked" (188). Bayard is bemused by the absence of the smell of tobacco or drink as these odors are indicative of someone's masculinity and virility. He realizes that Redmond is a masculine deviancy as he lacks the smell of manhood and the smell of the war's powder (172).

Gavin Stevens, in *The Town*, is another male who does not meet the requirements of masculinity and who is implicitly uncovered through smell. Being a victim of other men's violence, failing to fulfill his sexual longings for Eula Snopes and her daughter Linda and escaping from Eula's seductive attempts, Gavin Stevens is excluded from the standards of masculinity as "he lacks the skills of smelling like a man" (95), to use Eula Snopes words. Besides, Eula notices that Gavin Stevens lacks the tobacco smell though he always carries a pipe: "'There's your cob pipe', she said [...]. You've got three of them. I've never seen you smoke one. When do you smoke them?'" (320). Lacking the smell of tobacco and failing to perform sexually as a masculine, Gavin holds a pipe that he never uses, which is suggestive of sexual impotency and a masculine deviancy.

Like Redmond who, in *The Unvanquished*, lacks tobacco smell, Gavin lacks such a gendered-masculine code. When Ratliff enters Gavin's office, he opens the drawer where Gavin always kept liquor. However, the drawer "never even smelled like he used to keep whiskey in it" (353). Therefore, the smell of tobacco and alcohol, two gendered-masculine products, are not sensed in Gavin and his surrounding, testifying to his inability to meet patriarchal parameters of masculinity despite his many attempts. In a later scene, Ratliff watches Gavin trying to smoke his pipe. He lights the match and then blows it out carefully and, tellingly, sets the pipe unused (358). Considering the phallic aspect of Gavin's pipe, this scene communicates the male character's impotency and his inability to belong to masculinity.

Likewise, female characters are perceived by masculine noses as a luring or unpleasant smell. In *Light in August*, when Joe Christmas hid in the dietician's closet, he smelled her garments as womanly with "rife pink woman smelling obscurity" (122). Correspondingly, the dietician's room is repeatedly described as "warm, littered woman pink smelling" (132). Later, when Joe reached teenage, he discovered, with the help of his older friends, that the only valid fact about the female body is that it ought "to be discerned by the sense of smell" (185). In another instance, Miss Bell Worsham, an old white woman in *Go Down Moses*, lives in a room having "the unmistakable faint odor of old maidens" (361). In "A Rose for Emily," another spinster, Miss Emily Grierson, lives in a house "smelling of dust and disuse," having "a close dank smell" (48) and replicating her state of old age and decay. Therefore, just as male characters, Faulkner's females are constructed as feminine through a gendered smell which constitutes a silent medium of representing gender roles and codes of belonging. The smell of the ladies and their intimate belongings, ranging from the dietician's pink toothpaste and her pink undergarments to Miss Emily's room having a smell "acid in the nostrils," (59) are absorbed into one aroma associated with femininity.

Not only do they have a charming smell as in the case of the "warm woman pink smelling" dietician in *Light in August*, Faulkner's women also appear as a threat to masculine nostrils. In many Faulknerian texts, females are portrayed as having an unappealing smell which dehumanizes them and turns them into a threat to masculinity. Going in tandem with Simone de Beauvoir's postulation, in *The Second Sex*, that female sexuality is considered as a threat and thus needs to be excluded and shunned, a category of females in Faulkner's world, mainly old women, are portrayed as a sickening smell and a disagreeable taste. In *As I Lay Dying*, Addie Bundren's son Vardaman repeatedly mistakes his dead mother for a fish he had caught, stressing her dead body's stinky odor and inscribing her in the animal order due to her putrid smell. Later in the novel, Albert reports to his boss Moseley the outrageous smell of Addie's corpse comparing it to a horrid taste: "It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill" (192). Similarly, in the same novel, Tull, the Bundrens' neighbor, describes his wife Cora as a jar of milk that is bound to turn into smelly soured milk as she grows older:

To hold Cora like a jar of milk in the spring: you've got to have a tight jar or you'll need a powerful spring, so if you have a big spring, why then you have the incentive to have tight, well-made jars because you would rather have milk that will sour than to have milk that won't because you are a man. (126)

Tull's description of his wife as a horrid taste erases the latter's efforts to highlight her femininity through a pleasant smell and taste of cakes: "So I saved out the eggs and baked yesterday. The cakes turned out right well" (3). The woman's attempts to highlight her appealing sexuality through the gendered role of cooking and the pleasant smell of food are further manifested in her overt reference to the snake which is an emblem of desire and temptation (3). However, Cora's attempts to voice her sexuality are vain since her husband describes her as a kind of unpleasant food he is compelled to consume as a way of maintaining his masculinity even if he knows that such food is bound to decay. Tull's pronouncement is replicated in the image of one of the buzzards lured by Addie's rotten corpse and described by Samson, the local farmer, as an "old bald-headed man" (106).

In the same way, Anse Bundren is attracted by Addie's reeking corpse as he finds in it joy and regeneration. In her study entitled *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, Ellen W. Waisala supports the argument that the female body ought to be consummated as a way of preserving one's masculinity, stating that in Faulkner's text

the distinction between the people and animals is blurred. Anse's posture is similar to that of a buzzard. The metaphor can be extended to Anse's character; like a buzzard, he seems to feed off Addie's death. As her body rots, he appears neater, cleaner, and more alert than when we first met him. (33)

The fact that Anse Bundren and Vernon Tull "feed off" their wife's bodies to preserve their masculinity is a reverberation of Simone de Beauvoir's and Luce Irigaray's statement that the female body is a desired "other" which masculinity not only strives to possess but also be well-constructed upon. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray exposes the dominant culture's objectification of woman as an act needed in the establishment of the male subject:

Woman, for her part, remains an unrealized potentially unrealizable, at least by/for herself. Is she, by nature, a being that exists for/by another? [...] Is she unnecessary in and of herself, but essential as the non-subjective subjected? As that which can never achieve the status of the subject, at least for/by herself? [...]. This 'lack of qualities' that makes the female truly female ensures that the male can achieve his qualifications. (165-66)

In such a culture, the relationship between sexes is exclusionary as it negates and subjugates the other, constituting a strongly gendered system that seeks to banish maternal origins and create the illusion of masculinity. The smell in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha falls within Irigaray's description as it turns females into objects helplessly manipulated by the masculine subject.

In *As I Lay Dying*, the child Vardaman asks Dewey Dell, his sister, "I can smell her, I say. Can you smell her, too? 'Hush' Dewey Dell says. The wind's changed. Go to sleep!" (202). By his masculinity, young Vardaman has the power to smell the dead body of his mother while Dewey Dell is denied such power due to her feminine construct. When they arrive at Jefferson with the putrid corpse of their matriarch nine days after her death, the Bundrens are received with different gendered reactions. While women were "scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their nose," (191) men were standing unaffected around the stinky wagon thanks to their potent "hard noses."

Rather than being purely biological, masculinity is a cultural construct in Faulkner's county. Judith Butler introduces the concept of performativity to argue for gender identities as culturally constructed. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler explains that gender performativity is "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (2). Gender identities, she adds, are not biological but rather constructed by dominant discourses in a particular culture. Butler's notion of performativity suggests the body as central in gender construction. In a society highly sensitive to gender identities, maskless masculine faces and the power to smell constitute a show of manliness, strength, and freedom as the masculine nose and its olfactory powers becomes an emblem of hegemonic masculinity.

Lockdown and Domestic Violence: Yoknapatawpha echoed

With the mandatory lockdown imposed in most of the world's countries, feminist voices started to rise, drawing attention to domestic violence and female oppression in an insecure home. V. Geetha, Shalu Nigam, Amanda

Magnus, Frank Stasio and Anant Kumar, (2020) argue that women's bodily integrity, safety and autonomy have been affected by the pandemic due to gender differences.

The instruction to stay at home, issued based on keeping people safe and protected from the virus, poses dangers for victims living with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Victims are in the alarming situation of spending protracted periods with perpetrators in shared living spaces, making them more susceptible than usual to a perpetrator's controlling behavior and constant surveillance. (Kumar 193)

Kumar adds that domestic abuse can take different forms, being verbal, economic, sexual, psychological, and emotional, in addition to social isolation, neglect, and acts of physical violence. In "Domestic Violence: Feminist Perspective" (2011), Dale Bagshaw points to postmodern feminists' recognition that "family violence occurs at all levels of society and that religion, race, ethnicity, class, age, and sexuality influence the experience and outcomes for victims" (4), pointing out that imbalances of power between men and women in society and culture and the patriarchal laws are the main causes of domestic violence (Porter, 1991; Singal, 1999; Waisala, 1996; Willingham, 2020).

In the current context, recent data have shown that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has increased. Kumar refers to UN Women (2020) reports which indicate 30 percent increase in the cases of domestic violence in France, Cyprus, and Singapore. Besides, increased cases of domestic violence and demand for emergency shelters have also been reported from Canada, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. During the lockdown, women are compelled to stay at home without much-extended help from male members of the family due to strong gender norms and agency like patriarchy. Women's mobility and contact with their family and friends have equally been restricted and physical/social distancing limited women's access to the outside world (Kumar 193). Lockdown has also had a drastic impact on women's ability to seek help (Vincent, 2020).

Respectively, victims of domestic violence, female characters in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha are compelled to a lockdown imposed by a patriarchal society and culture. In "Symbolic Fathers, Dead Mothers," Carolyn Porter states that in Faulkner's world "there is no figure more foundational, central and constitutive than that of the father" (83). The figure of the powerful aggressive patriarch is strongly present in Faulkner's texts. The portrait of the patriarch in Faulkner's fiction is synonymous with dominance, power, and violence. For instance, In *Sartoris*, the patriarch is resolved into an image or a statue of an old Colonel who

stood on a stone pedestal, [...] one leg slightly advanced and one hand resting lightly on the stone pylon beside him. His head was lifted a little in that gesture of haughty arrogance which repeated itself generation after generation with a fateful fidelity, his back to the world and his carven eyes gazing out across the valley where his railroad ran and beyond. (427-28)

The same image of patriarchal dominance and violence devastates Miss Emily's life. In her domestic life, Miss Emily seems absorbed by the idea that the patriarch is ever-present: "See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson [...] See Colonel Sartoris (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years)" (49-50). Even in her death, Miss Emily's body reflects the dominant image of the patriarch, for on her dead body lies "the crayon face of her father musing profoundly" (58).

Besides, of paramount significance is the tableau imagery in "A Rose for Emily" insofar as it replicates male authority in defining the lady's identity and reveals a masculinist agenda that strives to establish a social hierarchy fulfilling patriarchal needs:

We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. (51)

Bringing to mind the feminist perception of females during the lockdown, the image of the tableau is an outward masculine-constructed reality projected by patriarchal fantasies and psychic desires. Miss Emily's role as perceived in the tableau analogy does not escape traditional stereotypes of femininity. Miss Emily is submissively placed behind male authority. As peaceful and obedient as her white figure, the woman is portrayed as violently manipulated by the patriarch's horsewhip.

In the same spirit, John McLendon, in "Dry September," returns to his "birdcage" home at midnight and violently deals with his wife whose pale, strained, and weary-looking face (75) testifies to her husband's violent treatment.

The husband's inquiry: "Haven't I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?" (75) reveals how often his wife has endured his abusive behavior. The man's brutality continues as he "half struck, half flung her across the chair and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room" (75). Michael Johnson labels McLendon's as well as Miss Emily's father treatment of the female as a kind of patriarchal terrorism which is "a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control their women involving the systematic use of violence, economic subordination, isolation, and other control tactics" (284). Such masculine-biased practices are perpetrated again during the lockdown turning female victims of domestic violence into slender figures submerged by the overwhelming residues of patriarchy (Zhou et al., 2014; Faulkner & Badurdeen, 2014; Esposito et al., 1979).

Male authority established in the image of the tableau is the ultimate goal of a patriarchal culture's endeavor to direct the female body, voice, and will. Placing his daughter in a marginal position by which she is collectively remembered by the townspeople in Jefferson, Miss Emily's father fulfills his masculine subject and meets a sociocultural desire to valorize masculinity while placing the female in a position of submission and absence. In this respect, the tableau description which permeates the town's collective memory suppresses the woman's identity and voice, highlighting her sexuality through the virginal white dress and her inferior social position as a subhuman dependent on a male subject and manipulated by his horsewhip.

In "The Social Psychology of Paternalism," Kevin Railey further examines Irigaray's idea of the construction of masculine subject at the expense of female objectification, stating:

A key aspect of the definition of masculinity is the objectification of women. He [the patriarch] objectifies women into ladies for whom he can fight the good fight, silencing their sexual presence, praising them as if they were statues, goddesses, ladies of the pedestal. (87)

Envisioning her as an "idol," a "tradition," a "duty," and "care," Miss Emily's masculine-oriented town authorizes gender roles assigned to the patriarch as protector and provider. Moreover, positioning Miss Emily in an idolized state of respect and seeing in her "a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town," (47) the people of Jefferson eliminate the lady's humanity, sexuality, and voice. "When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, [...] with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows – sort of tragic and serene" (52). Inscripting her into a non-human paradigm and seeing her as an angel in the house, the men of Jefferson fulfill their masculine subject and validate their patriarchal authority.

Depicting Miss Emily as an idolized girl in "virginal white" and a locked-down spinster, Faulkner ironically uncovers a sociocultural system that establishes masculine-biased stereotypes and makes females accept them, declining any attempt to question and change them. In this vein, Caroline Dillman talks about strategies of female subjugation as far as Faulkner's south is concerned:

Southern women are tied to men for validation. If male dominance is threatened while women move into the public world because of changes in the social order, these men try to reinforce their wives' traditional gender-role beliefs to reassert dominance over them. (16)

Miss Emily's portrayal as a subcategory in the tableau image where she is passively positioned behind male authority and under the manipulation of her father's horsewhip as well as her excessive fear of being deserted by her lover, Homer Barron, lead her to be haunted and invaded by a patriarchal culture that sees in women's dependence to men a vital condition of establishing the masculine subject.

The image of the tableau replicates the state of abnegation and devaluation Miss Emily suffers from in a patriarchal town. The patriarch's whip, a phallic mark of presence, has for its target a daughter compelled to be under the dominance of a father who imprisons her and deprives her of voicing out her femininity while forbidding others to get into her domestic private life: "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" (52). In this respect, Judith Fetterley explains Miss Emily's decaying, dusty and closed house as a reflection of her psychological confinement, for "her identity is determined by the constructs of her fathers' mind and she can no more escape from his creation of her as a slender figure in white than she can escape his house" (37). Miss Emily's imprisonment in her patriarch's house is ironically echoed in the Covid-19 confinement of females in a patriarchal society and culture where the socioculturally established identity as a woman is a burden which she cannot overcome due to restrictions on mobility and masculine-biased gender stereotypes.

The relationship between Emily and her father is established upon patriarchal assumptions that abnegate and silence the feminine while voicing and valorizing the masculine. Describing Miss Emily as "a slender figure in the

background” and her father as a “spraddled silhouette” reveals male dominance over her life. Emily is standing behind her father, who is sitting in a chair on the front porch, with a horsewhip in his hand. The verb “spraddle” can be read as a combination of “sprawl” and “straddle.” Emily’s father straddles his chair which means he turns it around backward and sits with the back facing his daughter. To sprawl means to spread out. Therefore, Emily’s father is straddling his chair in a sprawled out, stern, erect, and relaxed pose telling about his privileged state as a patriarch. Likewise, the father’s “spraddled silhouette” can be explained as a shadow of someone standing or walking with spread legs and therefore works as a literal description of the dominance and authority of Emily’s father. However, thought about symbolically, the image of the “spraddled silhouette” signifies a patriarchal sprawling shadow that spreads out filling her house and life with silence and darkness. Accordingly, the father’s shadow falls over Miss Emily, spraddling her life and her psyche.

The same portrait of patriarchal dominance and locked down femininity is reproduced in *Sanctuary* where Temple ends up in a lockdown imposed by the patriarchal presence and Judge Drake’s straddled silhouette. The patriarch’s “hands crossed on the head of his stick” and “the rigid bar of his mustache beaded with moisture like frosted silver” (317) ironically stands for a sociocultural system that establishes masculine-biased stereotypes and declines any attempt to question them. The patriarch’s stick, another phallic symbol of masculinity, is telling about the dominance of a father who imprisons her and negates her identity. Temple’s state of confinement in the Luxembourg Gardens ironically echoes her confinement as a female in a patriarchal society and culture. Indeed, her socioculturally established identity as a woman is a burden which she cannot overcome. Described as a lifeless body “yawn[ing] behind her hand” and having “a face in miniature sullen and discontented and sad” (317) is indicative of male dominance over her life. Temple’s portrayal as “a miniature” passively positioned behind male authority is reverberated in females’ confinement and their vulnerability face to domestic violence during the Covid 19 lockdown.

Another image that echoes the Covid 19 lockdown and females’ subjection to domestic violence is produced in Faulkner’s *Mosquitoes* where Gordon, a socially detached artist, creates a sculpture that exhibits a “virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed yet passionate still for escape, passionate and simple and eternal in the equivocal derisive darkness of the world” (11). Gordon’s work of art unveils the patriarchal endeavor to objectify the female, denying her free identity and voice and culturally constructing her as a virgin with no legs to escape from the patriarch, no arms to resist his authority, and no head to talk and have her voice (Singal 89-90).

My body my choice: Emily’s hair cut

In a situation of confinement and subjugation, it is common for those who are unwillingly forced to live inside their homes to become a victim of domestic violence and react differently in an unusual way (Kumar 194). Following the mandatory lockdown, pictures of American women with the slogan “My body, my choice” started circulating on social media. The slogan soon spread to the United Kingdom, and in early May a group of protesters gathered in front of New Scotland Yard in London and engaged in a group hug defiant of Westminster lockdown rules with the slogan ‘My body, my choice, we do not consent’.³

The slogan ‘My Body, my choice’ is most commonly linked to feminist demands since the 1970s for women’s bodily autonomy and empowerment. In Covid-19, the slogan is reutilized to convey ideas of resistance, freedom, and mobility. In Faulkner’s *Yoknapatawpha*, the same slogan is voiced by many female characters who find in their bodies an expression of resistance and resilience. Though considered as “unusual”, Miss Emily’s act of cutting her hair is echoed in the slogan ‘My body, my choice’.

Despite the abundance of criticism devoted to Miss Emily Grierson’s character, too little analysis has been devoted to her silent resistance of masculinity through her head/hair. In many instances in Faulkner’s short story, Miss Emily makes use of her head and hair to communicate silent messages telling about a wordless seditious female identity. Interestingly, in her first reappearance in Jefferson after her father’s death, Miss Emily’s hair was cut short in a boyish fashion (52). Besides, the narrator reveals that the people of Jefferson are highly conscientious about Miss Emily’s hair:

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years, it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four, it was still that vigorous iron-gray, *like the hair of an active man*. (emphasis added 56)

Critics like Judith Fetterley and Deborah Clarke explain Miss Emily's gray hair as a sign of the decay and powerlessness of Southern womanhood. Nevertheless, the lady's hair can arguably be considered as a body language of resistance and empowerment. Cutting her hair in a manly style, Miss Emily announces her defiance of the Law of the Father and her emancipation from the confines of patriarchy after her father's death.

Though many critics like Galia Ofek and Barbara D. Miller emphasize the association between a woman's hair and sexuality, female hair can have social and personal significance. "Hairstyles can indicate not only an individual's aesthetic preference but also social differences varying according to age, sex, marital, and another status" (Hiltebeitel & Miller 124). Besides, in a book entitled *On Primitive Society*, anthropologist Christopher Robert Hallpike talks about the sociopolitical symbolism of female hair arguing that "cutting hair equals social control" (294) since changing one's hairstyle through cutting or dressing tells much about conformity or defiance of social norms and discipline.

Correspondingly, Miss Emily's manly haircut signals her refusal to conform to Jefferson's masculine constructed stereotypes of femininity as well as a mark of defiance to patriarchal laws. Miss Emily's masculine haircut falls within what Minrose C. Gwin describes as the creative aspect of the female character's response to a system that has repressed her. Cutting her hair, Miss Emily plays creatively by breaking gender stereotypes and paternal and societal restraints categorizing her as a decorative sexual object (65). Through such a culturally unusual act, Miss Emily attempts to subvert the Law of the Father, creating a nonverbal play of signifiers which echoes the slogan 'My body, my choice' though it undermines the linguistic system.

Similarly, the female's head is the testimony of a challenging attitude toward masculine rules. So significant is Miss Emily's act of buying poison in the local pharmacy. When the druggist states that the law requires her to tell what she is going to use it for, "Miss Emily just stared at him, *her head tilted back to look him eye for eye*" (emphasis added 54). The lady's reaction specifies her disrespectful attitude toward and critical vision about the law. Also, the gesture of her head tilted back to see the druggist eye to eye stands for her supposed authority over the patriarchal law of Jefferson. Indeed, Miss Emily's silent stare reveals her willingness to overcome the Law of the Father and fulfill her identity. As a female, Miss Emily "insists on making her existence, which the townspeople continually refuse to allow as they wish her to sustain her position as icon and memorial of antebellum South" (Appleton, 2001).

Having iron-gray hair which resembles "the hair of an active man [and] carry[ing] her head high enough – even when we believed that she was fallen" (52-53) and seen on a Sunday afternoon with Homer Barron "with her head high" (55), Miss Emily not only exhibits a powerful identity that turns her into a "monstrous apparition of the independent woman" (Appleton, 2001) but also reveals her desire to stand against and subvert the laws of patriarchy. Her image in the townspeople's memory is always associated with her Medusan⁴ hair which threatens to destroy a patriarchal culture and its masculine based norms. Hence, through her hair/head, Miss Emily manages to become a Medusa who challenges the patriarch and takes vengeance from a phallogocentric system violating the female and turning her into an object of desire.

In the same way, though Addie Bundren lies silent and lifeless in *As I Lay Dying*, she continues to shape both the existence of her family and the construction of Faulkner's novel. Her head similarly tells about resistance and subversion, for her reversed positioning in the coffin is symbolically telling of a reversed feminine existence which disturbs, challenges and controls: "They had laid her in it reversed [...] head to foot so it wouldn't crush her dress" (79-80). Lying with a veil over her head and reversed in a "clock-shaped" coffin, Addie Bundren silently celebrates her escape from the patriarch as Tull puts it: "Whenever she went, she has a reward in being free of Anse Bundren" (84). Yet, Addie Bundren finds Medusa's power and defiance in her head even when she is dying.

Remarkably, during her last moments, Addie Bundren never closes her eyes as if all her powers were placed in one part of her body. Her children and husband have the impression that her eyes are listening and talking as Darl states: "She looks at pa, all her failing life appears to drain into her eyes, urgent, irremediable" (44). Interestingly, Addie Bundren finds in her head and eyes an instrument to reject the patriarch even during her last and weakest moments. The last act Addie performs before death is to exhibit a silent yet rebellious stare at her husband:

She lies back and turns her head without so much as glancing at pa. She looks at Vardaman, her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them, the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone has leaned down and blown upon them. (43)

Addie's eyes are indeed mute reflectors of the lady's power centered in ahead which, in its presumed lifelessness, shows a sense of insubordination and triumph and being silently reiterated the slogan 'My Body, my choice.'

4 Conclusion

Resisting face masks in public for psychopolitical reasons and using war rhetoric characterizing in their speeches when dealing with the pandemic, male world leaders like Boris Johnson and Donald Trump are a modernized carbon copy of Colonel Sartoris in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha whose masculine nose is used to war powder and whose smell reminds his son of battles and victories. During mandatory lockdowns, the myth of patriarchal homes as comfort zones is called into question as homes turned into spaces of violence in which females are silenced and subjugated, turning into shadowy figures like Miss Emily, Mrs. Mc. Lendon, and Temple Drake in Faulkner's world. To voice their concerns and escape home as a gendered space, females turn to the language of their bodies. 'My Body, my choice', a slogan commonly noticed during the pandemic, had indeed been raised by Faulkner's female characters, like Addie Bundren and Emily Grierson, who found in their bodies power and agency. However, while scientists are currently working on a cure to the Covid 19 pandemic, the virus of masculinity in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha remained incurably toxic.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declared that he have no competing interest.

Statement of authorship

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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