rather than united (214–17, 219–23). In effect, having noticed what appears on either side of the "but"s and "yet"s, the painting's central line, or the lighthouse, Schneider assumes all that's juxtaposed gets united. For example, after noting certain female and male qualities in the descriptions of Lily's painting, he simply says that the painting is "obviously a fusion of the feminine and the masculine" and that it is "a fusion of female color . . . and male angular essences." No one denies that there are male- and female-associated images in the novel and that there may be related male and female qualities in the descriptions of the painting (224, n. 8), but I find no evidence of the accomplished "fusions" or "weddings" to which Schneider refers. Finding relations is different from finding fusions. Rather than address what I say (213, 222–23) about critical rhetoric like his "To capture the whole of life, the artist must wed 'female' imagination and 'male' reality," Schneider merely repeats such banal formulas as givens.

In short, Schneider either fails to understand or refuses to address the distinction my essay establishes between "relations" and "fusion" or oneness. Perhaps we can at least agree that *To the Lighthouse* does reveal Woolf's empathy for those people, like herself, who resist relinquishing romantic aesthetic attitudes and habits of mind (whatever their philosophical origins). But if these attitudes are enacted in the novel, it does not follow that they become a measure of Woolf's method or of her vision. If indeed there is a "vision that animates all Woolf's art," it certainly is not one in which a recipe calling for ingredients like imagination and reality or feeling and intelligence produces, with proper blending, a cake of unity.

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Faulkner and the Power of Sound

To the Editor:

Karl F. Zender's "Faulkner and the Power of Sound" (99 [1984]: 89–108) offers a valuable exploration of the roles of sound and silence in the experience of Faulkner's protagonists. Especially important is his elaboration of the evolution (in the fiction) of the more inimical possibilities of sound and (in the world at large) of Faulkner's increasingly urgent sense of the relationship between sound and the incursions of modern life that effectively keep most of us from thinking about the choices we are making in living it.

Zender's insights can be even more illuminating, though, if seen in a larger context: that of the interrelationship of sound and the other senses—notably sight and smell—that lead to knowledge for Faulkner's characters. (Zender does not discuss this relationship although he suggests it by beginning to insert references to smell into his discussion about halfway through.) By the time Faulkner was writing his "mature fiction," these three senses can be seen to have settled into a stable relationship with one another; each is a paradoxical source of information, on the one hand offering particular types of data and, on the other, accompanied by particular drawbacks.

Sight is the preferred way of knowing for Faulkner's protagonists whenever they need to understand or feel in control of a situation. It affirms distance between the self and what is perceived and, hence, confirms separateness and the fact (often problematic for Faulknerian protagonists) that the self has not been engulfed by the other. Consequently, we see—almost in direct proportion to the degree of subjectively experienced anxiety in a given character—tendencies to perceive the external world in strongly visual terms, to insist that what is seen is stable and, therefore, predictable. The paradox of sight, however, is that it regularly fails as a reliable indicator of reality; it tricks the perceiving self into a false belief that all is well.

Sound and smell, in contrast, convey an irrefutable sense either of safety or of danger, of peace or of threat (as Zender recognizes). You may not, in Faulkner's world, always know the specific identity of a particular sound or smell, but you are assured by its presence of the *fact* that what is near is benevolent or overwhelming. The difficulty with this knowledge, however, is that sound and smell function only by being experienced as interior events, by virtue of their intimate connection with our internal sensory organs. The separateness of the self and its safety from the otherness of others, then, is brought into question precisely by the experience of these senses. Unlike sight, sound and smell are characterized as involuntary, unchosen, and often invasive.

Thus, what typically occurs in Faulkner's world is that a character will attempt to understand a problematic reality by seeing it in all its aspects; sight will fail to give accurate knowledge; and the failure will be accompanied by a rapid decline in the subjective sense of control, conveyed by (1) the blurring or fading of visual objects, and (2) the increasing potency of the more nearly "blurry" senses such as hearing and smell. There are numerous examples of such occasions in Faulkner's prose, including some of Zender's own choices. An especially striking example occurs late in *Light in August* when Byron Bunch is forced to accept the fact that Lena Grove "is not a virgin" (Vintage-Random ed., 380). He has been near her and seen that her baby's birth is imminent, but "it was like for a week now his eyes had accepted her belly without his mind believing" (377). Byron attempts to flee the scene of the birth in order to forestall the knowledge his eyes have refused to convey: "He passed the cabin at a gallop, with thinking going smooth and steady, he not yet

knowing why. 'If I can just get past and out of hearing before she hollers again,' he thought. 'If I can just get past before I *have to hear* her again.' . . . he ran in the final hiatus of peace before the blow fell and the clawed thing overtook him from behind. Then he heard the child cry. Then he knew" (379, emphasis mine).

In the passage from *The Sound and the Fury* that Zender quotes (94), it is the failure of sight that causes the sounds and smells Quentin experiences to begin to embody powerfully the subjective sense of blurring and indeterminacy that characterizes the final portion of his monologue. "Grey halflight" and "twilight" reflect a disintegration of visual control that is the counterpart for Quentin's loss of subjective integrity, his sense of engulfment by sensations alien to him.

This perspective on sound's relationship to the other senses Faulkner uses with similar care enhances many of Zender's observations because it suggests the larger coherence of Faulkner's choices. The interplay of the clarity and precision promised by vision, on the one hand, and the intensity and irrefutability of sound and smell, on the other—and for that matter, of their respective presences and absences in particular scenes—conveys a sense of the larger patterns of perception that inform much of Faulkner's work.

Gail L. Mortimer
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Reply:

Gail L. Mortimer's comments, though interesting, are not very germane to my essay. As I make clear in my introduction, the purpose of my essay is to explore changes in Faulkner's understanding of himself as an artist. I chose sound as the vehicle for this exploration both because of the historical importance of its association with artistic inspiration and because of its centrality to Faulkner's depictions of the relation between the self and the world. Extending my argument to include sight and smell would not materially alter my conclusions—a point Mortimer implicitly concedes by her failure to disagree with the main lines of my argument.

I wish also to speak to the substance of Mortimer's comments. Her letter repeats an argument she develops at greater length in *Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983). Though the argument broaches a valuable area of inquiry, in neither of its forms is it fully convincing. It has two main limitations. The first is that Mortimer's "typical" pattern of a collapse of sight into sound and smell by no means dominates Faulkner's fiction. Often, in fact, an exactly opposite movement occurs. One thinks, for example, of the Reverend Shegog's sermon in *The Sound and the Fury*, which begins with the congregation listening to Shegog maneuver "upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice," then moves to "hearts . . . speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words," and finally culminates in the congregation's repeated "I sees, O Jesus! Oh I sees!" and in Dilsey's "I've seed de first en de last." And as a second example, one may cite the repeated pattern in *Absalom, Absalom!*, amounting to a central motif of the work, wherein the various narrators' voices are described as vanishing into acts of vision on the part of their auditors. Faulkner's depictions of relations among sight, sound, and smell are far too various to be confined within the single pattern that Mortimer examines.

The second limitation is related to the first. Mortimer's nearly exclusive emphasis on the psychological dimension of Faulkner's representations of the senses produces a narrow and somewhat negative view of the role of sight in his fiction. The acts of seeing in which Dilsey and the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* engage are not visual but visionary, and their success or failure depends as much on cultural conditions as on psychological ones. To "see" as Dilsey does is to reside within a set of philosophical and religious assurances that make such transcendental forms of seeing possible. The withdrawal of these assurances is a central theme—perhaps *the* central theme—of Faulkner's fiction, and his attitude toward their disappearance is never unequivocal. Hence efforts to see, far from merely exhibiting a character's "need to understand or feel in control of a situation," often reveal a transcendental yearning that Faulkner endows with positive value; and failures of vision as frequently provide evidence of the tragic stature of Faulkner's characters as of their psychopathology.

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Gawain's Wound

To the Editor:

One doesn't have to be apologetic for raising the issue of Gawain's wound; we raise it because we have not yet discovered or uncovered all the sources, analogues, and implications of both the wound symbol and the *Gawain* romance.

I agree with Paul F. Reichardt ("Gawain and the Image of the Wound," 99 [1984]: 154–61) that "the image of the wound . . . occupies a prominent place in the poem" (154), that "the sacred wounds of Christ offer a striking contrast to Gawain's wound of 'vnleuté'" (154), that "Gawain's *cervix* is the appropriate location of the Green Knight's blow, for it is the traditional anatomical locus of the problem of stiff-necked pride" (157) not only for Gawain but also for "the Arthurian