

ADDITIONAL MANUSCRIPTS OF FAULKNER'S "A DEAD DANCER"

by
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TO DATE the only versions of William Faulkner's early poem, "A Dead Dancer," which have been published are the three autograph manuscripts contained in the Faulkner Collections at the University of Virginia.¹ Additional manuscripts of this poem, however, are included in the William Faulkner Collection of Louis Daniel Brodsky.² The Brodsky documents, three of which are transcribed below,³ make significant contributions to the bibliographical history of "A Dead Dancer." For one thing, the Brodsky materials provide evidence that the Virginia versions are incomplete, omitting as they do the conclusion of the poem. Moreover, one of the Brodsky texts, the partially-burned version of "A Dead Dancer" appearing in "The Lilacs," the hand-lettered booklet which Faulkner assembled and presented to Phil Stone in January 1920,⁴ quite possibly represents Faulkner's final rendition of this poem.

BRODSKY 14a

A comparison with Virginia 2 suggests that this untitled Brodsky manuscript is a fragment, the final two stanzas of an early version of the poem. The last stanza of Brodsky 14a is especially important; it suggests the possibility that Brodsky 14a could be the next in a series of revisionary drafts following Virginia 1,⁵ or, indeed—perhaps more likely—a hitherto unknown continuation of Virginia 1.

The hurdy-gurdy in the street below
Still weaves the song across the silent street
Like gold threads in an ancient tapestry
And we that she had loved at different times
Sit in the backwash of self consciousness
Beyond the ebb and flow of Life and Death
Seeing her on the backdrop of the brain
Her long slow eyes and shaken hair, her breast
Short with the love she felt, or seemed to feel
['If it was love' *del.*]
Visions, flawless children of the brain
While each one whispers to himself — I was the last.

She dances now for apocryphal lovers
In the dim aisles, with pale stirrings
Of the white mouths of the dead, a wind
That whispers in her shadowy garments.

(stanza continued)

1. See *Man Collecting: Manuscripts and Printed Works of William Faulkner in the University of Virginia Library*, comp. Joan St. C. Crane and Anne E. H. Freudenberg (1975), pp. 124, 131-133. These manuscripts are hereafter designated as Virginia 1, 2, and 3, in keeping with their numbering in *Man Collecting*.

2. See Robert W. Hamblin and Louis Daniel Brodsky, *Selections from the William Faulkner Collection of Louis Daniel Brodsky: A Descriptive Catalogue* (1979), items 14-14d, 17. For purposes of identification the numbering of these items in this catalogue has been retained.

3. The other two Brodsky documents relating to "A Dead Dancer" (Hamblin and Brodsky, 14b, 14c) contain experimental lines from an unidentified poem describing summer rain. Apparently this attempt was abandoned, but several of the images and phrases (most notably, "And we sit dreaming dreams beyond the ebb and flow / Of dying years") were utilized in "A Dead Dancer."

4. For a description of this booklet see Hamblin and Brodsky, pp. 31-32.

5. Both manuscripts are written in brown ink on 14 by 8½-inch Hammermill Bond paper. (In *Man Collecting* the paper-size of Virginia 1 is mistakenly identified as 11 by 8½ inches.)

[‘In her hair are poppies, ghosts of loves’ *del.*]
 And in the poppies she wears in her hair
 And the foot-lights of her stage are asphodels
 [‘And’ *del.*] While her song, as it falls spreading into silence
 Like slow ripples on a placid stream at sunset
 Still loops and coils about her painted limbs

BRODSKY 14d

This autograph manuscript contains three experimental versions of the final stanza of the poem. These versions are considerably different from both Brodsky 14a and the text Faulkner produced in “The Lilacs.”

One might speculate that Brodsky 14d is a continued reworking of Virginia 2, and that the initial two lines of this draft (14d), set off by themselves, are in fact the final two verses of the three-line stanza concluding Virginia 2.⁶

She goes through calm vistas of the shadows
 Pale with stirrings of the white mouths of the dead

About her are the white mouths of the dead
 Their voices, like a wind that whispers in her garments
 And in the poppies wreathed about her head
 While the foot lights of her stage are asphodels
 And her song, as it falls spreading into silence
 Still loops and coils about her painted legs

About her now the white mouths of the dead
 Stir like a wind that whispers in her garments
 And in the poppies wreathed about her head
 While the foot lights of her stage are asphodels
 And her song, as it falls spreading into silence
 Still loops and coils about her painted legs

BRODSKY 17

The text of “A Dead Dancer” in “The Lilacs,” like the remainder of the booklet, was partially destroyed by fire in 1942. However, through collation with other extant versions, one may reconstruct the “Lilacs” copy almost entirely.

In the reconstruction printed below brackets enclose material missing in the burned copy. The manuscripts upon which these additions are based are identified at the end of each line. In some cases the apparent length of the line in the “Lilacs” text has dictated the choice among variant readings.⁷ Interpolations are indicated by *ed.* In lines 13-14 reconstruction was impossible, since no corresponding versions of these lines exist in other manuscripts.⁸

6. Both autograph drafts are written in blunt pencil; all five lines represent revisionary attempts to clarify a similar set of images.

7. For example, the wording of lines 3, 11, and 19. Length-of-line considerations also influenced the omission in line 13 and the addition of “And” in line 18.

8. What at first appear to be good possibilities for the wording of line 13 (for example, “A little nameless tune”) are negated by the fact that the top stems of two adjacent letters (perhaps *b*, *d*, *f*, *h*, *k*, *l*, and/or *t*) are barely visible one-half inch to the left of the comma.

