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Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and the Politics of Art.

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**FAULKNER AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION:
AESTHETICS, IDEOLOGY, AND THE POLITICS OF ART**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of English

**by
Theodore B. Atkinson III
B.A., University of Mississippi, 1990
M.A., Mississippi College, 1996
May 2001**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first experience with a Faulkner novel was, appropriately enough, during my undergraduate days at the University of Mississippi. It was *Sanctuary*, and I was just eighteen. What captivated me then was a sense of the familiar: Horace's visit to "the University" and the excitement over the baseball game against that other school. But thanks to dedicated Faulkner scholars and teachers such as Doreen Fowler and Jay Watson, whom I will always appreciate, I read not only more but more deeply. And so here I am, diving deeper still. Though certainly more skeptical now, I am no less captivated.

First and foremost, I must express my gratitude to Professor Panthea Reid for her guidance in this project. It was her interest in Faulkner and in the 1930s that inspired me to put two and two together, so to speak. I am grateful for her wise counsel, her unfailing support and affirmation, and, of course, her biographer's sense of chronology.

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's most concentrated and flourishing phase of literary production virtually coincided with the Great Depression, yet the relationship between these two monumental developments in American cultural history has remained for the most part unexplored. Consequently, a more complete understanding of Faulkner can be achieved by redressing this critical oversight. Such an endeavor must involve reconstituting relevant features of historical and cultural context so as to comprehend the forces informing Faulkner's literary production. A critical approach rooted in Marxist literary theory is useful in this regard, for it challenges persistent notions of Faulkner as a writer resistant to contextual influences in the pursuit of an autonomous "art for art's sake" rather than a writer of considerable social insight. Through analysis of aesthetics and ideology as integrated rather than mutually exclusive subjects of inquiry, this study traces the social dimensions of Faulkner's literary production in the thirties and reveals its active participation in the politics of art extant in the cultural context. Posited at the outset, then, is a theory that the aesthetic features of Faulkner's texts are bound to larger ideological formations, thus yielding political implications that are measurable in terms of thematic content and formal structure. Examining Faulkner's fiction in relation to prominent social and cultural issues—specifically, the "Literary Class War," the specter of fascism, and the prospect of agrarian revolution—provides an instructive means of testing this theory. This critical inquiry finds that tensions between narrative disruption and the desire for closure in Faulkner's texts suggest that his fictional voice assimilates, represents, and negotiates the struggle to achieve order in a period of heightened social upheaval.

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner's most celebrated work emerged from a concentrated phase of artistic production that rivals any in literature. Remarkably, the novels most often read and taught were written in the years roughly spanning the Great Depression. At a time when America produced so little, Faulkner produced so much. Though these two significant events in American cultural history occurred simultaneously, there exists no comprehensive study of their relationship to each other. Influenced by cultural studies and its fundamental tenet that literary production is a social process, this study seeks to fill in this blank by exploring Faulkner's art in relation to the historical and cultural forces that inevitably shaped his writing during the Great Depression.

During those years of the Depression, America's most severe socioeconomic crisis, influential critics in the literary establishment placed a high premium on art that spoke to the pressing social issues of the day. Some of these critics viewed Faulkner as a throwback to the "decadent" and "bourgeois" literary formalism of the twenties; others charged more vehemently that his emphasis on violence and the macabre demonstrated an indifference to the evils of poverty and racism prevalent in his native South. Consequently, Faulkner's work seemed out of touch in an era when harsh socioeconomic conditions inspired artists to establish social consciousness and political activism as necessary criteria for worthwhile art.

But Faulkner experienced a rapid rise in literary reputation after ending the Depression in relative obscurity, his books mostly out of print and his prospects for leaving a lasting impression on American letters appearing slim at best. The same fundamental argument that had been made to bury Faulkner in the thirties was made to

praise him in the forties and fifties. After Malcolm Cowley effectively resurrected Faulkner by seeing to the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946, the New Critics pointed to Faulkner as an example of consummate artistic genius. For the New Critics, Faulkner's apparent lack of social consciousness was an asset—a trait that distinguished his work from the "political art" of the thirties perceived as deficient in aesthetic value. The Faulkner whom the New Critics canonized was the crafter of the "well wrought urn" who belonged in the company of the geniuses of modernist literature—Joyce, Woolf, and Proust, for example. Faulkner's modernism was his greatest attribute at a time when American literary criticism was in transition after the Depression and World War II. As Lawrence H. Schwartz observes, Faulkner was "perfectly suited to the prevailing formalist aesthetics of the post-war era which claimed, in part, that literature in its fully realized form was universal and apolitical" (203)—this formalism was in itself a reaction to the prevailing aesthetic of the thirties which insisted that art and politics remain inextricably linked. Interpretations of Faulkner from both perspectives, then, shared in common the view that Faulkner's art aims for the universal in scope and thus remains distant from the immediate concerns normally associated with political art. The notion of Faulkner as essentially an apolitical writer has remained a persistent influence guiding much of Faulkner studies even to this day.

Certainly adding to this perception of Faulkner has been a pervasive tendency to treat his work within a strictly regional context. When scholars attempt to situate Faulkner in relation to contextual forces, the emphasis tends to be on his native South—and with good reason. The importance of place in Faulkner's work is evident in the

palpable South that he evokes in proportions frequently described as mythic. To measure the importance of place in Faulkner, we need only consider the seismic shift often noted in Faulkner's career when he turned from writing in the derivative vein of *Soldier's Pay* (1925) and *Mosquitoes* (1927) to *Sartoris* (1929) in which he founded his Yoknapatawpha County, later famously declaring himself "sole owner and proprietor." Faulkner's South is much like Joyce's Ireland: in the case of both writers, the native region is a source of intense sorrow and torment and, in dialectical form, of definitive influence and inspiration. But the centrality of place has encouraged in Faulkner studies a sort of critical provincialism which imposes *de facto* limitations not only on Faulkner's scope but on the scope of the critic as well. This decidedly essentialist stance, either implicitly or explicitly, demands that Faulkner be conceived primarily, if not solely, as a *southern* writer confined to the influences of his region even as he is credited with transporting that region to the realm of the universal.¹ What can be lost in the process, as John T. Matthews reminds us, however, is the participation of Faulkner's literary production in the progression of American history.²

This study redresses that loss by viewing Faulkner as an *American* writer, certainly influenced heavily by the history and culture of his native region and his experiences as a southerner, but by no means confined to those influences. Despite the close ties to home that Faulkner maintained for his entire life, he was no provincial, as his various connections to the larger American culture attest. Faulkner's stints as a Hollywood screenwriter and his mingling with the New York *literati*, awkward though it was, are cases in point of Faulkner's awareness of and participation in the larger cultural moment. In recognition of this broader scope, some scholars have suggested a

more expansive view of Faulkner. In reference to the American experience, Frederick Karl writes: "We must locate Faulkner *there*. However much the South and his chosen few square miles became the substance of his novels and nourished his imagination, his reach was for America" (*William Faulkner: American Writer* 15). In a similar vein, David Minter contends that Faulkner's "art is broad in its allusions, analogues, and reach. It brings the culture, society, and political economy of one imaginary North Mississippi county into the broad sweep of U.S. history" (217). These general insights provide a useful starting point from which to examine in more specific terms how in reaching for America Faulkner produced both art and cultural artifact.

Rather than perceiving Faulkner as removed from context, out of modernist solipsism or provincial isolation, this study assumes a materialist stance and contends through analysis of ideology and aesthetics that Faulkner's art is grounded in the *American* culture of the Depression era and thus is responsive to issues of contemporary political relevance. Placing Faulkner into "conversation" with this historical and cultural moment reveals the ways that the aesthetic components of his texts are bound to larger ideological formations, yielding political implications that can be measured in terms of formal structure. For this reason, it is difficult to separate ideology from aesthetics and thus ideological analysis from aesthetic interpretation. The tendency to separate these two critical practices, a result of the politics of current literary criticism, has been a deterrent to achieving a more comprehensive view of Faulkner to account for the brilliance of his art and the materiality of its relationship to contextual forces. Seeking a fuller comprehension, then, this study contests a basic perception of Faulkner formed in the thirties and perpetuated in the years beyond; it does so by asserting a

certain social consciousness on Faulkner's part. In so doing, it identifies in Faulkner's literary production a complex "politics of art," which was ignored, resisted, or simply misread in the context of polarized cultural debates during the thirties. Such an endeavor reveals how in terms of thematic content and formal structure Faulkner's art represents and negotiates social conflicts prevalent in the American culture of the Great Depression.

In spite of this fundamental contention, I should point out that by no means do I intend to suggest that Faulkner exhibits the same sort of social consciousness as leftist intellectuals which was evident in the literature of social realism advocated by influential critics and writers in the literary establishment of the thirties.³ Faulkner's novels and stories written during the Depression contain few explicit references to the issues and incidents that concerned the left in contemporary culture. In *Sanctuary*, Horace Benbow does not use the courtroom as a forum to indict systematic exploitation of the working class. Nor does Joe Christmas chronicle the injustices of the Scottsboro trial in *Light in August*. Quentin Compson does not explicitly make the tale of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* an object lesson about the rise of fascism. Talk on the front porch of Will Varner's general store in *The Hamlet* does not turn conspicuously to the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti. All of this is to say that Faulkner was indeed too much the artist to run the risk of his art becoming propaganda, as he likely considered many works of social realism. However, a lack of explicit references does not mean that Faulkner lacked a certain social consciousness or that his art does not bear the marks of its production in a specific historical and cultural context. In archeological terms, then, this study will expose and decipher those marks in the interest of achieving

greater understanding of Faulkner's literary artifacts as participants in and documents of historical and cultural development in the Depression era.

* * *

The chapters of this study are organized in relation to key issues that defined social consciousness during the 1930s. With emphasis on these issues, we can see how Faulkner's fiction contains ideological responses to larger social concerns. These responses are useful in identifying how Faulkner's aesthetic judgments are then implicated in contemporary politics.

The first chapter is devoted to an overview of the historical and cultural context of the Depression era. An ideological shift from individualism toward collectivism was evident during this period, as socioeconomic distress inspired communal values and caused Americans to become more accepting of activism on the part of the federal government. This pattern extended as well to forms of cultural expression, as evidenced by revitalized social realism and calls for the fusion of art and politics. Despite an emergent radicalism pressing the cause of fundamental social and political reform, however, dominant social formations such as the New Deal opted for measures that would not alter the basic structure of American society which was favorable to the dominant class. At this time, then, the nation practiced a sort of formal experimentation in response to the radical disruptions inspired by the desperate circumstances of the Depression. With this historical and cultural frame of reference established, I set out to explore how Faulkner's literary production represents and negotiates social conflicts in

terms of thematic content and formal structure and thus actively participates in the politics of art.

The primary focus of chapter 2 is the relationship between Faulkner's early fiction and the Literary Class War of the late twenties and early thirties. This major cultural conflict pitted a residual formalism against an emergent social realism and influenced authors and critics to stake firm positions based on opposing aesthetic ideologies. In practice, however, this culture war was marked not only by conflict but also by artful negotiations. A survey of Faulkner's critical reception in the thirties—especially "excavated" reviews from leftist critics—reveals his literary production as an important site of negotiation. Early Faulkner novels, for example, are responsive to aesthetic and ideological tensions that would lead to the Literary Class War. Situating *Mosquitoes* in relation to an emergent cultural critique of the "lost generation," I examine how formalist aesthetic theories espoused in this novel of ideas clash with representations of class relations bound to social reality. This dynamic is even more pronounced in *The Sound and the Fury*, as the modernist form of the text gives way section by section to an expansive social vision. In each case, the disrupted condition of the text produces a desire for closure; the ensuing tensions enact in narrative terms the political struggle to maintain established order in response to the prospect of social transformation. This textual dynamic exposed at the intersection of aesthetics and ideology establishes a pattern that extends to subsequent works examined in this study.

In chapter 3, I examine Faulkner's fiction in relation to the discourse around fascism in the thirties. Mainly a cultural formation, this discourse functioned as a means of negotiating the deployment and distribution of power at a time of national

crisis. Its emergence can be traced to the gangster stories of the late twenties and early thirties which many cultural critics describe as proto-fascist fantasies influencing and influenced by the desire for strong leadership in response to the Depression. In *Sanctuary*, Faulkner clearly employs the popular gangster genre and thus, I contend, his novel becomes implicated in the discourse around fascism. In order to illustrate the ideological implications of this narrative decision, I examine *Sanctuary* in relation to the rash of gangster films that appeared from 1930-32. Like the gangster films, Faulkner's novel represents an imperiled system of justice and a crisis in law and order. However, instead of celebrating the outlaw as a force of social disruption and transformation, *Sanctuary* contains the gangster in a reassuring form and thus represents in narrative terms the maintenance of established order in response to the prospect of social transformation. In the wake of the gangster films, representations of mob violence and lynching extended the discourse around fascism. Such representations in *Sanctuary*, "Dry September," and *Light in August* explore the nature of mob mentality from the standpoint of an apprehensive dominant class fearful of social disruption. By the mid-thirties, the aggressive and ruthless tactics of the "great dictator" figures had inspired vocal opposition to fascism. This opposition was most visible in the Popular Front, which inspired artists such as Orson Welles to adopt the allegory of anti-fascism as a form of cultural expression. In this cultural context, I read the story of Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* as an anti-fascist allegory informed by the class anxieties on display in the discourse around fascism.

Chapter 4 examines Faulkner's depictions of agrarian life in the context of mounting social unrest in rural America born of hardship. During the Depression, the

plight of the small farmer contributed to revitalized populism in rural America which led many in the culture to consider the prospect of an agrarian revolution. However, radical agrarianism surfaced mainly in the realm of ideas—for example, the farming cooperatives proposed by leftists and the rural utopia imagined by the Southern Agrarians in their anti-industrialist manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*. Harsh socioeconomic conditions and burgeoning radicalism made rural America a site of struggle between the forces of order and upheaval in the Depression. This politics of social upheaval noticeably influences Faulkner's depictions of the small farmer, contributing to what I call conflicted agrarian representations. On the one hand, Faulkner's fiction shows a keen awareness of and sympathy for the plight of the small farmer. On the other hand, it exhibits a noticeable apprehension over the prospect of small farmers exercising political agency in the interest of transforming the existing social order. Stemming from familial, social, and historical influences, this contradiction is inscribed in the thematic content and formal structure of Faulkner's texts, as illustrated by my readings of *As I Lay Dying*, "Barn Burning," the opening section of *The Hamlet*, and "The Tall Men." I argue that tensions between order and upheaval apparent in the disrupted nature of these narratives bind Faulkner's literary production to the politics of social upheaval in rural America.

* * *

Examining Faulkner's implication in the politics of art requires a resistance to a common tendency in Faulkner studies to insist on finding unity and order in his work. On the contrary, we must be open to the ideological contradictions that characterize the

fiction produced in this most prolific span of Faulkner's career. For, as we shall see, these contradictions are indicative of Faulkner's position in a dominant social class struggling with instability and with reassessment of longstanding values under substantial revision in an era of heightened emphasis on social and economic justice. In a climate of professed binary opposition between left-versus-right, proletariat-versus-bourgeois, and social realism-versus-formalism, Faulkner's complex works defy the sort of facile categorization prevalent at the time even as they respond to pressing concerns with relevance and urgency.

If the production of literature is a social process, as I have so far suggested, then so is literary criticism. For a critic, the task of approaching the figure of William Faulkner is certainly daunting, given the vast amount of resources comprising the community of Faulkner scholarship that has come to be known as Faulkner studies. Undertaking an analysis of the ideological nature and political implications of Faulkner's art is even more challenging, because Faulkner studies remains a major front in the American "culture wars," as even a cursory view of the scholarship will confirm. Since the late 1920s, literary criticism has participated in a tug-of-war between those professing that art is an autonomous form of expression and those insisting on its formative relationship to contextual forces. Generally speaking, this debate has obtained from the high modernism of the "lost generation" to the insurgent literature of social conscience in the thirties to the New Criticism of the forties and fifties and, currently, to the burgeoning of critical theory in the era of postmodernism. Through it all, Faulkner has emerged as an increasingly prominent and controversial source of debate, and so it compels the critic intent on examining the political implications of

Faulkner's writing first to recognize the political implications of his or her own approach and to situate it accordingly.

The relationship of Faulkner's art to its context has inspired careful examinations from the earliest critical analyses of his work. Out of this line of inquiry, there are, I think, two general trends that pertain to this study. Predictably, these trends coincide with the move from the monolithic New Criticism toward the multiplicity of contemporary critical theory, providing confirmation that Faulkner is a writer to whom we repeatedly turn as we continue to define and redefine the purpose and function of literature.

One view holds that contextual forces are material for Faulkner in the sense of providing substance for his creative enterprise. Instead of these forces acting on Faulkner, the theory goes, Faulkner acts on them, and they are subsumed by his creative genius and reshaped or ordered by him. Conceived in the early defenses of Faulkner in the thirties, which we will consider in greater detail in chapter 2, this approach gained refinement under the New Critics' championing of Faulkner in the forties and fifties. It is most clearly exhibited in Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, which inspired a generation of critics insistent upon Faulkner's dominance over context. Brooks's interpretation of Faulkner's relationship to history is indicative of this critical approach. In drawing conclusions from his study, Brooks observes that Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha "bears a special and significant relation to history [. . .] [and] has a sort of collective memory," and so "this society is bound together by unspoken assumptions—that is to say, it is a true community" (368). In this sense, if the actual events of history tend toward the unpredictable and chaotic, then order can be restored

through the unifying power of art. What lacks coherence and cohesion in history thus becomes reconciled in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and the "concrete particularity of its old-fashioned order" (368), which is native to the autonomous realm of the text.

But Brooks's interpretation ultimately relies on what Warren Susman has called the use of history as myth and ideology.⁴ For Brooks, Faulkner's treatment of history has value because it performs the role of myth, in the classic sense of the term, providing a "usable past" (Susman 7-26) to this "true" community seeking reassurance of order and stability. In response to the view of Faulkner's relationship to context informing Brooks's study and its descendants, a number of scholars have offered alternatives rooted in the argument that the relationship is material, in the sense that context acts in tangible ways to shape or to produce Faulkner's art as part of a social process. Initially, Myra Jehlen's groundbreaking study, *Class and Character in Faulkner's South*, set out to expose the ideological implications of Faulkner's fiction and Brooks's interpretation of it. Where Brooks stresses unity and order, Jehlen finds quite the opposite in Faulkner's major works: "Faulkner's South is homogenous only in the sense of adding up to a coherent community; but that community is itself deeply rent and its parts in constant play" (10). At the root of this division, Jehlen argues, are "moral and ideological antagonisms rooted in a discordant class structure" (20). In this regard, Faulkner's art has material ties to the social context from which it emerges. Though noticeably lacking a necessary theoretical framework, Jehlen's study has nevertheless provided a base for critics wishing to bring Marxist literary theory and cultural studies to bear on Faulkner.⁵

The trend toward ideological analysis inspired by Jehlen has, not surprisingly, met with considerable resistance in Faulkner studies, which has been a refuge for traditionalism in literary studies. The terms of this debate were cast long ago in the initial reception of Faulkner during the Great Depression. Now, as ever, the debate tends toward professed extremes—formalist assertions of the autonomous author and text inspire opposing assertions of the ideological implications of Faulkner's socially-produced art which, in turn, yield formalist charges of reductive determinism. And so on. When the 1992 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, the Mecca of Faulkner studies, convened to consider the theme "Faulkner and Ideology," the give-and-take took center stage. The subsequent publication of *Faulkner and Ideology*, including selected proceedings of the conference, reveals in its textuality the politics of this controversial debate, occurring within Faulkner studies but reflecting as well the climate of the broader "culture wars." In this publication, ideological analysis is, for the most part, cast as a threat to sound Faulkner scholarship; it is charged with denying Faulkner's art distinction as a privileged form of expression. Through a process of demystification, critics contend, ideological analysis reduces the value Faulkner's art: determined by ideological forces that they cannot transcend, Faulkner's texts thus becomes mere symptoms of their contexts.⁶ For André Bleikasten, ideological analysis, conducted by "new ideologues" in Faulkner studies, is something to be feared, for it potentially signals "a relapse into the leftist pieties and platitudes of the 1930s" (Kartiganer and Abadie, *Faulkner and Ideology* 4). To meet this challenge, Faulkner scholars should presumably reassert the apolitical nature of Faulkner's fiction and the absolute autonomy of the artist and text, which is ultimately about "the singular

conditions and singular becomings of singular beings" (Kartiganer and Abadie, *Faulkner and Ideology* 19).

Binary opposition is rarely productive in literary criticism, and this is certainly the case with the sort of absolutes constructed in the sound and fury over ideological analysis in Faulkner studies. Consequently, this study resists these absolutes in its attempt to account for how ideology informs Faulkner's literary production by giving aesthetics its due. Instead of viewing these critical practices as independent, this study operates under the assumption that they are interdependent. The argument that exposing the political implications of Faulkner's art somehow diminishes its value is tied to the more general suspicion that the "well wrought urn" brought down from its pedestal is sure to be damaged. On the contrary, recognizing the inevitable negotiations between text and context, between ideology and aesthetics, between art and politics can yield greater appreciation and understanding of Faulkner's remarkable achievements. By examining the ways that Faulkner's art engages the historical and cultural moment of its production, we stand to gain new insight into the ways that one of the most profound and complex American writers continues to engage us.

End Notes

¹ This sort of reading was championed by advocates of the New Criticism. See, for example, Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, one of the most influential works in the history of Faulkner studies. In the first chapter, demonstratively called "Faulkner the Provincial," Brooks compares Faulkner to W.B. Yeats in an effort to assert the positive value of Faulkner's provincialism: "Faulkner's work, like that of the great Irish poet, embodies a criticism of the prevailing commercial and urban culture, a criticism made from the standpoint of a provincial and traditional culture" (2). For Brooks, though, provincialism must not be viewed through the prism of realism for fear of leading to reductive sociological treatments of Faulkner's fiction that measure its representation of the South in terms of factual rather than aesthetic truth. Brooks thus offers this brand of provincialism, which can only be understood by

those who know "how fiction 'works,'" as a means of distinguishing Faulkner's "works of art" from mere exercises in social realism (9).

² I refer here to Matthews's critique of the methodology employed by the New Critics in his essay "The Sacrifice of History in the New Criticism of Cleanth Brooks."

³ "Social realism" is intended here as a broad term to encompass the literature of social conscience prevalent during the thirties. Of course, there are more specific sub-genres such as proletarian literature, for example. In *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*, Barbara Foley discusses the various types of fiction produced by leftist writers during the Depression.

⁴ See "History as Myth and Ideology," the first section of *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* for Susman's full description of this concept (3-38).

⁵ Here I am thinking in particular of Sylvia Jenkins Cook's chapter on Faulkner in *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction* in which she argues that "in his treatment of poor whites and of southern society generally, Faulkner is as acutely class-conscious as any Marxist and as prone to patters of economic sympathy and class allegiance" (39-40). See also Carolyn Porter, "Faulkner's America," in *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner*. John T. Matthews has drawn a useful line of inquiry rooted in Marxist theory and cultural studies. See especially "As I Lay Dying in the Machine Age," "Faulkner and Cultural Studies," the introduction to a special issue of the *Faulkner Journal* devoted to cultural studies approaches, and "Faulkner and the Culture Industry." Recent works have extended this line in compelling directions. See Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* and Kevin Railey, *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner*.

⁶ The resistance to ideological analysis is evident in both the form and content of the text. In the Introduction, Donald M. Kartiganer questions the validity of such examination, basing his argument on Faulkner's self-professed lack of concern for contextual matters when writing novels and stories. This leads Kartiganer, perhaps inevitably, to adopt the intentional fallacy: "If there is ideology in Faulkner's fiction, it is absent, *as far as he is concerned*, of much of the comprehensive and subtle force that Marx and more recent commentators have attributed to it" (ix; emphasis added). Essays that do conduct ideological analysis—for instance, those by Richard Gray, Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., Ted Ownby, Anne Goodwyn Jones, and Thadious M. Davis—are conspicuously framed by indictments of this method. Betraying what might best be called an organizational ideology, Kartiganer explains that "The volume concludes—perhaps not surprisingly and even properly so—with two further versions of André Bleikasten's opening salvo against ideological analysis" (xxii), which are essays by

Noel Polk and Louis Rubin, Jr. The tenor of the text takes on a decidedly biased tone as a result of this noticeable editorial posturing.

CHAPTER ONE

(RE)FORMING FAULKNER'S ART: HISTORY, CULTURE, AND THEORY

If ideological analysis is to be useful in examining Faulkner, it is important to reconstruct, to the extent possible, the historical and cultural context that encompassed his literary production in the years spanning the Great Depression. A comprehensive account of Depression-era history and culture obviously falls outside the parameters of this study, and so I want to focus on what was perhaps the most fundamental ideological shift that occurred during the Depression: the move away from individualism toward collectivism which the majority of Americans, in the midst of socioeconomic distress, came to view as a necessity. Rocked by the devastation of the Depression, the country made this move in order to shape a social structure able to withstand the hard times. America was, as always, experimenting with its form. In the process, this ideological shift permeated social thought, public policy, political discourse, cultural expression, and literary theory. More to the point, it informed important aspects of Depression-era history and culture relevant to this study—specifically, the greater emphasis on social and economic justice, the conception and implementation of the New Deal, the aesthetic and ideological debates active in the literary establishment, and, ultimately, Faulkner's literary production.

Any examination of the tensions between individualism and collectivism during the Depression should resist the temptation to view these concepts as absolutes. Rather it is more productive, I think, to assign them different points on a spectrum with varying degrees falling in between. In the Depression, prevailing social thought and public policy accepted an increasingly greater degree of collectivism while trying not to

abandon individualism altogether. This seismic shift in ideology is perhaps best defined in terms of cultural materialism. I would argue, then, that individualism was a residual ideology and collectivism an emergent ideology and that the shift from the former toward the latter occurred in response to social instability that left the dominant class fearful of being able to preserve its position of hegemony through a period of chronic uncertainty. This conceptual framework helps to explain why the dominant class was open, for the most part, to reform in the interest of economic recovery but committed as well to preserving the basic structure of society in terms of social class. It is my contention that Faulkner's fiction reproduces this dynamic at the level of form, creating a general frame of reference for his ideological responses to issues and concerns that defined social consciousness in the thirties.

In the case of ideological analysis, one of the most significant challenges is to mediate the variations in meaning now attached to key concepts. The term *ideology* is a case in point. Initial use of the term, as in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels, refers to ideology as a "false consciousness" binding individuals to particular social formations and thus preventing them a comprehensive view of society from which to challenge the received class structure. Elaboration of the concept in later Marxist theory stresses ideology as a determinant of social relations, rather than chiefly a cognitive function. In "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser borrows from Lacanian psychoanalysis to define the systematic workings of ideology. Through State Apparatuses (government agencies, courts, military and police units) and Ideological State Apparatuses (churches, families, political parties, and forms of cultural expression, including art and popular media), ideology shapes or

"interpellates" individuals, fashioning them as subjects willing to accept the conditions that favor the dominant class. The view of ideology in Marxist theory, then, has tended to stress a certain deceptiveness which serves the interests of a dominant class over an exploited working class.

However, as Terry Eagleton has cautioned, the insistence on false consciousness can lead to a reductive determinism hindering ideological analysis. If, as Eagleton and others have asked, ideology is deceptive to the point of totality, how can one ever find a space outside ideology in order to interrogate it? Furthermore, must ideology be inherently false? These questions, among others, prompt Eagleton to offer six more progressively refined definitions of ideology that retain much of what earlier Marxist theorists contribute to ideological analysis (Althusser's cogent discussion of the systematic workings of ideology, for instance) but also allow for resistance to a counterproductive determinism. Two of these definitions pertain to my examination of Faulkner's literary production from the standpoint of ideological analysis. First, Eagleton explains that ideology is a system of ideas and beliefs, regardless of veracity, that "symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class" (*Ideology* 29). However, acknowledging the inevitability of intra- and inter-class conflict, Eagleton adds a qualification that such ideology "attends to the *promotion and legitimation* of the interests of such social groups in the face of opposing interests" (*Ideology* 29). Thus ideology both reflects the beliefs and values of a given class and acts on behalf of that class as it enters into conflict with others in social formations. The ideological dimensions of Faulkner's texts, for example, often expose

dominant-class anxieties associated with social instability at the same time they express a desire for resolution and order in terms of the narrative process of closure.

These ideological conflicts, influenced heavily by class distinction, occur in the pursuit of what Antonio Gramsci defines as hegemony.¹ For Gramsci, there is a distinction to be made between *rule*, an exercise of overt domination, and *hegemony*, a system of interconnected political, social, and cultural forces that support dominant-class rule in less obvious ways. In articulating his theory of cultural materialism, Raymond Williams defines three types of ideology that form amid the class conflict (within and between particular classes) resulting from the pursuit of hegemony. A dominant ideology serves the interests of the dominant class, a cultural formation which has achieved the hegemonic position and seeks to maintain this position through ideological means. A residual ideology refers to an ideological formation on the wane, yet extant and influential in the present. An emergent ideology is a new ideology, either friendly or hostile to the dominant class, that occurs in the ongoing dynamics of cultural formation. The interplay of such forces is evident in the struggle between the residual ideology of individualism and the emergent ideology of collectivism that was influential in shaping the historical, cultural, and political currents that guided Faulkner's aesthetic maneuvers in his fiction of the Depression era.

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William Faulkner ended the twenties with the narrative frenzy of *The Sound and the Fury* and began the thirties, appropriately enough, with *As I Lay Dying*, the story of

a prolonged and restless death march toward an ominous horizon. The titles alone suggest a telling relationship between these novels and the historical and cultural forces that encompassed them. On one level, it would seem, Faulkner sensed the last desperate gasp of one era as it succumbed to the reality of a lingering and painful demise. The young nation that had emerged from World War I to assume its role as world power and model of industrial and entrepreneurial ingenuity and practice, enabled by the Icarus wings of speculation and conspicuous consumption, found itself entering the 1930s in a chaotic downward spiral. The transition from the "Roaring Twenties" to the Great Depression was cruel and abrupt, bringing an end to a period of the sort of recklessness that Faulkner assigns to Jason Compson's stock-market maneuvers in the third section of *The Sound and the Fury*. Indeed, the crash proved disastrous for the entire economy, as T. H. Watkins explains, because "the failure of the greatest speculative fever in American history profoundly weakened confidence in the basic soundness [. . .] of one of the nation's economic foundations" (75). Economic indicators provide a vantage point from which to view the damage that extended to all sectors of the economy. From the high point of prosperity in 1929 to the low point of economic despair in 1933, GNP plummeted 29 percent; expenditures for consumption were down by 18 percent, construction starts by 78 percent, and investment by 98 percent; and unemployment rose from 3.2 percent to 24.9 percent (McElvaine 75).² Once a well-oiled machine of production and consumption, the American economy had come to a screeching halt. Due to high tariffs and overproduction, warehouses were overstocked, farm markets were overwhelmed by the twin demons of high yields and low prices, and consumers were left with significantly diminished buying power. It

would take an entire decade and another global war to bring about a substantial economic recovery. In the thirties, no other factor contributed as much to defining the historical and cultural context surrounding Faulkner's literary production as this monumental crisis that ripped the fabric of American society and culture.

The term "depression" speaks well to the dimensions of this national catastrophe, for it can be measured in units both great and small. While the statistics tell us much about the devastation to the economy, they can do little to show us the effects on the people who lived through the experience. After all, it is one thing to take note of the substantial drop in consumption or the drastic rise in the percentage of unemployed and quite another to be confronted with the wan look of despair on the human face of this disaster, captured so vividly by Dorothea Lange in her photograph of a migrant mother and child which has come to be perhaps the most recognizable image of Depression-era suffering. Economic data cannot speak with the clarity of Sherwood Anderson when he described "men who are heads of families creeping through the streets of American cities, eating from garbage cans; men turned out of houses and sleeping week after week on park benches, on the ground in parks, in the mud under bridges" (qtd. in Jellison 14). Such economic hardship led to severe depression of the psychological kind in those most directly affected by the hard times. For the scores of Americans struggling to survive, there was the added burden of low self-worth exacting a huge psychological toll, evident in this recollection from a Depression survivor:

Shame? . . . I would go stand on that relief line, I would look this way and that way and see if there's nobody around that knows me. I would bend my head low so nobody would recognize me. The only scar left on me is my pride, my pride. (Terkel 426)

Measuring the Depression in terms of damaged pride is a common refrain in accounts of the period and reveals a depth of despair and self-doubt that extended from the individual to the national consciousness. Out of this despair, there inevitably emerged in the early years of the Depression a growing sense of desperation and a restlessness in the land, forcing the nation to ask with urgency and virtually in unison the simple question out of which social consciousness is born: What is to be done?

In terms of social thought, the answer to this question came in the form of a reassessment of many core values, foremost among them the ideology of individualism which had inspired the steely resolve of the early colonists, the pioneer spirit of the settlers who expanded the nation ever westward, and the frenzied profit-taking and social experimentation of the 1920s. As Watkins is right to point out, "Self-reliance, rugged individualism, and the primacy of local rule were articles of faith rarely questioned by most middle- and upper-class Americans at the beginning of the 1930s" (73). For these Americans, who constituted the dominant class, it had been much easier to gain from their social status a high level of comfort and stability and to extol autonomy as an inherent American virtue.³ Invested in the ideology of individualism, the dominant class conveniently ignored the support from government which had assisted them in gaining prosperity—land grants for large farming operations and tax incentives for industry, for instance—and chose instead to believe that success had come solely by the virtues of hard work and individual resolve. However, with the onset of the Depression extending severe economic hardship far into the ranks of the middle class, individualism and self-reliance seemed less means of liberation and wish fulfillment than cruel features of a naturalistic realm of social Darwinism in which only

the fittest could survive. As a result of this change in perspective, the lower sectors of the dominant class began to realize that the individualism of the past was incompatible with the harsh realities of Depression life and thus became more willing to think, speak, and act in ways that brought the country closer to collectivism than ever before.

One result of this shift in social thought was that Americans had a more comprehensive view of society than in the previous decade when prosperity tended to insulate people in their own social classes. Economic uncertainty made people acutely aware of social stratification, particularly as more middle-class Americans developed a greater sympathy for those below them on the economic ladder even as they feared joining their ranks. Americans thus became preoccupied with the negotiations between self-preservation and acceptance of communal responsibility. And Faulkner was a prime example. Compared to the casualties of the Depression, Faulkner was on a reverse trajectory: he struggled in the twenties and prospered, relatively speaking, in the thirties. Money from his stints in Hollywood enabled Faulkner to increase his financial holdings; yet he was constantly on the brink of financial ruin due to faulty investment strategies and a consistently long list of dependents. Not surprisingly, Faulkner's fiction explores tensions between independence and interdependence and in so doing remains responsive to contemporary politics.

The political climate of the Great Depression was affected most substantively by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's monumental effort to strike a New Deal. No one understood and, in effect, defined the ideological shift away from individualism toward collectivism more than FDR. In crafting and promoting the New Deal, Roosevelt tried to blend elements of both ideological positions in ways that were acceptable to a

dominant class now compelled toward recognition of economic hardship. Prior to taking office for his first term, FDR demonstrated his awareness of a greater concern for the downtrodden and dispossessed prevalent in the nation. In his famous 1932 radio address, "The Forgotten Man," Roosevelt offered a preview of the skillful use of media that would become essential to enacting the New Deal. In the address, Roosevelt promised measures that would "build from the bottom up and not from the top down" to benefit "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid" (par. 5). Later, in his first Nomination Address, Roosevelt returned to the metaphor, though in mixed form, asking on behalf of the nation why the Hoover Administration had failed to realize that all sectors of the pyramid, from top to bottom, were mutually dependent, each affecting "the whole financial fabric" (par. 25). With this revised understanding of social structure, Roosevelt began the process of advancing and naturalizing the ideological shift from individualism toward collectivism, declaring adamantly that "we are going to make the voters understand this year that this Nation is not merely a Nation of independence, but it is, if we are to survive, bound to be a Nation of interdependence" (par. 25). Out of this sense of interdependence would emerge the tangible policies and programs of the New Deal—from the National Recovery Act to the Civilian Conservation Corps to the Works Projects Administration—a vast initiative designed to change the relationships between the various sectors of the pyramid but not, it would seem, to alter its basic form.

Since the founding of the country, the balance between the power of the federal government and state and local governments had largely defined the nation's politics. By any measure, the New Deal constituted the largest expansion of the federal

government in the history of the United States. In Faulkner's region of Mississippi, for example, the development of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) constituted a monumental federal incursion not seen since the one that had come under largely different circumstances during the Civil War. Although such New Deal programs were popular in the South, particularly among the rural poor, they concerned Faulkner and others who perceived a sort of social engineering at work. Faulkner would later express this concern quite conspicuously in his short story, "The Tall Men" (1941).⁴ Even in the early years of the Depression, Roosevelt sensed that many Americans might resist such a substantial expansion of federalism, and so he stressed the urgency of the moment, likening the Depression to an invading force that must be met with fierce resistance. Speaking in favor of his works relief program, Roosevelt implored, "This is a great national crusade to destroy enforced idleness which is an enemy of the human spirit generated by this depression. Our attack upon these enemies must be without stint and without discrimination" ("Works Relief," par. 23). The analogy between the economic recovery effort and war-time mobilization had its advantages, not the least of which was the ability to rally the citizen-troops to the cause of the New Deal and to justify its policies and programs as necessary reactions to a national crisis. Times of emergency required decisive action, Roosevelt insisted, and so citizens must accept the fact that "a rounded leadership by the Federal Government had become a necessity of both theory and fact" ("Purposes," par. 5). The Administration employed aesthetic means to further the crusade, urging citizens to become "soldiers [who] wear a bright badge on their shoulders to be sure that comrades do not fire on comrades"; the badge was emblazoned with the declaration, "We do our part" ("Purposes," par. 25). The laconic phrase spoke

directly to the ideological shift underway: the individual part would now serve itself by serving the whole, thus providing structural integrity to the social order.

Roosevelt and the crafters of the New Deal knew full well that individualism was too much a part of the American psyche to be jettisoned, and thus they set out to redefine it in relation to the collective. Throughout the conception and implementation of the New Deal, FDR was careful to cast the large expansion of federal government in terms the dominant class could accept. If the nation was to move closer to collectivism, it would do so on an individual basis. In Roosevelt's view, it was the responsibility of Washington, not to seize control of local authority, but to provide support out of a concern for the greater good. So in his first Nomination Address, for example, Roosevelt made sure not to suggest a shift in the balance of powers, but a renewed pledge to carry out Washington's natural function: "I say that while the primary responsibility rests with localities now, as ever, yet the Federal Government has always had and still has a continuing responsibility for the broader public welfare. It will soon fulfill that responsibility" (par. 56). This blend of individualism and collectivism found its full ideological expression and practical application in programs like the "self-help cooperatives," which were developed under the WPA. The Roosevelt Administration applied its own logic to reconcile what appeared to be a contradiction in terms, as evident in Eleanor Roosevelt's plea on behalf of the program. In "Helping Them to Help Themselves," she insisted that "everybody must do his own work," but always with the clear sense that "you cannot work for yourself alone" (par. 17). Individual profit, then, did not exist for its own sake, but was instead a product of the collective purpose. For as Eleanor Roosevelt added in aphoristic style, "The more you help

others, the more you really gain yourself" (par. 17). In a statement with obvious ideological implications, she insisted that this was "good doctrine to inculcate in the citizens of a great democracy" (par. 17).

The success of the New Deal depended to a large extent on restoring a sense of order and stability by instilling in the nation's citizens—particularly those who comprised the dominant class—a belief that a commitment to the New Deal was the natural reaction to the crisis at hand. The hegemonic imperative is evident in the effort not only to mobilize but also to universalize the Administration's move closer to collectivism. As Roosevelt often repeated, times of crisis required unified and decisive action without the sort of fractious debate that could undermine the cause. In stating his philosophy of recovery, Roosevelt insisted, "This is no time to cavil or to question the standard set by this universal agreement" ("Purposes," par. 30).⁵ Order and stability would proceed from the "great common effort" which would envelop all efforts to meet the monumental task at hand. Americans could support the New Deal, Roosevelt assured, because it was

in complete accord with the underlying principles of orderly popular government which Americans have demanded since the white man first came to these shores. We count, in the future as in the past, on the driving power of individual initiative and the incentive of fair private profit, strengthened with the acceptance of those obligations to the public interest which rest upon us all. We have the right to expect that this driving power will be given patriotically and wholeheartedly to our nation. ("Greater Freedom," par. 10)

The New Deal was, in this sense, an extension of Manifest Destiny—in narrative terminology, an installment marked by tragedy, but only part of the larger American story guided, as ever, by the triumphant conclusion that was assuredly this nation's due. Of course, this was the story written by and for a dominant class that saw its position

threatened. It is no wonder, then, that Roosevelt's promises of immediate relief in the service of preserving the established order came as mostly welcomed reassurances that the pyramid would remain intact. For this reason, the ideological shift from individualism toward collectivism and its material consequences of direct relief and an expanded federal government were, on one level at least, not revolutionary reform but, as Althusser might say, instruments of reproducing the means of production for a dominant class interested in maintaining its advantageous position.

While accomplishing this feat required both ideological and material endeavors, it also demanded a skillful balancing act in terms of political rhetoric. Roosevelt's speeches during the Depression were consistent in their emphasis on political, social, and economic reform, in keeping with the sense of desperation and urgency that gripped the nation. Rather than advocating revolutionary change, however, the rhetoric of protest and reform helped cast the policies and programs of the New Deal as part of a progressive determination to see the country through the hard times. Accordingly, moments of firebrand rhetoric were tempered by statements of caution and reserve—a combination that also occurs in Faulkner's fiction, as we shall see, and thus serves as yet another important link to contemporary politics. The blend of rhetorical tactics is evident in Roosevelt's first Inaugural Address, as early on he sounded the notes of class conflict characteristic of socialism:

The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit. (par. 4)

However, returning to the war metaphor, Roosevelt cautioned against uprising, advising instead that "we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good

of a common discipline" and stand "willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline, because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good" (par. 17). Such rhetorical maneuvering was influenced in no uncertain terms by FDR's previously expressed concern that the misguided response of the Hoover Administration to the Depression "may degenerate into unreasoning radicalism" ("Nomination Address," par. 8), which was exhibited in the growing chorus of social protest resounding in the country.

The early years of the Depression were marked by a radical spirit that grew out of economic catastrophe and widespread social unrest—evident from rural areas of the country like Faulkner's Mississippi, where Depression-like conditions had existed before the thirties, to the urban centers, where organized bands of unemployed citizens looted stores. This social unrest came to a head in the summer of 1932 when auto workers rioted in Dearborn, Michigan, and disaffected veterans of World War I gathered in Washington for the Bonus March, camping out in tents and demanding that the federal government make good on promised benefits.⁶ Roosevelt took the Oath of Office for his first term in 1933 with talk of revolution in the air; after a reprieve during the first year of his initial term, this social unrest intensified. By 1934, forces were aligned in vocal opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal. Some accused FDR of threatening traditional American values, and others charged that he had not acted decisively enough to provide relief and institute lasting social and economic reform. As Williams observes, though, any successful hegemonic endeavor remains ever wary of the alternatives that threaten its dominance and thus strives to appropriate useful elements located at its fringes (113). In this regard, Roosevelt's New Deal was

influenced significantly by the "wild radicalism" ("Nomination Address," par. 10) sounding from the right and the left, which FDR and the crafters of the New Deal wanted desperately to keep at bay.

While the New Deal largely defined the American culture surrounding Faulkner's literary production, the opponents of this monumental enterprise were instrumental as well. The New Deal essentially became the focal point for an interplay of competing voices that, I will argue, Faulkner's texts absorb with discernable aesthetic, ideological, and political consequences. The wariness of collectivism evident in Faulkner's work, for instance, can best be understood in the light of broader concerns expressed by the right as the debate over the New Deal unfolded.

Understandably, the Republicans spent the first couple of years after FDR's landslide victory reeling from defeat and the cloud cast over the party during Hoover's final years in office. So, it fell predominantly to a conservative coalition to mount a challenge to the New Deal from the right. In 1934, there emerged a bipartisan effort to articulate a conservative response to the New Deal geared mainly toward those who were not hit hard by the Depression. Probably the most visible conservative challenge to FDR, the American Liberty League emerged from a series of letters between former Democratic National Committee chairman John Raskob and R.R.M. Carpenter, vice-president of the Du Pont Corporation. Motivated by a perceived loss of "good help" to agencies like the Civilian Conservation Corps, Carpenter enlisted Raskob in the effort to prevent Roosevelt from leading the country toward irreversible social and economic reform. Erstwhile New York City mayor and presidential candidate Al Smith, who by

this time had drifted from his working-class roots to cast his lot with corporate executives, served in the initial group of directors of the Liberty League.

As the name of the organization suggests, the American Liberty League was based in the residual ideology of individualism. Fundamentally, the organization argued that the New Deal was an attempt by the federal government to encroach on the sacred American virtues of individual liberty and self-reliance—a concern that Faulkner would maintain, to a large degree, throughout the thirties and, indeed, his entire career. Sounding a theme that would become prevalent in the 1936 presidential election, the League insisted that Roosevelt's policies would create a nation of dependents addicted to the dole rather than capable of self-sufficiency in the traditional American way. A headline in the *New York Times* on August 23, 1934 stated the twofold mission of the League: "League is Formed to Scan New Deal, 'Protect' Rights." The ideological position of the League was made clear in the prepared statement delivered by executive chairman Jouett Shouse, who declared the organization's promise

to defend and uphold the Constitution of the United States [. . .] to teach the duty of government, to encourage and protect individual and group initiative and enterprise, to foster the right to work, earn, save and acquire property, and to preserve the ownership and lawful use of property when acquired. ("American Liberty League," par. 3-5)

Like FDR, Shouse emphasized form in discussing the League's vision of the federal government. Instead of a pyramid, though, Shouse likened government to a tree—a solid trunk with individual branches extending in all directions. Although the League vehemently opposed the policies of the New Deal, it shared the same resistance to fundamental changes in the structure of society. Articulating the League's political aesthetic, Shouse explained:

We do not oppose change, but we would not sacrifice the form of government under which our country has grown strong and prosperous. There have been abuses. They must not be allowed to recur. There have been inequities. They must be righted. But the tree must not be destroyed merely because some branches need to be removed. ("American Liberty League," par. 26)

Faced with the nation's move leftward in response to the crisis at hand, the Liberty League saw an urgent need to cling to the individualistic values which had informed the dominant class in times of stability and prosperity. But the League was clearly too out of step with the times to gain enough support to stem the tide of FDR's New Deal. The affirmation of the residual ideology of individualism at the base of the League's political agenda did not speak effectively to the large number of Americans who had been moved by the hard times to seek protection and comfort from community. The values that the League wanted to preserve with a sort of fundamentalism were undergoing a substantial revision.⁷

While the Great Depression pushed the right to the margins of political discourse, the left experienced a time of unprecedented vibrancy as socioeconomic conditions made its politics more relevant and appealing than at any time in the nation's history. Lying virtually dormant during the bacchanalian reign of capitalism in the twenties, the left viewed the despair of the thirties as an opportunity to advance an agenda of fundamental reform in American social, economic, and political life. The nature of this reform ranged from the call from self-professed Communists for a proletarian revolution intended to achieve a classless society to the proposals of socialists for redistribution of wealth and strict governmental control over the economy to the more moderate aims of liberalism to bring about greater social equality and economic justice. The Depression, in one sense, allowed the left to say "We told you

so" to a nation that had refused to heed warnings against unchecked capitalism as the Industrial Age unfolded. Though perhaps hard to imagine now, the prevailing cultural climate during the Depression was largely determined by the successful efforts of the left to influence political debate and, in effect, to define social consciousness for an American public that had, out of necessity, become more socially conscious. In many ways, the Depression was the finest hour for leftists, who spoke passionately to an American public never more willing to listen, even if it was not prepared ultimately to vote for the sort of radical change that would fundamentally restructure American society. Consequently, Americans like Faulkner, who were not predisposed to the left, had to contend with its revitalized political agenda made all the more forceful by the circumstances of the Depression.

Two years into FDR's first term, with the New Deal in its infancy, there were visible efforts by the federal government to provide relief and to restore confidence in the American economy. Despite the ideological shift underway, those to the left of Roosevelt politically were not satisfied that the New Deal would be sufficient to achieve lasting reform. For this reason, a rift on the left was evident by the latter half of 1934, occurring essentially along the lines described by Robert Morse Lovett nearly a decade earlier. In "Liberalism and the Class War," Lovett identified a fundamental point of contention between Radicals and Liberals that posed a threat to progressive reform. For Lovett, a Radical would define society in terms of class conflict brought about by "the domination of an upper class, through control of religion, education, social recognition, ethical standards, literature, art, and government" (191). On the contrary, Lovett writes, a Liberal "is by theory and tradition opposed to the Class War,

as he is opposed to everything that intensifies the difference between the classes" (191). What Lovett explains here is essentially hegemony, with liberals exerting a sort of omnipresent control that prevents radicals from asserting a view of society centered on class conflict. Lovett's model can be applied as well to the political dynamics on the left during the implementation of the New Deal, as proponents tried to stem radical challenges intended to move the country ever closer to collectivism.

Class conflict was at the heart of significant movements exerting pressure on the New Deal to move leftward. For one, the labor unions became more active, culminating in 1934 with widespread strikes, perhaps the most famous of which was the longshoreman's strike in San Francisco. Led by the charismatic Harry Bridges, chairman of the Joint Maritime Strike Committee, the strike garnered national attention and epitomized labor discontent across the nation. In Faulkner's South, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union formed in the small Arkansas Delta town of Tyronza, extending to the mid-thirties a pattern of labor unrest that had surfaced with the 1929 Gastonia riots in North Carolina.⁸ Heightened labor activism and protests resulted not only from the frustrations accompanying economic hardship but also from a new attitude in the working class. After FDR took the reigns of power from Hoover, the blend of rhetoric stressing the "forgotten man" and policy measures providing relief heartened a labor movement that saw the initial years of FDR's first term as a time for decisive action to bring about a lasting shift in the balance of power between labor and management. Labor urged Roosevelt leftward, closer to the collectivism he was approaching moderately. But, when it became clear that FDR was willing to go only so far, social unrest intensified.

Fanning the flames of social unrest was an insurgent populism that swept the land—evident in high-profile movements that sought to translate social unrest into political action. Two movements in particular demonstrate the widespread appeal of populism in mid-1930s American politics and culture. In Detroit, Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest and radio personality launched a populist movement that gained national prominence. Next door to Faulkner's Mississippi, Huey Long, the Louisiana governor-turned-U.S. Senator mounted a populist grassroots campaign that enabled him eventually to pose a serious threat to FDR's re-election campaign in 1936.⁹ Coughlin and Long drew support by using the tried and true rhetoric of class conflict. Each in his own way repeatedly called for programs that would redistribute the wealth and thus move America closer to collectivism than FDR's New Deal ever intended. Americans responded to both men in large numbers. At the height of his popularity, the "Radio Priest," as Coughlin was widely known, reached an estimated audience of 30 to 40 million and received an average of 80,000 letters per week (McElvaine 238). Likewise, Long's Share Our Wealth (SOW) program generated an average of 60,000 letters per week to his Senate office; in 1935, a year after the founding of SOW, officials claimed there were 27,000 clubs in existence (McElvaine 246). Early on, Coughlin stressed social justice, vilifying the "robber barons" who placed individual wealth above concern for the collective good. In order to set the country on the right track, Coughlin argued, the exploited working class needed to share more in the fruits of its labor. While not calling for an end to private property, Coughlin argued that social justice and responsibility should take precedence over the profit motive. Though every bit the personality that Coughlin was and more, Long stressed specifics: his SOW

program, in the true spirit of Robin Hood, called literally for taking from the rich (those with fortunes over \$1 million) and giving to the poor. Extending the tradition of rural populism that had shaped him, Long berated the guilty profiteers and promised to return what had been plundered from the working class. In this time of severe crisis, the message was welcome; as a result, these messengers acquired substantial amounts of political influence and cultural capital.

While the rise of these very public figures speaks volumes about the restlessness in the land in the mid-1930s, they are no less compelling for what they reveal about persistent tensions between the ideologies of individualism and collectivism that informed the American culture in which Faulkner was writing. Despite agendas based ideologically in collectivism, perceptions of Coughlin's and Long's movements became less about the policies they proposed than about them as enigmatic and controversial figures. This focus led increasingly toward an inconsistency typical of movements defined more by the ego of the leader than the ideological base.¹⁰ But it is important to remember that, at the height of their popularity in the mid-1930s, it was the emphasis on values of social and economic justice that caught the attention of Americans who saw in their radicalism a fervor that was apparently missing in FDR's New Deal which was rooted firmly in progressive liberalism.

In more urgent terms, Coughlin and Long appealed not only to the working class but also to those in the middle class for whom sharing the wealth seemed preferable to having no wealth at all. For these Americans, preserving the structure of the pyramid did not seem as essential as improving conditions for people hit hard by the Depression. An essential difference between FDR's New Deal and the opposition movements led by

Coughlin and Long is evident in the fundamental bases of support they sought to attract. Broader in scope, the New Deal nevertheless appealed, as stated above, to the upper- and middle-class alliance that had emerged from the 1920s as the dominant class. However, Coughlin and Long encouraged a greater affinity between the middle class and the working class based on shared hardship and a commitment to fundamental changes in American society based on collectivism. This alliance is what Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, calls a transition class—that is, a union forged in immediate response to external conditions which professes to transcend class antagonisms but, in point of fact, merely suspends them (47). In these times of despair, Coughlin and Long injected a radical fervor into political discourse, coaxing the middle class toward a potentially new hegemonic position in union with a long-exploited working class with whom many middle-class Americans were coming to identify. The individualism that tempted Coughlin and Long ever closer to demagoguery as they promoted this alliance should not obscure the collectivism that, in the main, contributed to their mass appeal. The popularity of such programs exposed and exacerbated dominant-class anxieties that affected the form of FDR's New Deal and, as we shall see, of Faulkner's literary production as well.

In addition to these enigmatic figures who helped to heighten social consciousness, there was also the rise of the Popular Front. For the most part, radical political beliefs were articulated through this *de facto* alliance of intellectuals, artists, politicians, and social activists that coalesced in the mid-thirties and extended its influence to the decades beyond. Faulkner certainly witnessed this social movement firsthand during his frequent stints in Hollywood—an epicenter of Popular Front

activity. In *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, Michael Denning defines a force as notable for its eclecticism as for its activism:

The Popular Front was the insurgent social movement forged from the labor militancy of the fledgling CIO, the anti-fascist solidarity with Spain, Ethiopia, and China, and the refugees from Hitler, and the political struggles on the left wing of the New Deal. Born out of the social upheavals of 1934 and coinciding with the Communist Party's period of greatest influence in US society, the Popular Front became a radical historical bloc uniting industrial unionists, Communists, independent socialists, community activists, and émigré anti-fascists around laborist social democracy, anti-fascism, and anti-lynching. (4)

Although it may have been born in 1934, the conception of the Popular Front came much earlier, dating back to the anti-capitalist social activism that began in the Industrial Age. As Denning is right to point out, the Popular Front most often defined itself in opposition to the injustices it perceived. Although the Popular Front advanced what it deemed a positive socialist agenda, its very nature as a self-professed radical movement demanded that it work, in its emergent form, against the dominant ideology based in capitalism.

For the Popular Front, the preferred course of action was to focus attention on specific issues and incidents that demonstrated the inherent injustice of American society as means of promoting an alternative vision of social justice. Thus the plight of dispossessed migrant farmers revealed the injustice of free-market capitalism wreaking havoc on agrarian communities; the brutal suppression of striking dock workers in San Francisco or mill workers in Gastonia effectively spoke to the exploitation of the working class by management; the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti suggested a darker interpretation of the founding principle that "justice is blind"; and the case of the

"Scottsboro Nine" or the disturbingly common practice of lynching demonstrated chronic racism in America. Whereas Coughlin, Long, and other charismatic figures relied heavily on personality to advance their visions, often resulting in ego-driven movements, the Popular Front cut a broader swath in its march toward radical reform in America. In the spirit of the collectivism it espoused, the many parts working for the whole characterized the Popular Front.

There is, of course, dissension among historians and cultural critics as to just how influential the Popular Front really was. But it is safe to say that its impact on FDR's New Deal and thus on American culture is indisputable. Faced with this broad-based social movement at his left flank and the vocal challenges from opponents like Coughlin and Long, FDR had no choice but to accommodate what McElvaine aptly calls the "thunder on the left" (224). And he did so in launching what has come to be known as the Second New Deal.¹¹ Initially hopeful that an expanded role for the federal government would bring an immediate recovery and thus make the expansion temporary, Roosevelt saw that, if he was to be re-elected in 1936, he would have to move even closer to collectivism. This tactic allowed Roosevelt to consolidate support for the New Deal and to temper the resistance that threatened social unrest. As we have seen, he achieved this consolidation by appropriating the voices that opposed him, retaining elements of individualism but ultimately pressing closer to collectivism with policies and programs that would change the nature of governmental responsibility for decades to come. The fiery spirit of radicalism, as Richard Pells observes, was transferred by Roosevelt to the warmth and stability of the Fireside Chats, which assured the dominant class that established order would prevail despite substantial

changes in the role of federal government (86). By the end of the 1930s, radical activism would fade, the idealism and activism of the early years no match for the sobering defeat in the Spanish Civil War and the inevitable cynicism after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The Popular Front effectively merged into the larger progressive tide that was the New Deal, but not before shaping cultural discourse in ways that heightened social consciousness in the nation and aided in advancing the ideological shift that directed social thought away from the individual and toward the collective.

* * *

To this point, I have sustained the historical overview by focusing on strategies and developments in political discourse and public policy. But this consideration cannot be complete without attention to the ways that cultural expression participated in this transition. For leftist intellectuals, committed to challenging the dominant ideology based in capitalism, the Depression provided an unprecedented opportunity to speak in a voice more likely to be heeded in light of pending socioeconomic conditions. The fact that Americans were more attuned than ever to the communal values of social, economic, and political justice in the 1930s was owing in large measure to the radical spirit that informed the left and, in turn, shaped the culture encompassing Faulkner's literary production.

Leftist artists and intellectuals participated in the effort to heighten social consciousness in the nation, drawing attention to the issues and causes deemed

important by the Popular Front. Various forms of cultural expression became the most effective tools at the disposal of activists/artists who were determined to create art that spoke with relevance to the conditions of Depression-era America. In this endeavor, leftists employed the various forms of expression prevalent at the time—namely literature, painting, theatre, periodicals, photography, radio, and film. The Popular Front took advantage of both "high" culture and an emerging popular culture in advancing its social movement. Margaret Bourke White's resonant photographs documenting the plight of the dispossessed; Clifford Odets's agit-prop drama with its vicious portrayals of capitalist "robber barons" and calls for solidarity with the working class; King Vidor's testament to cooperative farming as a response to a harsh capitalist marketplace in his powerful film *Our Daily Bread*; Mary Heaton Vorse's vivid accounts of the strikes in Gastonia; Richard Wright's visceral descriptions of urban squalor and systematic racism—these texts and others like them together wove a cultural tapestry depicting America as a land of inherent injustice rather than unlimited opportunity. And they set a standard for the times against which Faulkner and other emergent artists were measured.

The rise in social consciousness among artists and intellectuals infused debates in the literary establishment over the purpose and function of art, the most prominent dispute being the "Literary Class War" that pitted a residual formalism against an emergent social realism. This aesthetic and ideological dispute will receive more substantial analysis in chapter 2, but for now it is important to point out that by the time Michael Gold staged this war's equivalent of Fort Sumter in the pages of the *New Republic* in 1930, the climate of American letters had already become politicized and

polarized. Gold's attack on Thornton Wilder effectively drew the battle lines between a host of leftists—young, socially conscious writers, some of them from the working class, and radical moderns, expatriates from the twenties whose energy for social experimentation was now redirected toward political radicalism—and their formalist counterparts on the right, who held to traditional conceptions of art as removed from social context. For leftist writers, advocating the mission of the John Reed Clubs to wed poetics and politics, no boundaries existed between art and social activism. Creating art, then, was not to be the isolated act of creative genius confined to the bourgeoisie, but a form of praxis aiding in the cause of the proletariat. In the tradition of Communist writers in the Soviet Union, many American writers adopted social realism as the prescribed literary device for aiding in societal transformation. It was time, as Malcolm Cowley exhorted at the end of his popular memoir *Exile's Return*, for writers to take up the cause of the working class in an effort to transform America based on communal values and social responsibility. This awakening of social awareness resulted in a flurry of activity in the literary establishment, including the birth of periodicals such as the *Partisan Review* and the *New Masses*, which provided a forum for radical politics and, in part, prompted liberal publications such as the *New Republic* to revise their editorial positions leftward.¹² Also, the publication, in 1935, of an anthology called *Proletarian Literature in the United States* announced the arrival of a vibrant literary movement thriving on its close ties to the historical and cultural moment and prompting influential critics to demand the same from writers of the period—a factor that would have direct bearing on the reception of Faulkner within the literary establishment of the thirties.

Wary of such an overt mixture of art and politics, intellectuals on the right reasserted literary formalism as part of a larger formation of cultural conservatism. Taking their cue from T.S. Eliot, self-prescribed American "humanists" such as Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More urged the nation to respond to the hard times by turning inward for spiritual strength and resolve. In Faulkner's South, the Agrarians published *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), a tract of essays written to offer a return to agrarian society and culture as a means of countering a perceived threat to individual liberty and "traditional" values posed by both industrialism and leftist political philosophies. In many instances, intellectual conservatives fought fire with fire, so to speak, attempting to claim the mantle of radicalism so popular in the thirties. When Seward Collins launched *The American Review*, for example, he proclaimed that the journal would be "providing a forum for the views of . . . 'Radicals of the Right' or 'Revolutionary Conservatives'" (126). This journal exemplifies how radicalism could easily give way to extremism, though. During the journal's six-year run, its editorial policy reflected a strict adherence to the ideology of individualism, resulting in untenable political positions such as a call for monarchy and, finally, support for fascist regimes. Predictably, many of the *Review's* contributors cut all ties to the journal, preferring instead to wage cultural war in more moderate publications, such as those to which Faulkner contributed early in his career: the *Hound and Horn*, a popular forum for conservative dissent, and the *New Republic*, in which left could meet right at a noticeably left-of-center front. However, like the political conservatives mounting a challenge to the left, intellectual conservatives in the thirties ultimately faced the harsh

reality that their reassertion of values rooted in the ideology of individualism was no match for a Depression that was forcing Americans to the left.

Prolific with novels, stories, poems, plays, and articles, leftist writers and thinkers articulated a new aesthetic to meet the political demands of the time. The aesthetic of high modernism, emphasizing the self-reliant text, was attacked as a product of egocentric bourgeois individualism, complicit with capitalism and thus useless to the growing mass of the poor and downtrodden finding common purpose in their exploitation by the dominant class. Instead of striving for what Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, calls stasis—a suspended state of artistic appreciation—and replicating the solitary workings of interior (bourgeois) experience, the aesthetic of social realism celebrated its lack of formal refinement and sophistication and looked urgently outward to the material world. Rather than prompting the sort of active, yet totally aesthetic, response that Dedalus terms kinetic, this new literature of the masses would inspire readers toward a recognition of the collective need for social justice forged through political action. Writing in the *New Masses* in 1932, Philip Rahv described this proletarian katharsis as a new spirit "breaking through the wall that separates literature from life" (281). Rahv articulates here the central aesthetic concern for emergent leftist writers coming into their own in the Great Depression and changing the literary establishment in the process: how to bridge the distance between experience and art which had appeared to grow ever wider under the dominant formalist aesthetic of high modernism.

Each position staked out in this cultural debate represents what Terry Eagleton has called an ideology of the aesthetic—a theoretical concept that accounts for the

infusion of politics into debates over art. As a result of this condition, Eagleton explains, "The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artefact is thus inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 3). So, in this light, formalism can be tied to the residual ideology of individualism in the thirties serving the established order based in capitalism and informing the subjectivity of those in the dominant class. The aesthetic concept of the autonomous text, for example, is implicated in the ideology that validates the system of private property. Likewise, social realism can be related to the emergent ideology of collectivism informing the radical activism of the Popular Front and, to a significant degree, the progressive reforms of the New Deal that blended cooperation and self-reliance. In the thirties, then, aesthetics was returning to its pre-Enlightenment roots, brought from a Kantian realm of abstraction closer to material experience by a literary movement insisting that art develop a social awareness in keeping with the times in order to be considered relevant.

As a result of the insurgence of social realism, literary criticism struggled with the same questions that have preoccupied Marxist aesthetic theory since the 1930s: What are the nature and role of cultural expression in the context of historical materialism? Does aesthetics inevitably create a gap between art and experience? If so, can that gap be closed with a revised aesthetic that conceives a utilitarian art overtly political in function? What is the use-value, as Marx might say, of the bourgeois literary tradition? In responding to these questions, leftist writers and the formalists who resisted the literature of social realism reflected the ideological shift from

individualism toward collectivism taking place in the society at-large. In effect, the ideological shift was translated into aesthetic terms. While formalists tended to hold firm to the rugged individualism of solitary creative genius and the autonomous text, leftists tended to promote a sort of aesthetic collectivism in trying to bring art closer to the experiences of the masses and thus to make it accessible and politically functional as an instrument of social reform.

Despite the prescriptive nature of social realism, however, it was not unusual to find authors with proletarian sympathies experimenting with form every bit as much as writers considered formalists. Writers such as John Dos Passos, Tillie (Lerner) Olsen, Richard Wright, and Muriel Rukeyser—all of them praised in the pages of the radical and liberal journals of the thirties—employed many of the same modernist techniques that marked others as "bourgeois"—Eliot, Wilder, Hemingway, and Faulkner, to name a few. The problem, of course, was that in practice art defied what was prescribed to it in theory by both the advocates of social realism and the formalists who championed "art for art's sake."

The implications for Faulkner's literary production in the thirties are profound. For we can now begin to explore the relationship between Faulkner's art and the larger forces active beyond the pages of his texts at that time. In so doing, we can strive to reform Faulkner's fiction in terms of its social impact and its active involvement in the politics of art.

End Notes

¹ Gramsci's concept of hegemony is fundamental to his cultural theory and permeates his writing. See especially *Selections from Cultural Writings* for Gramsci's

discussion of politics and culture (16-46) and his treatment of aesthetics and criticism (91-135).

² For comprehensive accounts of economic data from the years preceding and containing the Depression, see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression* 72-94, 134-37, 250-305 and T.H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression* 5-52.

³ I should explain further my sense of the term "dominant class," since it appears frequently in this study. Generally, I use the term in reference to an alliance of the upper class and the upper sectors of the middle class in a national context. My understanding is that this social formation held a position of hegemony as the Depression took hold. During the Depression, however, the dominant class experienced instability and anxiety, as a substantial number of middle-class Americans descended the socioeconomic ranks. My contention is that Faulkner occupied a position in the dominant class and that his experience with its attitudes and anxieties is inscribed in the form of his texts. At times, however, I apply the term more specifically—for instance, in discussing social order in a regional context.

⁴ For a cogent discussion of the New Deal in the context of Southern class politics, see Numan Bartley, "Politics and Ideology" 1154-55. Chapter 4 of this study features a more detailed discussion of "The Tall Men" in social and historical context.

⁵ In his speeches, Roosevelt frequently mentioned the need for consensus in this time of national crisis, usually in the context of the analogy to war. Earlier in the Inaugural Address, Roosevelt declared that "the larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife" (par. 17). In the speech about works relief cited above, Roosevelt insisted, "No sectional, no political distinctions can be permitted" (par. 23). Such statements were fodder for Roosevelt's opponents, who saw his consolidation of power as inconsistent with the values of democratic government.

⁶ See McElvaine 90-94.

⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of the American Liberty League, see George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940*.

⁸ The formation of the STFU, backed by Socialists, came on the heels of the ill-fated Share Croppers Union, supported by the Communist Party/USA. In chapter 4, I will consider these and other instances of rural labor activism in more detail. For now, it suffices to say that these organizations were manifestations of radical activism that hit particularly close to Faulkner's home.

⁹ Though my concern here is primarily to situate populism in a national context, it is important to note that populism had a storied history in Mississippi as well. James

K. Vardaman and Theodore Bilbo were governors of Mississippi who ran largely on populist platforms in the first two decades of the twentieth century. To a large degree, Huey Long inherited this legacy of rural Southern populism, though fashioning it for more widespread appeal, most notably perhaps in rejecting the racist sentiments of his populist forebears.

¹⁰ History has tended to record Coughlin and Long as demagogues and even as signs of the potential rise of fascism that was the subject of much speculation during the Depression. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval*, offers an interpretation that is typical in this regard (15-28, 42-68). However, later historians have tempered the charge of fascism. See, for example, Alan Brinkley's *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*. My interpretation of these figures parallels McElvaine's in stressing the elements of collectivism that defined these movements as they attracted an American public that was increasingly concerned with social and economic justice, not fascism (237-40).

¹¹ See McElvaine 250-63 and Schlesinger 211-43.

¹² See Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams* 151-93.

CHAPTER TWO

DECADENCE AND DISPOSSESSION: FAULKNER AND THE "LITERARY CLASS WAR"

The rise in social consciousness among artists and intellectuals in the 1930s began as a reaction to much that had characterized the 1920s—namely the unchecked capitalism celebrated by the "robber barons" and a frivolous bourgeoisie. The expatriate impulse that the intelligentsia had developed in response to an American culture in which they appeared to have no clear purpose or function prompted introspection as well. The austerity of the Depression served as an antidote to the isolation both literal and imaginative which had been a hallmark of the "lost generation." With a sort of Lenten devotion, artists and intellectuals in the thirties began to examine their excesses in the previous decade, attempting to cleanse themselves of the attitudes and practices that had attended their bohemian rebelliousness. Acknowledging the decadence in life and art so pervasive in the twenties, they welcomed the dose of reality prescribed by a new era of hardship. Now, these artists and intellectuals, many of them former expatriates, would emerge from the insulation of European cafes or the inner recesses of the creative mind to engage society through active involvement in community. This emergent wave of repentance rooted in social and political activism inspired a new aesthetic ideology as well. If artists were now to reestablish ties between the life of the mind and social reality, they would need an artistic form appropriate to the task at hand. Determined to fuse social activism and artistic form, those committed to a revitalized social realism essentially declared the "Literary Class War" that would preoccupy the cultural establishment throughout the 1930s. This Janus-faced conflict focused on both the decadence of the twenties and the

dispossession of the thirties and was fought on various fronts—cultural, ideological, and aesthetic.

For a young writer like William Faulkner, who was struggling to find a voice in the late twenties and early thirties when this cultural conflict was taking shape, engagement of these major themes was perhaps inevitable. And, to extend the military metaphor perhaps to its breaking point, so was the probability of getting caught in the crossfire. Certainly this was not the sort of "action" that the young Faulkner had craved when he tried to join the Royal Air Force in Canada after deficiencies in height, education, and character had prevented his enlisting in the United States Air Force. Faulkner's service in World War I ended prematurely, after only a few weeks of training, and apparently yielded only a uniform and the affected limp that he cultivated upon returning home to Mississippi from Canada. Faulkner's enlistment in the Literary Class War, however, would eventually prove much more productive.

Literary history has tended to define this encounter with laconic ease, relegating it to little more than a footnote in Faulkner's development as a writer. Robert Penn Warren, for example, offers this account of why Faulkner's art seemed "not irrelevant, but inimical" (6) in the context of the Literary Class War: "This clearly was not a literature in tune with the New Deal; the new post office art, the new social conscience, the new Moscow trials, or the new anything. It was, simply, new: that is, created. And in some circles, at all times, for a thing to be truly created, is to be outrageous" (7). The implication is that the autonomy of Faulkner's art—that is, its distance from what Warren identifies as the "leftism" (6) prevailing in the culture of the thirties—stands as testimony to his integrity as an artist, who needed only to weather a momentary lapse of

reason in American literary history before his brilliance would be rightfully acknowledged.

Warren echoes what had become virtually an official account in Faulkner studies, gaining a sense of authority through the sheer power of repetition, one of the most effective devices in the politics of recording the past. But it should always be the task of the critic, if not to rewrite, at least to revise literary history so as to question longstanding assumptions that obscure more than they reveal. In my view, the problem with the traditional view of Faulkner's engagement with the Literary Class War is that it denies the complexity of this relationship and especially its significant role in the production of Faulkner's fiction in the thirties. In order to comprehend this complexity, there are certain false assumptions that must be challenged: (1) that the Literary Class War was rooted in a binary opposition between formalism (or modernism) and social realism; and (2) that Faulkner remained distant from the cultural context that fostered literature of heightened social conscience. Reconstituting the Literary Class War as a fusion of formalism and social realism that occurred despite professions of absolute division exposes Faulkner's art as an active participant in this process of integration. By examining the themes of decadence in *Mosquitoes* and dispossession in *The Sound and the Fury*, we can see how the internal components of Faulkner's texts mediate the external conflicts and contradictions extant in the Literary Class War. Through this inquiry, the ways that Faulkner's art responds ideologically to the cultural politics encompassing its production become evident.

* * *

The Literary Class War was an aesthetic and ideological dispute that erupted in the thirties as a result of the rise in social consciousness among writers who insisted on close ties between art and politics. Fundamental positions in this dispute generally corresponded to formations in the ideological shift from individualism toward collectivism underway in the nation. In response to an invigorated left calling for a more socially minded art, many cultural conservatives reaffirmed principles of formalism in an effort to preserve the conception of art as a privileged form of expression forged from the individual creative mind rather than produced by social relations. These fundamentally different beliefs contributed to a sense of polarity that defined the terms of an intense cultural conflict. Indeed, the heightened rhetoric of entrenchment at play in the Literary Class War insisted upon strict ideological division. Nevertheless, the conflict produced mutually constitutive negotiations between the opposing forces. This intricate cultural politics centered not only on the literary giants of the time but also on emerging writers like Faulkner.

Because Faulkner's early novels exhibited classic tendencies of modernism—specifically, formal experimentation and exploration of the psychological dimensions of individual characters—many advocates of social realism reacted to Faulkner with predictable consternation. These modernist traits suggested to them that Faulkner had an affinity for the literary tradition of the twenties and thus his irrelevance to the emergent aesthetic ideology appeared all but certain. After all, Faulkner's fiction seemed a far cry from the aesthetic of "proletarian realism" that Michael Gold described in an effort to give direction to a burgeoning literary movement. As one might expect, the genre defined by Gold was essentially an antidote to the literary aesthetic of high

modernism. In classic Marxist form, Gold posited culture as a reflection of class society and held forth the dominant literary tradition of the twenties as evidence of a bourgeoisie in decline. For the mobilized proletariat intent on assuming power, then, Gold imagined a new literary form to reflect the revolutionary project at hand. Insisting that proletarian realism should resist prescriptive constraints, Gold nevertheless identified various demonstrable aspects of this revolutionary form. Instead of focusing on "idle Bohemians" in the manner of Proust, whom Gold dubbed the "master-masturbator of the bourgeois literature" ("Proletarian Realism" 206), proletarian realism would describe the lives and work of the proletariat accurately. In a minimalist style, Gold explained, proletarian realism would strive for "swift action, clear form, the direct line, cinema in words" ("Proletarian Realism" 207). Fundamentally, depictions of social reality would be honest, focusing on the plight of the working class in order to awaken readers to the inherent injustices of capitalism and thus to inspire to aid the revolutionary cause. In effect, Gold injected social realism with the more specific political agenda of proletarianism to arrive at an aesthetic ideology—that is to say, an artistic vision heavily influenced by the Marxist philosophy that Gold and a host of intellectuals had come to accept as essential to achieving greater social and economic justice in America. Gold was by no means alone in articulating such a vision: Granville Hicks, Philip Rahv, and Joseph Freeman, among others, also contributed to a revised aesthetic intended to bind art closer to social reality generally and a leftist political agenda specifically.

Hicks wrote one of the earliest critical studies of Faulkner's fiction outside the genre of the book review. Hicks's treatment of Faulkner was plainly influenced by the

emergent aesthetic ideology of social realism. In *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (1933), Hicks took Faulkner to task for not writing "simply and realistically about southern life" (266). In the eyes of Hicks and other advocates of social realism, Faulkner showed a tendency to sensationalize the plight of the rural poor but no commitment to expose the real social conditions responsible for this plight. Hicks contended that if Faulkner aimed for "a more representative description of life," he might be able to probe "the kind of crime that is committed every day, and the kind of corruption that gnaws at every human being in this rotten society" (266). Failing that, Hicks concluded, Faulkner was left "to pile violence upon violence in order to convey a mood that he will not or cannot analyze" (266). In *Writers in Crisis*, Maxwell Geismar devoted a chapter to Faulkner and followed Hicks's line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. Displaying the either/or reasoning common to the more polemical critics of the thirties, Geismar asserted that a writer unwilling to operate under the framework of social realism would likely wind up an advocate of fascism. Ironically, Faulkner could take heart in the fact that he had arrived in at least one respect: he had warranted the charge of fascism that leftist critics reserved only for writers whom they took seriously. In the early thirties, then, critics influenced by the aesthetic ideology of social realism lodged two charges against Faulkner on a consistent basis. First, they criticized him for writing in a style derivative of high modernism, emphasizing formal experimentation and the "aristocratic obliviousness" (Trilling 70) of quasi-aristocrats such as Sartoris and Compsons. Second, critics cited Faulkner for injecting gratuitous violence into his novels and stories for apparent shock value.

The two primary criticisms aimed at Faulkner evoked the charge of escapism—for radical critics, an aesthetic effect indicative of complicity in a fading bourgeois literary tradition. In "Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ," the article credited as the opening salvo of the Literary Class War, Gold took Thornton Wilder to task for being "the poet of a small sophisticated class that has recently risen in America—our genteel bourgeoisie" (202). For Gold, Wilder had become a servant of the dominant bourgeois class seeking to "forget its roots in American industrialism," because his fiction "disguises the barbaric sources of their income, the billions wrung from American and foreign peasants and coolies. It lets them feel spiritually worthy of that income" (202). For advocates of social realism, violent content could function in much the same way, offering an escape route to the bourgeois reader seeking freedom from social responsibility. Citing *Sanctuary* as an example, Hicks charged Faulkner with providing cheap thrills so as to obscure the unjust social conditions that produce violence. Thus, instead of inspiring his readers to probe the roots of violence, Faulkner "helps them to forget, for a few hours, their petty cares" (Hicks 268).¹ Although not in such specific terms, what Gold identified in Wilder and Hicks in Faulkner was an aesthetic ideology of escapism masking social reality for the dominant bourgeois class. Lost in bourgeois decadence, the reader could deny material social conditions through a false consciousness induced by the aesthetic effects of the text.

While negative reception of Faulkner during the period of the Literary Class War was influenced by the emergent aesthetic ideology of social realism, appreciation of his work stemmed from an alternative aesthetic ideology rooted in literary formalism. The Southern Agrarians were among those who expressed initial admiration for

Faulkner, citing his concern with form as an attribute rather than a detriment.

Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay* (1925), caught the attention of Donald Davidson, whose words of praise foreshadowed the growing tensions between formalism and social realism that would spark the Literary Class War. Davidson hailed Faulkner as "an artist in language, a sort of poet turned into prose; he does not write prose as Dreiser does, as if he were washing dishes; nor like Sinclair Lewis, who goes at words with a hammer and a saw" ("William Faulkner" 13). Instead, Faulkner showed a devotion to his craft that made him "distinctly a 'modern'" ("William Faulkner" 13). A year later, in a review of *Mosquitoes*, Davidson continued in the same vein, praising Faulkner's "wonderful dexterity in the technical management of words" ("The Grotesque" 20). *Sartoris* prompted Davidson to declare that "as a stylist and an acute observer of human behavior, I think that Mr. Faulkner is the equal of any except three or four American novelists who stand at the very top" ("Two Mississippi Novels" 27). Davidson's treatment of Faulkner was in keeping with the Southern Agrarians' mission to counter the aesthetic ideology of social realism favored by radicals on the left with a "radicalism" of their own—that is, a reaffirmation of formalist notions of art as a privileged form of expression forged from the creative genius of the solitary artist rather than produced by social relations.

Wary of such an overt mixture of art and politics, intellectuals on the right immediately reasserted an aesthetic ideology of formalism as part of a larger expression of cultural conservatism. In a series of articles written for the *New Republic*, Southern Agrarian Allen Tate proved himself a worthy adversary to Gold. In "Poetry and Politics," Tate criticized the effort to make art a tool of social and political activism,

insisting that art and the artist would be inevitably devalued and compromised in the process. Then, in a three-part series, Tate elaborated on this philosophical concern in aesthetic terms, identifying three motivations in contemporary writers: (1) the scientific spirit/practical will; (2) romantic irony; and (3) the creative spirit. In "Three Types of Poetry," the initial essay, Tate explained that the scientific spirit in art had yielded a "positive Platonism, or a naïve confidence in the limitless power of man to impose practical abstractions upon the world" (126). Inevitably frustrated by this attempt to replace the imagination with the practical will, Tate added, the writer would then adopt romantic irony to express disillusionment. Instead, Tate encouraged the artist to cultivate the individual creative spirit, which "occupies an aloof middle ground" between the practical will and romantic irony (126). Cautious of the pending threat posed by what Tate perceived as the harmful drives, he pointed out that they had come with their own "critical apparatus [. . .] known at present as the revolutionary or social point of view" (128). Finally, Tate arrived at an aesthetic ideology of formalism, essentially reaffirming the notion of art for art's sake. As Tate explained, poetry "has no useful relation to the ordinary forms of action" (translation: to social reality); instead "poetry finds its true usefulness in its perfect inutility, a focus of repose for the will-driven intellect that constantly shakes the equilibrium of persons and societies with its unrelieved imposition of partial formulas upon the world" (240).

The aesthetic ideology expressed by Tate explains much about the motivation of critics such as Conrad Aiken who offered spirited defenses of Faulkner. Determined to deflect the emphasis on depravity and violence in Faulkner's fiction, Aiken, in "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," stressed its stylistic merits. In contrast to advocates of

social realism, Aiken insisted that "what sets [Faulkner] above—shall we say it firmly—all his American contemporaries, is his continuous preoccupation with the novel as *form*" (139). Owing to the density of Faulkner's writing—the complex narrative structures and the extended sentence patterns—Aiken contended that "the reader must therefore be steadily *drawn in*; he must be powerfully and unremittingly hypnotized" (138). Aiken's assessment could not be more firmly opposed to Gold's definition of the purpose and function of art. And the political implications of Aiken's interpretation should not escape notice. With his emphasis on form and the arresting effect of Faulkner's novels, Aiken essentially praised Faulkner for not applying the techniques of social realism.

So, as literary history would have it, Faulkner's critical reception was determined by the polarized politics of the Literary Class War. Caught between two diametrically opposed aesthetic ideologies, Faulkner was fated to be condemned by one and praised by the other. The problem with this account is that it fails to capture for the sake of posterity the complexities that make this war every bit as hard to read as the literal kind. To say categorically that advocates of social realism dismissed Faulkner, while cultural conservatives recognized the value of his art is to tell only part of the story. While this interpretation has served various purposes—foremost, perhaps, a political agenda active in the forties and fifties and thus beyond the scope of my concern here—achieving accuracy is certainly not among them. In actuality, by the mid-thirties, recognition of Faulkner's value as a writer was registered by some of the most unlikely people—outspoken advocates of proletarianism, for example—and in some of the most unlikely places—notably the *New Masses*. This previously ignored

component of Faulkner's critical reception in the thirties warrants consideration, not only for the questions it raises about literary historiography, but for the added insight it lends to Faulkner's art in relation to the cultural context of the Literary Class War.

Recognition of Faulkner's talent among advocates of proletarianism tended to come in the form of constructive criticism. While Faulkner's technical genius was obvious to critics on the left, they predictably wanted him to expand a social vision that they perceived as limited by an upper-class perspective. Such was the case with James T. Farrell, author of the *Studs Lonigan Trilogy*, as demonstrated by his review of *Light in August* for the *New Masses*. Farrell was especially impressed with the "powerful writing, particularly some of the passages that describe the life of Joe Christmas, a life heaped with injustice" (84). Predictably, Farrell mentioned Faulkner's preoccupation with violence and mental disturbance, but remained confident that such emphases would wane in time. Implicitly recognizing Faulkner's talent for probing social reality, Farrell mourned the fact that for now "he is limiting himself" (84).

In a similar vein, Muriel Rukeyser's review of *Dr. Martino and Other Stories* for the *New Masses* was a blend of sharp criticism and recognition of vast promise. Rukeyser placed Faulkner among "those writers of vignettes of the macabre who portray a civilization without explaining it" (115). Although she praised Faulkner for resisting didacticism, Rukeyser faulted him for not clearly articulating one of the remaining alternatives: "to drive his characters implacably by outside forces, or to dignify them giving them enough consciousness to make meanings in their lives" (115). If Faulkner was "to assume the proportions his work still shadows," Rukeyser commented, he would have to develop the "emotional sophistication which he now

lacks" (115). Achieving that, Rukeyser concluded, "his work will be what he is ambitious for it now to seem, having the living dimensions of the society he draws" (115).

By the time *The Hamlet* was published in 1940, it would seem that Faulkner had completed the task Rukeyser assigned him, at least as far as Edna Lou Walton was concerned in her review of the novel for the *New Masses*. Repeating what leftists saw as Faulkner's main detriments—a derivative modernist style and an emphasis on violence and perversity—Walton proclaimed that Faulkner had now redeemed himself. Once misguided imitation, now Faulkner's "frequent use of stream of consciousness method [. . .] is admirably suited to his purpose of portraying almost completely inarticulate and shrewdly instinctive mentalities" (216). On the second count as well, Faulkner had demonstrated maturity because now "his distortion can function when used to portray a distorted or disintegrating social scene" (216). Focused on the element of class conflict, Walton interpreted Faulkner's novel as "a study of the methods (totally amoral and petty and vicious) by which the shrewder of the once tenant or small farmers of the hills turned the tables against the older traders" (216). Walton went so far as to assign Faulkner a revolutionary vision, concluding that his treatment of the Snopeses demonstrates "that the small dog can eat the larger dog—if nothing, not even kinship (the greatest loyalty among landowners), is sacred" (216). Together, these three reviews suggest that Faulkner's value as an artist was measured on the left in terms of his potential to move beyond the forces that limited a progressive social vision.

Recognition of Faulkner's potential as an artist of social vision was not an aberration but a development in the aesthetic ideology of social realism occurring in the mid-thirties. By that point in the decade, controversy over "leftism" had surfaced in the radical journals committed in part to debates over aesthetics— most prominently the *New Masses*, the *Partisan Review*, and the *Daily Worker*. James F. Murphy explains that the term "leftism" had evolved into "an epithet characterizing certain attitudes and practices that were considered unacceptable" (1). Foremost among them were partisan attacks on writers considered deficient in social consciousness and the belief that writers committed to social realism and proletarianism stood to gain nothing from the bourgeois literary tradition. Moreover, "leftism" was associated with a disregard for aesthetics and with the practice of sociological literary criticism viewed as reductive.

A major catalyst for this less strident aesthetic ideology taking shape in the mid-thirties was the publication of letters written by Marx and Engels on the relationship between art and the proletarian cause. Particularly important was the publication of a letter by Engels to the British socialist writer Margaret Harkness which appeared in English translation for the first time in *International Literature*, a respected journal among American radical writers and critics. In the letter, Engels stressed the contradictions in Balzac's work as evidence of his value to a writer intent on comprehending class conflict:

That Balzac was . . . compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favorite nobles and described them as people deserving no better fate; that he saw the real of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found—that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of realism, and one of the greatest features in old Balzac. (114)

While a writer such as Balzac was obviously more concerned with conflict between the upper-class and a rising bourgeoisie, he nevertheless could provide a form worthy of proletarian writers to emulate as they turned to the struggles of the working class. The views of Marx and Engels on the uses of the bourgeois literary tradition inspired intellectuals on the left to revise the aesthetic ideology of social realism and to find value in writers whom they had previously deemed bourgeois and thus irrelevant. In the mid-thirties, American intellectuals were joining their European counterparts in reevaluating the bourgeois literary tradition for what it could teach writers committed to social realism. Of course, a writer's ability to comprehend social dynamics, particularly class conflict, determined his or her value to a revised aesthetic ideology of social realism. For this reason, many intellectuals on the left were beginning to see in Faulkner what Engels had seen in Balzac: a writer often at odds with his own class sympathies whose work was full of the sort of contradictions that enabled not only an increasingly comprehensive social vision but also promised a thriving realism worthy of emulation. This critical reception of Faulkner, until now unmentioned in the annals of literary history, reveals much about the changing cultural politics of the Literary Class War and, as we shall now see, opens the way for "radical" rereadings of Faulkner's literary production.

* * *

The majority of critics grant *Mosquitoes* the dubious distinction of being Faulkner's worst novel. Among the numerous flaws cited, the blatant posturing of this

early work as a novel of ideas bears repeating. Typical of this genre, *Mosquitoes* contains repeated digressions serving no apparent purpose but to allow a budding novelist to work through thoughts on various topics of interest, particularly the nature of art and the role of the artist in modern society. From this perspective, the characters in the novel are thinly veiled mouthpieces and function as rhetorical devices through which the novel attempts to articulate a coherent aesthetic vision. But the novel also falls under the category of *roman á clef*, given that it emerges from Faulkner's stint in New Orleans in the mid-1920s. There Faulkner cultivated, but mostly observed, the bohemian lifestyle by sitting at the feet of Sherwood Anderson who was, for a while, a mentor and an advocate. On one level, *Mosquitoes* marks Faulkner's declaration of independence from this tutelage, expressed through the rather unflattering depiction of Dawson Fairchild, the Falstaffian novelist generally recognized as Anderson's analogue.

These two strains in the novel—the expression of ideas and the inclusion of autobiographical data (even a famous cameo appearance by Faulkner himself)—have led critics to conclude that *Mosquitoes* renders, in effect, a portrait of Faulkner the artist as a young man.² So critics interested in ideas expressed in the novel have tended to focus on the most prominent themes as evidence of what preoccupied Faulkner at the time—specifically, the relationship between art and sex and problems of language and representation.³ Treatment of these ideas is often accentuated by the connections between Faulkner's experiences in New Orleans and the events of the novel, which are allusive pieces in the puzzle of this *roman á clef*. While this critical practices has explained much about *Mosquitoes*, it ultimately contains the novel in a fixed set of

references to Faulkner's ideas or to his biography. My interest here is to broaden the scope by situating the novel in a larger cultural context that takes into account changing attitudes toward art and the role of the artist in the late twenties which informed the Literary Class War of the thirties. In fact, reading the novel as ideologically responsive to the theme of decadence so much in discussion in the late twenties reveals *Mosquitoes* as a text heavily influenced by competing aesthetic ideologies and thus active in the cultural politics of its time.

One of the most eloquent expressions of the changing convictions among artists and intellectuals in the late twenties and early thirties came from Faulkner's eventual champion, Malcolm Cowley, whose *Exile's Return* (1934) spoke for a lost generation committed to finding itself once more. Cowley's attack on the twenties was driven noticeably by the realization that the decadence in life and art which had come to define the decade was finally running its course. A chronicle of the changing attitudes among artists and intellectuals as one decade gave way to another, Cowley's book is useful in gauging the responsiveness of Faulkner's second novel to many of the same concerns. *Exile's Return* begins as a nostalgic autobiography to document the experiences of artists and intellectuals who had fled America—some figuratively, some literally—with the sense that there was no clear role for the creative spirit in a post-World War I society which had grown increasingly materialistic.⁴ However, in keeping with the prevailing mood of the time, the text moves from the introspection of autobiography to comment incisively on the attitudes and behaviors of the expatriates and particularly the social implications of their self-imposed exile. For Cowley, writers in the twenties had suffered from a chronic solipsism caused by a selfish desire to protect individuality as

perhaps the most cherished possession. The consequences of this individualism for the artist could be measured in the work of writers such as Eliot, Joyce, and Proust, all of whom Cowley takes to task for privileging solitary concerns to the detriment of social awareness and responsibility. Cowley thus arrives at the same conclusion reached by many artists and intellectuals who were ready to acknowledge the error of their ways:

Once the artist had come to be regarded as a being set apart from the world of ordinary men, it followed that his aloofness would be increasingly emphasized. The world would more and more diminish in the eyes of the artist, and the artist would be self-magnified at the expense of the world. These tendencies, in turn, implied still others. Art would come to be treated as a self-sustaining entity, an essence neither produced by the world nor acting upon it: art would be *purposeless*.
(143)

Here Cowley's cultural critique brings him finally to an indictment of the principle of art for art's sake as construed by the aesthetic ideology of formalism. In contrast to that view, Cowley insists that the relationship of the artist to society and culture—the essence of politics and political identity—is inextricably bound to and expressed by aesthetics.

The decadence of the twenties was evident for Cowley in both the prevailing aesthetic ideology and the conflicted relationship that artists and intellectuals had formed with society. In Cowley's view, the unintended purpose of art now was to produce a commodity for the very bourgeois set from which the expatriates had tried to separate themselves. Artists, then, had become too accustomed to the easy money that seemed everywhere in abundance in the twenties. *Exile's Return* thus mourns the complicity of artists and intellectuals in the decadence of wealth and the consequent loss of artistic integrity: "We became part of the system we were trying to evade, and it defeated us from within, not from without; our hearts beat to its tempo" (227). For art

and artists to be redeemed, Cowley concludes, the exiles would have to return—from the bohemian cafes on the continent and from the inner recesses of subjectivity—and strive to acknowledge the ties that bound them to a society riddled with social injustice and defined by class struggle. *Mosquitoes* stands as testament to the fact that these concerns starting to emerge at the time of the novel's production were not lost on a young Faulkner, whose derivative second novel forms to a significant degree in response to revised conceptions of art and the role of the artist under negotiation in the culture in the second half of the twenties.

One need look no further than the basic concept of the novel to discern connections to the pending cultural politics thus far defined. *Mosquitoes* tells the story of a voyage on Lake Ponchatrain orchestrated by Mrs. Maurier, a dilettante New Orleans society matron who plans the cruise to be a sort of floating salon removed from the constraints of society. Thus Mrs. Maurier carefully selects a group of artists for the cruise whom she hopes will hold erudite discussions about Art for her to consume with relish. Leaving virtually no genre without representation, she includes among her guests Dawson Fairchild, a raucous novelist; Gordon, a hyper-masculine sculptor; Mark Frost, a brooding and non-prolific poet; and Dorothy Jameson, a painter. For the artists, this arrangement is beneficial in the sense that Mrs. Maurier will provide for them, but it also calls into question their artistic integrity. By supplying Mrs. Maurier's demand, these artists become complicit in the sort of decadence that she represents and thus run the risk of reducing art and the artist to the level of commodity. Not only that, but the artists must contend with the other guests, who embody various attitudes toward art: Ernest Talliaferro, an effete women's clothing salesman whose "appreciation" of art is

part of a cultivated bohemian personality; Julius Kauffman, the "Semitic man" who dismisses art as a pale comparison to actual life experience; Patricia and Josh Robyn, Mrs. Maurier's niece and nephew, who further raise questions about the utilitarian value and commodification of art; and Pete and Jenny, the working-class characters, who virtually stumble on board the yacht and proceed with a lack of pretentiousness that makes them stand in direct relief to their unlikely companions. Aboard the aptly-named *Nausikka*, these characters enable Faulkner to explore, in the words of Frederick Karl, "how the artist may survive on a ship of fools" (Introduction 4), which is in many ways a microcosm of the decadent society and culture prevailing in the twenties.

Viewing the yacht in this representative light makes its journey all the more compelling. While the name of the ship calls to mind, in the words of Kierkegaard's, a sickness unto death, the lack of progress and motion points to the fact that the way of life contained on the *Nausikka*—what Fairchild calls the "charming futility" (M 52) of the bohemian lifestyle—has lost its vitality and momentum. Traditionally in American literature, taking to the water is associated with liberation and self-discovery, *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn* being perhaps the most obvious case in point. On the water, freedom and movement—two American obsessions—provide means of transformation: the character who arrives at the docks is presumably a more complete version of the character who set sail, having undergone the voyage and the inner progression it symbolizes. Steeped in the archetypal concept of the voyage, the characters in *Mosquitoes* are initially hopeful that this outing on the yacht can provide them with a break from the constraints of society and thus ample opportunity for self-discovery. This hope for renewed growth is reinforced early on by the course of the *Nausikka*,

which moves "youthfully and gaily under a blue and drowsy day" (M 58). However, Faulkner almost immediately mounts a tide of resistance to the archetypal voyage, dating back at least as far as *The Odyssey*, by crafting (in every sense of the word) what Edwin T. Arnold rightly calls "a sterile, static world" in the novel (282). In this world, movement does not necessarily mean progress, a condition which is illustrated by the fact that the "*Nausikka* forged onward without any sensation of motion" (M 83). Fairchild acknowledges the general lack of direction when he responds to a question about where the yacht is headed: "'Why nowhere,' answered Fairchild with surprise. 'We just came from somewhere yesterday, didn't we?'" (M 85). What began as a yearning for freedom and movement has now become a tacit acceptance of confinement and stasis expressed in an explicit lack of purpose. Rather than serving as a means of liberation, as Eva Wiseman perceptively observes, "motion seems to have had a bad effect on the party" (M 110). Finally, the yacht ceases even its literal movement, running aground on a sandbar and resting "motionless, swaddled in mist like a fat jewel" (M 164). At this point, it has become clear that this novel opposes the possibility of the voyage with the probability of the anti-voyage. In various ways, discovery, progress, and motion enter into conflict with repetition, digression, and stagnation, thus creating an overarching tension between movement and stasis that infuses the critique of decadence offered in *Mosquitoes*.

One way that the novel engages the theme of decadence is through its concern with problems of representation. A case in point is the repeated emphasis on language, particularly the discrepancy between word and deed. Although the suspicion that language is a poor substitute for action does not originate with Faulkner, he does at least

translate this theme into contemporary terms. Fairchild initially introduces the point of contention in a gendered context, advising Talliaferro on what motivates women: "They ain't interested in what you're going to say: they're interested in what you're going to do" (*M* 112). Ironically, Fairchild, whose craft is to employ language, expresses the recognition of its ultimate futility. When Fairchild derides Talliaferro's faith in language, Julius Kauffman, the skeptic when it comes to artistic appreciation, offers a spirited logocentric defense. Surprised that Fairchild, "a member of that species all of whose actions are controlled by words" should be diminishing the power of language, Kauffman affirms its power: "It's the word that overturns thrones and political parties and instigates vice crusades, not things: the Thing is merely the symbol for the Word" (*M* 130). Interestingly enough, this vital defense of language is expressed in terms of its potential to bring about actual—in this case, political—transformation. In assigning literature a revolutionary function, Kauffman's conception of language coincides with the aesthetic ideology of social realism.

Instead of subscribing to Kauffman's view, though, Fairchild holds firm to the concept of language as abstraction. And, on the *Nausikka*, the abstract nature of language is taken to the extreme. In this rarefied and inert environment, where there is apparently little tangible connection between word and deed, language is reduced to mere babble. "Talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words," bemoans the narrator after the yachting party holds a lengthy discussion about the inability of art to convey the unpredictable nature of reality. "It seemed endless, as though it might go on forever. Ideas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead" (*M* 186). The arbitrary nature of words and ideas among

this set is reinforced by the fact that Kauffman and Fairchild reverse positions once they have returned to land from the *Nausikka*. Back in Gordon's studio, involved in a discussion of aesthetics, Fairchild testifies to the power of art to suspend time—a sentiment that Kauffman credits to Fairchild's "unshakable faith in words," adding that language has the same numbing effect as morphine (*M* 319). The discourse on language recurring in the novel is demonstrative of the superficiality that Faulkner assigns to Fairchild whose faith in art apparently stems from sentimentality and a need to overcome the deficiencies of humble origins rather than from a genuine commitment. This criticism is in line with a major complaint that Cowley and others would lodge against the literature of the lost generation: that its decadence stands exposed in the excessive amount of idle chatter which separates word from deed and betrays a general lack of conviction among artists.

The exploration of language and problems of representation in *Mosquitoes* is augmented by Faulkner's treatment of visual representation. As with language, aesthetic principles of form find initial expression in terms of gender. To apply a Lacanian paradigm, as the elusive object of desire, woman symbolizes what is lacking and thus serves as the impetus for expression and articulation of ideas in the novel. (This component is, of course, even more pronounced in *The Sound and the Fury*, as the following examination of the novel will recognize.) Much is made in *Mosquitoes* of the female torso sculpted by Gordon. The epitome of idealized and arrested form, the sculpture is "the 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" (*M* 11). But the sculpture is

also a rhetorical device that allows Faulkner to probe issues of perception, particularly the disparity between objectivity and subjectivity. When Patricia Robyn and Mrs. Maurier view the statue, they are compelled to a discussion of its meaning. While Mrs. Maurier defers to Gordon to explain what the torso signifies, Patricia argues that the point is moot given what she sees as the ultimately subjective and arbitrary nature of perception: "What do you want it to signify? Suppose it signified a—dog, or an ice cream soda, what difference would it make?" (*M* 26). Mr. Talliaferro presses the case even further, adding that the sculpture need not have "objective significance" but instead must exist as art for its own sake, as "pure form untrammelled by any relation to a familiar or utilitarian object" (*M* 26). However, as the artist, Gordon insists on having the ultimate authority, on being the sole proprietor, as it were, of his creation. Asserting the "objective significance" of the sculpture, Gordon proclaims, "This is my feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me" (*M* 26). Gordon's ideal is ultimately an abstraction, though, a woman whose means of utility and agency have been dissembled. The "objective significance" here is determined in actuality by Gordon's (the artist's) supreme act of subjectivity, rendering the object of desire completely passive, completely lacking and thus dependent on the creator for completion and meaning.

Gordon plainly embodies the notion of the artist as solitary and supreme creator of "pure" art—a fundamental component of the aesthetic ideology of formalism that many artists and intellectuals newly converted to social activism were coming to associate with the decadence of the twenties. If art exists for its own sake, the thinking goes, then it is the artist who endows art with this existence. Faulkner's novel exposes

the basis of this aesthetic principle in a gender ideology that defines creativity as a masculine impulse. When Mrs. Maurier arrives at Gordon's studio early in the novel to view his sculpture, she pines, "Ah, to be a man, with no ties save those of the soul! To create, to create" (*M* 18). Later, in the epilogue, this masculine aesthetic principle is elaborated by Fairchild who contrasts artistic creativity with human reproduction. While biology determines that men defer to women for most of the life-giving process, Fairchild contends that in art "a man can create without any assistance at all: what he does is his" (*M* 320). The element of ownership is evident: for the individual artist, the work of art is a form of private property. Though Fairchild deems this arrangement a "perversion," he insists that "a perversion that builds Chartres and invents Lear is a pretty good thing" (*M* 320).

Like so many ideas in Faulkner's second novel, however, this aesthetic principle of the sole creator stands directly challenged. Patricia Robyn rather obviously is the living form meant to expose the inadequacy of the ideal form that Gordon supposedly creates *ex nihilo* and infuses with "objective significance." Her flat, boyish look calls to mind the androgyny of Lady Brett Ashley in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, which was published a year before *Mosquitoes*, and is a source of mystification and intrigue for Gordon. The sexual tension between Patricia and Gordon is apparent in one of their initial encounters aboard the *Nausikka* when Gordon helps Patricia out of the lake after a swim. This tension is compounded by the fact that each tries to render the other as object through the power of perception. In Patricia's eyes, Gordon is the embodiment of his work—a living sculpture chiseled with a "high hard chest" (*M* 82). In turn, Gordon tries not only to control Patricia's movement but to arrest it as he would one of his stone

creations. Holding Patricia motionless above the deck, Gordon is struck by her "taut simple body, almost breastless and with the fleeting hips of a boy, was an ecstasy in golden marble" (M 82). A pattern is established here in which Patricia is described in terms that evoke the image of the sculpture. However, unlike the torso that Gordon has captured in stone, Patricia is capable of leaving him. And that she does immediately after Gordon releases her from his grip: "Then she was gone, and Gordon stood looking at the wet and simple prints of her naked feet on the deck" (M 82).

Through his encounters with Patricia Robyn, his statue come to life, Gordon develops a less abstract aesthetic and acknowledges the substantial ties between art and social relations. In effect, Gordon realizes the potential benefits of reconnecting to the world around him, rarefied though it may be aboard the *Nausikka*. A telling encounter between Gordon and Mrs. Maurier and the sculpture that results from it illustrate Gordon's revised aesthetic. Mrs. Maurier envies Gordon for having a vocation that insulates him from the cruelty of the world:

To live within yourself, to be sufficient unto yourself. [. . .] To go through life, keeping yourself from becoming involved in it, to gather inspiration for your Work—ah, Mr. Gordon, how lucky you who create are. (M 153)

But Mrs. Maurier's praise has quite the opposite of its intended effect: instead of convincing Gordon of her enlightened understanding of art and the function of the artist, the remarks expose her desperate need for confirmation and prompt in Gordon a crucial revelation. Instead of believing that art emerges from the creative impulse of the solitary artist, he is starting to recognize the role that social relations play in its production. Fortified by this epiphany, Gordon sees Mrs. Maurier with a new intensity. Studying the contours of her face, "learning the bones of her forehead and eyesockets

and nose through her flesh" (*M* 154), Gordon, in effect, chisels away the constructed façade that she presents to the external world. For Mrs. Maurier, the encounter proves devastating, shining the harsh light of reality into her refuge, the *Nausikka*, "that island of security that was always waiting to transport her comfortably beyond the rumors of the world and its sorrows" (*M* 163). For Gordon, on the other hand, the encounter enables him to produce a work approaching realism—the clay mask of Mrs. Maurier that greets the onlooker "with savage verisimilitude" (*M* 322) and captures the despair of her existence, which no one else has seen.

Faulkner underlines this transformation in Gordon by having the sculptor undergo what Julius Kauffman aptly deems a "resurrection" (*M* 267). Shortly after the aforementioned encounter with Mrs. Maurier on the *Nausikka*, Gordon disappears and is presumed by the guests and crew to have drowned. However, Gordon makes a sudden return, which coincides fittingly with the appearance of the tug boat sent to free the *Nausikka* from its stagnant position on the sandbar. On one level, the tug boat rescue has symbolic value: rescued from "exile," the *Nausikka* and the guests it contains must now return from a rarefied environment to society and social relations. For the "resurrected" Gordon, this transition is occurring in terms of the relationship between life and art. After returning to the yacht, Gordon has another encounter with Patricia Robyn. In this scene, Faulkner intersperses the story of a king who leaves his marble court, breaking free from the "*dreaming lilac barriers of his world*" (*M* 269) to move among his subjects—an obvious analogue to Gordon's revised aesthetic. Gordon cites another story to Patricia of an author who "traps" his lover by writing about her in a book. Patricia immediately associates the story with the sculpted torso, charging that

Gordon's intention must have been the same. Instead of the abstract woman represented in stone, Patricia asks Gordon, "Wouldn't you rather have a live one?" (*M* 270). This query initiates a negotiation between the two characters in a scene that parodies exchange in various forms. For one, Patricia tries to purchase Gordon's prized sculpture—in effect, assigning it an exchange-value so as to assume control over the object. While Gordon's power to confine objects to abstraction is artistic, Patricia's is financial: she can impose her own form of abstraction on the sculpture through the process of commodification. But Gordon predictably refuses the offer and tries to assert his own form of control by perceiving Patricia once again as the living form of the sculpture. Lifting Patricia and carrying her across the deck, he playfully spansks ("sculpts") her in response to the struggle she is mounting. A form of virtual sex, this exchange represents the consummation of the artist's renewed attention to social relations, his awareness that life and art must meet on material and physical terms rather than remaining distanced by abstraction.⁵

A further challenge to the notion of the self-sustaining artist devoted to art for art's sake comes in the form of Patricia's brother Josh, whose work exhibits an alternative aesthetic principle—the utilitarian conception of art. Fundamentally, Josh is a counterpoint to Gordon in terms of the way he views his craft. Rather than the "pure" form initially attempted by Gordon and profusely exalted by Talliaferro, Josh is a living example of what Gordon imagines in stream of consciousness as "the soul horned by utility" (*M* 47). Josh is a sculptor of sorts, though his artistic material is wood rather than clay. Unlike the torso, which represents what Cowley would call purposeless art, Josh's creation—a cleaner smoking pipe—is functional. Not only does Josh take pride

in the outcome, he clearly feels a tangible connection to his craft. Deriving satisfaction and a sense of fullness from his artistic labor, Josh does not experience the kind of reified despair that Gordon suffers in relation to the abstract torso. For Josh, the creative process yields simple pleasure. Pressed by Major Ayers to explain the ulterior (i.e., profit) motive informing his work, Josh cites mere pleasure as the source of his inspiration: "Say, I'm just making a pipe, I tell you. A pipe. Just to be making it. For fun" (*M* 173). Major Ayers, ever the venture capitalist, cannot comprehend this sentiment. For this reason, Josh faces much the same challenge from Major Ayers that Gordon faces from Patricia. Ready to abandon his plan for a sure-fire laxative to clear America's chronic constipation (a condition that in itself expresses incisive social commentary), the major tries to convince Josh to let him mass market the pipe. Like Patricia, Major Ayers attempts to assign an exchange-value to the object, though his motivation is pure profit rather than obtaining an upper hand in a relationship. But for Josh the worth of the pipe is measured in terms of its use-value and the sense of satisfaction that he derives from its production.

The depictions of Gordon and Josh as craftsmen, rendered from the perspectives of two seemingly opposed aesthetic ideologies, articulate essentially the same message: that "pure" art derives from the tangible connection between the creative process and life and maintains its integrity by resisting the bourgeois mentality that reduces art to the level of base commodity. The aesthetic principle that Faulkner imagines here suggests that he was testing ideas associated with the aesthetic ideology of social realism circulating in the cultural context of the novel. But to say that Faulkner embraces the aesthetic ideology of social realism would clearly overstate the point.

Rather *Mosquitoes* reveals a young Faulkner responsive to cultural politics to the point that the critique of decadence in his second novel internalizes and, in many ways, anticipates the chief conflict between alternative aesthetic ideologies that would become a fixture of the Literary Class War. In my view, Faulkner's response to this conflict goes a long way toward explaining the contradictions that riddle *Mosquitoes* and, in effect, serve as staging devices for the fiction to come.

One of the most visible contradictions in the novel is the way that it treats class relations. Obviously, the dominant perspective in this novel is upper-class, whether focused from the standpoint of a character like Mrs. Maurier, who holds a position in this class, or one like Talliaferro, who is granted access to it because of his careful cultivation of acceptable social mores. While the *Nausikka* represents an effort to gain freedom from the constraints of society, it also suggests the futility of this undertaking and the naturalization of social stratification which renders the notion of classless society as idealistic. Though the novel often expresses longing for encounters and spaces beyond class, it also exposes the rigidity of a social structure defined by class difference. This aspect of the novel is evident in the brief relationship that develops between Patricia Robyn and David West, the yacht's steward. In aesthetic terms, we might say that Patricia's attraction to David is initially a response to form. Patricia descends below the deck to the engine rooms where, in terms of class, she condescends to David's level—the yacht in this instance representing socially stratified society. Patricia admits to David that she first noticed him when he jumped into the lake fully clothed to the aid of Major Ayers who had flung himself overboard after losing a bridge hand. She further stresses his subservient role in the hierarchy of the yacht (and, by

extension, in society) by repeatedly observing that he has to work long hours at the service of the guests who are at complete leisure. For Patricia, the interest in David stems from the same rebellious nature on display when she invites Pete and Jenny to join the cruise. After all, Patricia is motivated less by genuine regard for David or for Pete and Jenny than by a self-satisfying desire to disrupt the stratified form of the yacht and to spoil the intentionally sophisticated aura of the yachting party.

Through what might be termed formal experimentation, Patricia seeks to blur the lines of class difference represented by the upper and lower decks of the *Nausikka*. Because the relationship between Patricia and David is a vehicle for exploring the possibility of transcending class distinction, these characters are compelled to leave the *Nausikka*. Initially, Patricia suggests a rendezvous so that she and David might enjoy "swimming around in the moonlight" (M 135). When they do meet, David performs his assigned duty, rowing Patricia in one of the smaller boats for her midnight dip in the lake. Though Patricia urges David to join her for a swim, he is at first reluctant, preferring instead to remain with oars in hand as the faithful steward. But Patricia is insistent that David remove his uniform, an outward sign of his social function, and enjoy the soothing water. In this fluid environment, a direct contrast to the rigidly stratified yacht, the class differences that separate these two characters are at least aesthetically cleansed, enabling them to interact more freely. Fortified by the prospect of greater equity, Patricia and David plan a more permanent flight from the yacht and the societal structure it represents.

Patricia and David's attempted journey to Mandeville is one of the more resonant episodes in *Mosquitoes*, mainly because it constitutes such a dramatic shift in

tone and form. This section of the novel is in many respects a parody of naturalism—a precursor to the more earnest forays into this mode evident in later works such as "The Bear." In one sense, Patricia and David essentially go back in time as they set out to escape the confines of the *Nausikka*. Evoking a primeval setting, Faulkner describes a swamp full of trees "heavy and ancient with moss" (M 169) that engulfs these ill-fated travelers. Early on, Patricia and David revel in the natural world as a place of possibility, for it offers them the hope of transcending the boundaries of social distinction. But this journey quickly becomes more harrowing than liberating. Having lost any sense of direction, Patricia and David must contend with the debilitating heat of the swamp and the maddening swarms of mosquitoes that maintain persistent attacks. Thus, what begins with the hope of freedom and movement quickly turns to the despair of oppression and stagnation that the swamp so aptly represents. This ironic and self-conscious foray into naturalistic gear is made all the more evident by one of the scenes that Faulkner uses to break the ominous adventure of Patricia and David in the swamp. Several members of the yachting party embark on one of the smaller boats in an absurd mission to tow the *Nausikka* away from the sandbar. This scene ironically alludes to Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," as these "castaways" enact with hyperbole a futile struggle against the forces of nature that seem to conspire against them. In no real danger of peril, though, this "open boat" adrift in the water merely stands in comic relief to the struggle for survival occupying Patricia and David.

Ultimately, the mode of naturalism used to convey Patricia and David's journey stresses the futility of their effort to erase the boundaries of class difference and thus exposes the power of class as a marker of difference. True to the established form of

the novel, Faulkner uses ironic juxtaposition of scenes so that the journey unfolds in a narrative that suffers constant interruption. Not only does Faulkner interject the parody of "The Open Boat," but he repeatedly returns the focus to the *Nausikka*, often for the patented *repartee* among the yachting party which has by now become a staple of the novel. In this juxtaposition, we find a politics of form at work, as the very structure of the novel responds to the social conflict under representation and negotiation. By constantly interrupting Patricia and David's journey—in essence, not allowing it to progress—these characters are unable to achieve their goal—reaching Mandeville and, symbolically at least, diminishing the effects of class difference. The constant return to the *Nausikka* has the aesthetic effect of reaffirming the prevailing social structure that the yacht has come to represent. Like the journey of the *Nausikka*, initially conceived as a flight from societal constraints, Patricia and David's attempt to reach Mandeville winds up ironically representing and reinforcing prevailing codes of class difference. In this instance, what Edwin T. Arnold identifies as Faulkner's sense of "the antithetical freedom inherent in movement and change" (282) is apparent in terms of class relations: what appears to be a journey beyond class is, in the end, a return to "natural" order.

In this brand of naturalism, the forces of nature act to reinstate the boundaries that Patricia and David have transgressed. For one, the heat and mosquitoes take their toll on Patricia to the point that David must continually serve her, literally giving the shirt off his back in the line of duty. Moreover, as Arnold observes, "David is ultimately reduced to the level of an animal: like a horse or a mule he carries Patricia on his back" (295). Compounding David's subservient role as a beast of burden, Patricia expresses her gratitude by assigning monetary value to what would surely be

viewed as a labor of love if these characters were on par socially. "I'd like to do something for you. Pay you back in some way," Patricia says to David, just before the sound of the boat that will rescue them signals the end of this journey and this relationship (M 213). The forces of the natural world have compelled Patricia to reassert her class prerogative over David by forcing her to long for the relative comfort of the *Nausikka* and the boundaries of social distinction that it represents. Accordingly, Patricia takes firm control of the financial negotiations with the captain of the rescue boat, directing David to pay with her money and thus further rendering him servile. The fate of Patricia and David's attempt to transcend differences rooted in class illustrates the power of social stratification as a force that works ideologically to promote its dominance as the "natural" order of things.

In sum, Faulkner's second novel is a text at odds with itself. In many respects, *Mosquitoes* actively participates in the fundamental shift in cultural attitudes and aesthetic ideology taking place in the late twenties. The novel turns a critical eye on the decadence which had prevailed in the American culture of the twenties. In this regard, Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* anticipates Cowley's *Exile's Return* as an indictment of the bohemian lifestyle celebrated and cultivated among artists and intellectuals of the lost generation. Like Gordon, Faulkner probes beneath the veneer of frivolity, social masquerade, and hedonism to reveal the depths of despair that would soon rise painfully to the surface of individuals and of the society at-large. Moreover, Faulkner's second novel, in its own way, acknowledges the importance of social relations in producing art. A fundamental aesthetic principle expressed in the novel is that art must speak with

vibrancy of the artist's engagement of life or else suffer the sterility and stasis that comes from isolation. Despite these aspects of the novel that find common ground with the wellspring of radicalism in American culture, Faulkner's novel comprehends the staying power of established social order. *Mosquitoes* not only charts the boundaries of class difference and the limitations that they impose with great accuracy, but it also exposes how such divisions become "natural."

For the most part, Faulkner represents and negotiates the social and cultural conflicts that his novel absorbs in terms of the artist's interaction with life. This condition is evident when Fairchild and Gordon take to the streets of New Orleans in the epilogue, a scene owing much to the *Walpurgisnight* section of Joyce's *Ulysses*. The gritty and visceral descriptions of street life are tempered by the lyrical, stream-of-consciousness interludes that take place in the minds of the artists who feel compelled to distance themselves from the social reality surrounding them by employing their powers of abstraction. In the mania of this episode, the tensions between competing aesthetic ideologies—those of social realism and formalism—reach full crescendo. Amid such chaos, there is the predictable urge to restore order, given that guiding aesthetic principle that a novel divided against itself cannot stand. In this light, the final image of Talliferro—a club-wielding aesthete intent on asserting what he views as his prerogative—seems a fitting emblem of the frustrated desire for unity and order. As Talliaferro's futile display of power suggests, the forces of cultural conflict shaping into the Literary Class War were resistant to such facile containment. Consequently, they would continue to inform Faulkner's literary production, contributing substantively to what is for many his signature novel—*The Sound and the Fury*.

The Sound and the Fury is both a disturbing and a disturbed novel. In the voluminous criticism devoted to the work that Faulkner often cited as his most cherished, the most prevalent theme mentioned is undoubtedly loss. For the most part, critics have explored this theme relative to the psychological profiles of the characters or to the structural and linguistic components of the novel's form, often blending both perspectives.⁶ Along these lines, loss contributes to the disturbing nature of the novel by laying bare the individual psyches of the characters and the collective psyche of the Compson family and to the disturbed effect by revealing an inability to gain the complete story that the fragmented form struggles to comprehend. These approaches are indeed central to understanding the complexities of the novel, given that it represents Faulkner's most intense exercise in psychological exploration and formal experimentation. The sectional quality of the novel lends itself to both critical practices, as each of the four components offers not only a compelling psychological case study but an invitation to consider its structural relationship to the others. The often complementary relationship of these lines of critical inquiry extends as well to the persistent view that *The Sound and the Fury* is the inspired creation of a virtuoso at the height of his powers; the four sections thus can be read as variations on a theme, so to speak. The tendency here is to imagine the novel born suddenly of Faulkner in much the same way that Athena was born of Zeus. The mythos surrounding *The Sound and the Fury* assigns to Faulkner a heightened creative vision similar to the rapture that

Coleridge is said to have experienced while writing "Khubla Khan." This sort of thinking contributes to a fetish that imagines *The Sound and the Fury* as pure form.

Faulkner himself contributed much to the fetishism of the novel. In 1933, Faulkner wrote two versions of an introduction for a new edition of *The Sound and the Fury*, which was never published.⁷ Recalling the origin of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner emphasizes the distance he felt from the world of publishing as a result of his regional isolation and the thoroughgoing rejection he had received in response to his last novel.⁸ Rather than stalling his creative drive, Faulkner claims, the despair of rejection invigorated him as an artist. With the concerns of the marketplace now lifted, Faulkner recalls, "it suddenly seemed as if a door had clapped silently and forever between me and all publishers' addresses and booklists and I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can just write" ("An Introduction" 158-59). Apparently Faulkner felt sanctioned to retreat to the solitary realm of the artist where he could create art for its own sake rather than for the demands of publishers. Enraptured by his craft, Faulkner could write the Benjy section in the throes of "that ecstasy, that eager and joyous faith and anticipation of surprise which yet unmarred sheets beneath my hand held inviolate and unfailing" ("An Introduction" 160). With metaphorical reference to a Roman who bestows constant loving kisses on his beloved Tyrrhenian vase, Faulkner describes his intense devotion to *The Sound and the Fury* as an ideal form. This creation story has surrounded the text with what John T. Matthews appropriately calls a "mythical aura" and has led to a persistent belief that the novel exists "with no apparent connections to its history" (*Lost Cause* 23). For this reason, treatments of the novel in relation to contextual forces, be they socioeconomic or political, have remained few and far

between. By far, studies that take into account relationship to context have focused primarily on historical or cultural influences within a fixed regional paradigm—for instance, how the Compsons represent a southern society haunted by its feudal past as it undergoes a rapid though reluctant assimilation into the modern era.

Although my focus, like significant others, fixes on the theme of dispossession (a synonym for loss more in keeping, I think, with the Depression-era context already established) and the form of the novel, I want to apply these concerns to the textual politics of *The Sound and the Fury* in the context of the Literary Class War. As we have seen, the aesthetic ideologies at play in this cultural conflict inform the internal contradictions in *Mosquitoes* and thus contribute to disruptions apparent in the form of the novel. In my view, this pattern extends to *The Sound and the Fury*, though in a more organic manner consistent with the fact that this novel is far less self-conscious in regard to aesthetics than *Mosquitoes*. In terms of thematic content and formal structure, then, *The Sound and the Fury* contains—both in the sense of receiving and of seeking to restrain—fundamental tensions between negotiating aesthetic ideologies active in the cultural context. Accordingly, through examination of the theme of dispossession as applied mainly to the Compson brothers and patterns of formal disruption, we can determine how *The Sound and the Fury* works ideologically to register opposition to a socioeconomic order rooted in capitalism and thus anticipates a defining component of the Literary Class War.

Opposition to capitalism was one of the few issues on which the sworn enemies of this cultural conflict were in general agreement, even though they reached this common ground from different paths. Advocates of formalism viewed capitalism as a

totalizing force that threatened individual liberty with mass industrialization and cheapened the value of art by reducing it to the level of commodity. Advocates of social realism perceived capitalism as a brutal system that fostered competition and injustice by encouraging exploitation of the working class by a privileged ruling class. In response to capitalist hegemony, formalism stressed the values of humanism and the techniques of high modernism to maintain artistic autonomy, while social realism urged a comprehensive social vision to expose the contradictions and cruelties of capitalism. *The Sound and the Fury* moves on spectrum between each aesthetic ideology, as the modernist form established at the outset gradually gives way to the more comprehensive social vision toward which the text seems naturally to gravitate. From this standpoint, the four sections of the novel constitute a revision that binds the internal politics of form to the external cultural politics of the Literary Class War.

Faithful to allusion, *The Sound and the Fury* begins with a tale told by an idiot. The act of reading the Benjy section is perhaps one of the more disconcerting experiences to be found in literature. Among the numerous questions that inevitably confront the unknowing reader who enters the world according to Benjy Compson is certainly the very basic: What exactly am I reading? The Benjy section is a study in paradoxes. For one, the simple style—short, declarative sentences, child-like in construction—is at odds with the complexity of form achieved through stream-of-consciousness and abrupt shifts in time and setting that work to destabilize the reader accustomed to linear narrative structure. This section exhibits classic traits of modernism, as the shards of perception that form its created world preclude a more comprehensive social vision and yield the aesthetic effect of escaping the constraints of

standard time. Thus the Benjy section would seem to be the achievement of Faulkner's express desire to create autonomous art by distancing himself from the concerns of social reality.

In many respects, the Benjy section is anti-social, constructed as it is from the perceptions of a man-child alienated from family and society and so unable to comprehend or participate in the larger network of familial and social relations that he occupies. Andre Bleikasten emphasizes Benjy's isolation in asserting that he embodies the profound agony that comes with dispossession. In structuralist terms, Bleikasten argues that Benjy's "idiolect [. . .] forms a closed system, a strictly private code, designed to suggest the functioning of a strictly limited consciousness" (*Splendid Failure* 68). And within this system, Bleikasten continues, Benjy is reduced to a primitive existence, representing "humanity at its most elemental and most archaic, the zero degree of consciousness" (*Splendid Failure* 71). The only time Benjy is able to bridge the distance inherent in his isolation is when he experiences loss, given that "most scenes in which [Benjy] is directly implicated are scenes of loss" (*Splendid Failure* 75). In this regard, I would agree with Bleikasten's interpretation: the Benjy section does enact a sort of primal scene of dispossession in the novel. But I would cast a wider net than Bleikasten in order to transcend an inherent limitation of the psychoanalytic approach. An examination of Benjy's individual psyche has the effect of obscuring the social implications of his response to dispossession when placed in a broader familial and social context. In my view, the Benjy section is best understood in terms of a social psychology apparent in the form. This perspective reveals that the modernist technique in Benjy's narrative represses a more comprehensive social vision

and in so doing engenders a return of the repressed that binds the novel closer to social reality as it progresses.

Benjy's relationship to the land illuminates this feature of his section. In the course of his narrative, Benjy experiences dispossession through various means: he loses his name (Maury, after his uncle) due to his inability to bear it with the kind of distinction desired by Mrs. Compson; he loses his means of sexual prowess after an incident with a young woman passing by the Compson house leads to his castration; and, most profoundly, he loses Caddy whose resistance to social codes oppressive of female sexuality forces her finally to flee under a cloak of scandal. For Benjy, the experiences of dispossession seem to converge in the loss of the pasture originally designated as his inheritance but later sold to pay for Quentin's abbreviated Harvard education. For Benjy, the golf course is, in Lacanian terms, a symbolic order—a closed system of signifiers that introduces him to the inherent connection between language and loss. While the golf course promises to be a place where one can have, as it were, his "caddie" and his "balls," the elusive nature of the signifier in each instance only reinforces for Benjy the loss of the signified. Peering through the gate and whimpering, Benjy is what Lacan terms a barred subject—he is literally denied access to the golf course and figuratively precluded from assuming a stable place in the symbolic order, rendering him secondary to the signifiers that define him in terms of lack. Here the temptation to isolate Benjy not only from the symbolic order but from the larger social order is great indeed. As barred subject, Benjy seems incapable of revealing much about the social reality that exists beyond the line of demarcation drawn by the gate and, on a broader level, by the modernist form of his section.

On the contrary, Benjy's primitive state affords him the opportunity to register the expansive social vision that emerges in *The Sound and the Fury*. Viewed in isolation, for example, Benjy's fixation on the pasture-turned-golf course may seem no more than an arbitrary effect of his arrested development. However, broadening the scope of this concern, we can see how Benjy's relationship to this parcel of land offers revelations of a dominant ideology that defines identity in terms of ownership and influences the Compsons' familial and social identity. In fact, the considerable "investment" that Benjy has in the land originally intended for him calls to mind the relationship between owner and private property as defined by Marx. In this arrangement, landed property becomes a variant form of the person who owns it and thus takes on a common identity. The association is so strong that the land becomes, in essence, "the inorganic body of its lord" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 114). In this light, we can begin to understand why the dispossessed pasture becomes a source of such intense pain and longing for Benjy, as he is repeatedly drawn to it as an extension of himself which has been suddenly cut off. Consequently, the sale of Benjy's promised land is another form of castration—a symbolic and material dispossession that aligns Benjy with the overarching sense of loss that the Compsons are suffering in terms of diminished wealth and social status.

Benjy's intense desire to return to the dispossessed land is evident throughout his section, as virtually all roads lead him back to the fence that separates him from the land he has lost. Early in the Benjy section, for example, there is a typical series of rapid time shifts indicated by italics and connected through association—the Compson family carriage in this instance providing the unifying detail. Seeking solace, Benjy recalls a

time from childhood when Caddy comforted him by saying, "You're not a poor baby. Are you. Are you" (*SF* 9). This memory leads to a brief vision of the carriage house and the family carriage recently fixed with a new wheel, interrupted abruptly by another shift—to the present time of the section as T.P. prepares to drive Mrs. Compson to town in the now dilapidated carriage. For Mrs. Compson, hiding behind her veil, the ride to town in the carriage is like a funeral procession—a ritual display of the Compsons' fall from social distinction acted out in full view of society. As Benjy records, the procession also offers Mrs. Compson the chance to issue her two most common refrains in response to the family's decline: "'It's a judgment on me.' Mother said. 'But I'll be gone too, soon'" (*SF* 13). These statements, evidence of Mrs. Compson's pronounced martyr complex, prompt in Benjy a memory of walking in the barn with Luster. The scene is punctuated by dispossession, illustrated by the harsh words that Benjy recollects: "*You ain't got no pony to ride now, Luster said*" (*SF* 13). Significantly, we learn that Luster's taunting prompts Benjy to run toward the golf course, as if the land holds the key to recovery of the loss that Luster has accentuated.

This juxtaposition of scenes and rapid shifts in time and memory is exemplary of psychological realism and its antisocial bent. Not only are these apparently random thoughts, but they are those of a man who has not progressed beyond the understanding of a child. Still, the association of these scenes does suggest that Benjy has at least some sense of the outward signs that point to his family's diminished means and thus to their meaning in a broader social context. Consider how Caddy's mention of "poor baby"—a sympathetic sign of affection rather than a reference to material poverty—nevertheless leads Benjy to recall the carriage in a finer state and thus to measure the

current losses against a more prosperous time for the Compson family. Moreover, the impending ride through town in the failing carriage—an outward sign of the Compson decline—and Mrs. Compson's declarations that the family's plight is the effect of divine judgment lead Benjy to recall what he has lost as a result of this adverse change in family fortunes. For Benjy, the loss of the pony must figure in the loss of the land to which he instinctively returns in search of a repossession that can yield a sense of wholeness. In a Lacanian sense, the dispossessed property has undergone sublimation; it has become an elusive object of desire that promises a sense of wholeness but never delivers. Benjy is, in effect, the ground zero of this paradoxical desire common to the Compson brothers, who seem predisposed to reproducing their own desire by longing for what they can never hope to possess.

Benjy's affinity for the land is, of course, linked closely to his longing for Caddy's return. After all, it is the frequent call of "caddie" that Benjy hears from the golfers on the course that draws him to the fence. The association of Caddy to the land is reinforced by images that represent her in organic terms. For instance, Benjy repeatedly likens Caddy's smell to trees and to honeysuckle. Moreover, the ur-image of the text for Faulkner—Caddy's mud-stained drawers—is one that further stresses her connection to the soil. One episode in particular shows just how closely Benjy associates his sister to the sold property. After Benjy once again makes a path for the golf course, Luster admonishes him and suggests that he play near the creek instead. The suggestion leads Benjy to recall a childhood memory of playing in that spot at a time when the Compsons still owned the adjoining pasture. Benjy remembers Caddy's rebelliousness, as she insisted on playing in the water despite Versh's reminder that she

was not allowed to do so. The confrontation with Versh prompted a threat from Caddy to run away and proved traumatic for Benjy, who remembers Caddy, "all wet and muddy behind" (*SF* 18), offering him reassurances that she would not leave. Once again, Benjy remembers, "Caddy smelled like trees in the rain" (*SF* 18). This memory causes Benjy to head for the fence where he surveys the golf course and cries out with longing. Limiting this episode to Benjy's psyche renders this organic recollection merely a free association: faced with the loss of Caddy, Benjy makes tangible connections to the smell of trees and to the golf course in an effort to recover his sister in some variant form. However, we should also notice that the fractured form of the novel allows a glimpse of how Benjy's action is interpreted in a broader social context. While peering through the fence and crying is a way for Benjy to express his longing for Caddy's return, Luster perceives this action in a different way: "*He still think they own this pasture, Luster said*" (*SF* 22). Here the form of the text meant to render Benjy's individual psyche lays bare the social reality he occupies. For Luster, Benjy's wailing cannot exist in and of itself as merely the illogical workings of an arrested mind but instead must point toward a larger social significance. That is to say, Benjy's expression of pain must exist as part of a greater Compson agony rooted in material dispossession. This scene further establishes a pattern of conflict in which the modernist form of the text, approximating Benjy's internal thought process, fails to contain an underlying social vision that emerges from Benjy's perceptions of the external world.

The Benjy section is a fitting introduction to *The Sound and the Fury* because it establishes dispossession as a central theme in the novel, if not *the* central theme. In

many ways, Benjy signals what is to come, making Roskus's assessment ring all the more true: "He know lot more than folks thinks" (*SF* 36). The analogy to a pointer dog that Roskus uses to illustrate Benjy's clairvoyance is an apt one considering how his section functions in the novel. Much like montage in film, Benjy's section evolves through juxtaposition of scenes that challenge preconceived notions of narrative structure. Although this form contributes to a sense of insulated chaos, we are left with vivid impressions of the exterior world to which Benjy alludes and toward which the novel will progressively reach. Through Benjy's eyes, it is difficult to approach full comprehension but not impossible to gain a tangible sense that the Compsons are a family in social decline. The Benjy section points the way toward better understanding of the Compson curse noted by Roskus when he says quite simply, "Taint no luck on this place" (*SF* 33). The Compson curse is deeply rooted in class and coincides with the changes taking place in a larger social order in flux. Marx offers us insight into the transition that determines the change in Compson fortunes when he points out that the "disposal of landed property and transformation of the land into a commodity is the final ruin of the old aristocracy and the complete triumph of the aristocracy of money" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 113). By essentially merging the sale of the property with the loss of Caddy, the Benjy section opens the way for further elaboration of this relationship in the Quentin section and thus for an expanded social vision emergent in the novel.

The progression of the novel from Benjy's section to Quentin's is, in a strict chronological sense, actually a regression, given that Quentin's narrative precedes Benjy's by eighteen years. Although the Quentin section spans only one day in linear

time—June 2, 1910—the scope of Quentin's interior monologue is as wide as Benjy's and sometimes as disjointed. Quentin shares in common with his brother Benjy a sharp pain over the separation from his sister Caddy and a intense longing to be reunited with her. For Quentin, though, this loss occurs as a direct result of Caddy's sexual awakening. Thus Quentin comes to feel dispossessed of the "pure" Caddy whom he feels bound by honor and duty to protect and to preserve. Quentin is governed by the same sort of thinking that drives Mrs. Compson to wear black and to go into mourning over her daughter's losing her virginity out of wedlock. Mrs. Compson accepts what she was taught as a Bascomb: "that a woman is either a lady or not" (*SF* 118). Caddy's sexual encounter with Dalton Ames immediately places her on the negative side of the equation, amounting to her death as far as Mrs. Compson is concerned. While Mrs. Compson dons the clothes of mourning in response to Caddy's sexual maturity, Quentin goes so far as to imagine committing incest with his sister as a way of asserting some sense of control over Caddy's sexual awakening. In addition, Quentin goes the way of the cavalier, defending Caddy's virtue—and indeed that of Woman in general—by becoming what Quentin's college buddy Spoade calls the "champion of dames" (*SF* 191). But Quentin's interference has the opposite of its intended effect. Although he is successful in breaking up Caddy and Dalton, he is also largely responsible for Caddy's heightened promiscuity in reaction to the loss of her first love. Quentin thus brings about his own dispossession by driving his beloved sister away. He is left, then, to measure his loss against the constant march of time, which haunts him to the point of seeking self-negation through suicide.

Quentin's obsession with Time is one of the most obvious motifs in the section devoted to him. For Quentin, it is an external determining force whose very progression brings disruption and destabilization of the familiar simply because it brings change. Time is the outward measure of the Compson decline, extending from the past when the family boasted prominent statesmen to the present when its members are plagued by diminished material means and debilitating neuroses. Early in his narrative, Quentin displays this neurotic edge as he professes to be at the point of hopeless self-reliance, which he describes in this way: "It's not when you realise that nothing can help you—religion, pride, anything—it's when you realise that you don't need any aid" (*SF* 91). This profession of individualism is supported by the insular form of Quentin's section but resisted by the external social reality that shapes Quentin's experiences and his fear of time. For time is the mechanism that delivers Caddy's maturity and thus her sexual awakening. Through the changes in Caddy, time acts on Quentin with contradictory force, luring him out of his self-contained existence as he attempts to recover the sister he wants to preserve and then driving him to retreat in failure to the inner recesses of his mind in search of some semblance of familiarity and order. As elusive to Quentin as she is to Benjy, Caddy becomes, in Quentin's view, the embodiment of time and a social order transformed by class instability in which "all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical" (*SF* 194).

Quentin interprets Caddy's transition from "purity" to "defilement" in terms that reflect opposition to a dominant ideology rooted in capitalism. Specifically, Quentin views Caddy's sexual maturity as a form of capital and her sexual activity as a traded commodity. Caddy's association with the land underscores this point, for she becomes

in Quentin's way of thinking like the "pristine" parcel defiled once it enters the marketplace for exchange. Philip J. Hanson makes the keen observation that *The Sound and the Fury* expresses "anxiety over a traditionalist Southern socioeconomic system in the process of disintegrating, a system which had long regarded itself as opposed—and superior—to capitalist marketplace values" (4). Thus, for Hanson, Quentin's response to Caddy is informed by a logic of anti-capitalism evident in a southern dominant class ideologically resistant to modes of capitalist production. This motivation would add another dimension to Quentin's despair over Caddy's involvement with Dalton, the nomadic drummer fond of sporting silk shirts to signify his conspicuous consumption. For the purpose at hand, it is worth noting that the resistance to capitalism apparent in Quentin's section and much of the entire novel, while rooted in regional influence, can be aligned as well with a wariness of capitalism prevalent in the nation at the time of the novel's production.

In the Quentin section, the sexually mature Caddy is repeatedly associated with capitalist modes of production and consumption. For instance, her pending marriage to Sydney Herbert Head enacts capitalist economic exchange. Through the engagement, Caddy is commodified as Herbert offers the Compsons entry to the market-driven economy in return for the family's blessing of his marriage proposal. The brand new car Herbert gives to Caddy represents access to consumption, while the job he promises to Jason in his bank represents access to capital production. Mrs. Compson is especially impressed by the added value Herbert can restore to the diminished Compsons, writing to Quentin that "Herbert has spoiled us all to death" (*SF* 107). Honor bound, Quentin is determined not to participate in the mode of exchange Herbert represents. Having

successfully wooed Caddy, Mrs. Compson, and Jason, Herbert sets his sights on gaining the upper hand with Quentin, treating him as a rival for Caddy's affections. In the scene involving Herbert and Quentin in the Compson parlor, Faulkner opposes Quentin's sense of honor to Herbert's unscrupulousness. In the spirit of the robber barons, Herbert's identity is defined by acquisition, whether his possessive instinct fixes on expensive Havana cigars or on Caddy. For Herbert, the bottom line is all that matters; he will do whatever it takes to profit and to achieve what he desires to possess—from cheating at Harvard to paying off Quentin for his blessing. "Call it a loan then just shut your eyes and you'll be fifty" (*SF* 126), says Herbert, trying to persuade Quentin to accept money, in effect, as payment for his sister.

The offer of cold, hard cash from Herbert is an affront to Quentin's sensibilities, an overt recognition of Caddy's defilement not only as a sexual object but as a commodity subject to an exchange-value determined by Herbert's market savvy. Quentin's refusal to participate in this offer of exchange strikes Herbert as a sign of Quentin's impractical nature, which makes him, in Herbert's words, a "half-baked Galahad of a brother" (*SF* 126). Herbert, who has "been out in the world now for ten years" (*SF* 125), has learned not only to accept the crass ways of the marketplace but to profit by them. Quentin, on the other hand, experiences the growing sense that his internal system of beliefs is at odds with an external socioeconomic order adversely transformed by capitalist values and traceable in Caddy's path from "pure" virgin to "defiled" sexual commodity. Now Caddy even speaks the logic of the marketplace when she rejects Quentin's idea that they run away together which he offers in an effort to prevent Caddy from marrying Herbert. In response to Quentin, Caddy says, "*On*

what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard dont you see you've got to finish now if you dont finish he'll have nothing" (SF 142). While Quentin is concerned with protecting Caddy's virtue, as he defines it, Caddy thinks in economic terms. Mindful of a familial ledger, she stresses the importance of achieving the return on Mr. Compson's sizeable investment so that Quentin might prosper and provide compensation for Benjy's lost inheritance. Opposed firmly to such values, Quentin is left, then, with his outmoded sense of honor to strike out in futility at the likes of Dalton Ames, Sydney Herbert Head, and Gerald Bland, all of whom signal for Quentin the arrival of a new order in which the once distinguishing characteristics of honor and class distinction can be discarded or purchased outright like commodities open for exchange.

The conflict between Quentin's internal system of values and the one prevailing in a transformed social order makes Quentin's plight similar to Benjy's in that a loss of meaning contributes to paralysis and isolation. For Quentin, concepts once considered stable have now become unstable, causing confusion not unlike that of Benjy when he must contend with "Caddy" and "caddie." But Quentin's dilemma occurs in a more explicitly social context. After all, he is far more capable than Benjy of engaging the world around him, though he is ultimately no more successful at achieving a comfortable existence in it. Clearly, *The Sound and the Fury* comprehends this breakdown of meaning largely in terms of class instability, a recognition that registers at the level of form. While the mere mention of his sister's name sends Benjy into fits, Quentin seems especially troubled by the word "gentleman," which causes manic disruptions in the thought process that the form of the text seeks to render. A case in

point is when Shreve makes what is to him an offhand comment: " [. . .] God, I'm glad I'm not a gentleman" (*SF* 116), prompting this rapid-fire series of thoughts from Quentin:

He [Shreve] went on, nursing a book, a little shapeless, fatly intent. *The street lamps* do you think so because one of our forefathers was a governor and three were generals and Mother's weren't any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man *Done in Mother's mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned* you are confusing sin and morality women dont do that your mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her. (*SF* 116)

Here again the process of sedimentation enables the form of the text to mediate the destabilized social concept of "gentleman." For Quentin, the fractured meaning of the term is expressed typically as a process of defilement. The memory of prominent Compson forefathers—gentleman all, in Quentin's view—is tainted by "inferior" Bascomb blood, by egalitarian principle, and, most egregiously, by the blight of Caddy's sexual promiscuity. In this respect, the dispossession of the "pure" Caddy (an idealized Caddy whom Quentin never really possessed in the first place) also constitutes a dispossession of the social role that Quentin feels compelled to assume. With no "lady" to preserve and to protect, how is Quentin to be a "gentleman"?

Dispossessed of his social role in any stable form, Quentin is reduced to masking as he enacts a hopeless parody of gentlemanly deportment. This social masking is apparent in the encounter with Deacon the train steward whom Quentin recalls. Deacon defers to Quentin with strategic assurances of "Yes, suh, young marster" (*SF* 111). But this show of deference only serves to heighten the force of the ultimate message Deacon wants to deliver: "I draw no petty social lines. A man to me is a man, wherever I find him" (*SF* 114). This refusal of the servant to accept the

orthodoxy of rigid social stratification is a reminder to Quentin of his inability to assume the role of gentleman in the transformed social order he now encounters.

Quentin thus endures a ghost-like existence, living as the embodiment of a fading social concept that lacks resonance outside the confines of his own mind. This ambiguousness not only destabilizes Quentin's social position but raises the prospect of a complete role reversal—a condition apparent when Quentin encounters the young boys swimming in the river, one of whom says to another, "You said he [Quentin] talks like a colored man" (*SF* 137).

The prospect of role reversal is punctuated in the episode involving the lost girl whom Quentin meets in the bakery. For Quentin, the little girl is a stand-in for Caddy, as his greeting of "Hello, sister" (*SF* 143) makes abundantly clear. Betraying an ideology of racial purity, Quentin views the girl as the tainted Caddy, the darkness of her skin a visible mark of defilement. Walking with the little girl, Quentin notices her "unwinking eyes like two currants floating motionless in a cup of weak coffee. Land of the kike home of the wop" (*SF* 144). This xenophobic fear of a "pure" land defiled by foreign elements calls to mind the commodified Compson pasture and, in turn, the sexually promiscuous Caddy. Quentin's encounter with the lost girl evolves into a commentary on the perversion of his gentlemanly impulses. Initially, Quentin feels the urge to protect the lost girl, presumably out of a sense of honor and duty. As he walks with her, though, his obsession with defilement resurfaces in a recollection of "dirty" girls from childhood. First, Quentin remembers when Caddy walked into the Compson barn to find him and a girl named Natalie "*dancing sitting down*" (*SF* 156), as Natalie explained it to Caddy. After the incident, Quentin recalls, he got into an argument with

Caddy and performed a ritualistic defilement: "*I wiped mud from my legs and smeared it on her wet hard turning body*" (SF 157). Faulkner renders the conflation of past and present in typical modernist form, using italics to indicate shifts in time. The form adds to the aesthetic effect of objectifying the lost girl, as she is manipulated by Quentin's associative thought process. However, Quentin ultimately does not control the interpretation of his encounter with the lost girl. Instead of viewing Quentin as a benevolent gentleman come to her rescue, the girl's brother takes him for a child molester. This charge elicits hysterical laughter from Quentin, who clearly recognizes the irony of his being cast among the sexual predators rather than the protectors of feminine virtue. Adding insult to injury, Quentin can now measure himself against the lost girl's brother, who is the very sort of protector Quentin wants desperately to be.

Quentin's run-in with the lost girl's family and subsequently with the law demonstrate that he has difficulty comprehending a perspective that is foreign to the internal and increasingly outmoded system of beliefs rooted firmly in his regional and class upbringing. Unable to see things from a different perspective, Quentin does not recognize that what is for him an act of *noblesse oblige* is for the lost girl's family a form of exploitation. Likewise, in the eyes of the law, Quentin's motivation seems suspect, despite the fact that there is not ample evidence to convict him on the charge of child molestation. Ironically, Quentin is forced essentially to buy his way out of the predicament, not unlike what Sydney Herbert Head would probably do faced with legal difficulties. Near the end of Quentin's narrative, this episode extends *The Sound and the Fury* outward, as Quentin encounters a transformed social order governed by values that he can neither understand nor tolerate. Quentin's answer to this social reality rooted in

the values of the marketplace is to make a final trade with no hope of return. Amid the stream of thoughts flowing through Quentin's final moments, he professes, "I have sold Benjy's pasture and I can be dead in Harvard [. . .] Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound. A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound" (*SF* 200). This internal surrender in the face of the harsh external forces acting on him draws a clear line of distinction between Quentin's section and the one to follow, for Jason Compson's selfish pragmatism is vastly different from his brother's narcissistic self-containment. Significantly, the death of Quentin marks as well the demise of modernist form in the text. Jason's section unfolds in a straightforward form in keeping with his pragmatic desire to prosper in the transformed social order, despite his tacit recognition that it governs with deterministic force.

Much happens in the time span that separates Quentin's section from Jason's. The period between June 2, 1910, and April 6, 1928, encapsulates no less than World War I and a subsequent expansion of the American economy driven largely by burgeoning mass production and consumption. In the historical present of Jason's narrative, capitalism stands triumphant, the culmination of a period ranging from roughly 1890 when an expanding mercantile economy with an industrial base substantially redefined America's socioeconomic order. William Leach describes the outcomes of this cultural revolution apparent by the late 1920s:

A new commercial aesthetic had flowered, a formidable group of cultural and economic intermediaries had emerged, and an elaborate institutional circuitry had evolved, together creating the first culture of its kind that answered entirely to the purposes of the capitalist system and that seemed to establish and legitimate business dominance. Corporate business now orchestrated the myths of America, and it was through business [. . .] that the American dream had found its most dependable ally. (377)

Leach contends that the dominant myth to emerge from this new order cast America as the Land of Desire, thriving on the idea of each individual subject as "an insatiable desiring machine or as an animal governed by an infinity of desires" (385). Although the ideological components of this myth serve capitalism well, they are not without drawbacks. As Leach explains, this "capitalist concept of self, the consumer concept of the self [. . .] is a broker's view of people" that encourages speculation and irrationality and discourages social responsibility (385). Faulkner reproduces the ideological effect of this myth on the individual by creating in Jason Compson IV a palpable subject whose intensely conflicted nature is, by and large, a product of the socioeconomic forces that shape his experiences. Thus, in terms of the form and content of the Jason section, Faulkner expands the social vision of *The Sound and the Fury* to encompass the swift and comprehensive transformation coinciding in the text and in its historical context.

Like his brothers Benjy and Quentin, Jason is, in many respects, governed by a desire made all the more intense by the individual losses he incurs within the context of the general Compson decline and the socioeconomic factors that contribute to it. While we might say, metaphorically speaking, that Benjy and Quentin seek to repossess an idealized Caddy and in a sense "profit" from this recovery, we can apply these terms literally to Jason's involvement with his sister. For Jason, as for his brothers, Caddy becomes a symbol of dispossession. As a desiring subject of capitalism, Jason's relationship to Caddy is measured essentially in terms of cost-benefit. That is to say, the degree to which Jason is responsive to Caddy is roughly equal to the likelihood that he stands to gain material profit for his trouble. The prime example of this form of

sibling exchange is the job in the northern bank that Sydney promises to Jason. This position, as stated above, would offer Jason access to a crucial mode of production in the burgeoning economy of consumption and credit. On a higher plane, the job offers hope that the Compson decline will desist, as Jason learns the ways of the world and presumably restores the family to a place of prominence in the new order at least comparable to the one it enjoyed in the old. But the curse of the Compsons prevails when the job prospect fails, leaving Jason to negotiate the consequences of a tragic dispossession to match Benjy's and Quentin's and, ultimately, to seek revenge against his sister. After swindling Caddy out of a hundred dollars paid to him in return for seeing her daughter Quentin, Jason feels a sense that the ledger has been balanced, so to speak. "I reckon you'll know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it" (*SF* 236), Jason says in his mind to Caddy, as he passes by her in the carriage while holding up baby Quentin and fulfilling with literal intention his promise to let Caddy *see* her child.

The failed job prospect is even more painful given that Jason had the potential to fare well as a banker. For Jason is undoubtedly the most equipped of the Compsons to survive in a capitalist socioeconomic order, though this is perhaps at best a dubious distinction. After all, Jason is, from an early age, the budding entrepreneur of the family, whom Quentin recalls devising a venture to profit from selling flour out of the family barrel—a prophetic scheme when we consider Jason's obsessive preoccupation with filling the barrel once he has become head of the household. Notwithstanding his familial responsibilities, Jason is guided by an individualistic profit motive. Offering his thoughts on money, for example, Jason claims that it "has no value; it's just the way

you spend it" (SF223). This privileging of exchange-value leads Jason to conclude that money "don't belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it. It just belongs to the man who can get it and keep it" (SF 223). Here Jason discloses a view of money as pure object of desire consistent with the one Marx identifies in capitalism when he explains, "*Money*, since it has the *property* of purchasing everything, of appropriating objects to itself, is, therefore, the *object par excellence*" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* 189). Later, feeling frustrated by his secondary role in the feed store, Jason lashes out at his circumstances and his boss's lack of profit motive:

What the hell chance has a man got, tied down in a town like this and to a business like this. Why I could take his business in one year and fix him so he'd never have to work again, only he'd give it all away to the church or something. (SF 263)

Here Jason reveals himself as a creature of acquisition, driven mainly by the profit motive. Jason's commentary is indicative of his dilemma in a socioeconomic order governed by capitalism: while he accepts and, to some degree, understands the competitive principles that govern this system, his lack of access to its modes of production leave him feeling determined by forces beyond his control that render him powerless. Through Jason's dispossession and his intensely conflicted nature, Faulkner offers up an indictment of a system that exacts its cruelty by stimulating intense desires likely never to be fulfilled.

Jason's lack of productive capability contributes to his irrational financial decisions rooted in a desire to demonstrate success in the new economy of consumption—for instance, his withdrawal of the thousand-dollar investment in the feed store to purchase a new car and his misguided speculation on the stock market to gain purchasing power. In Jason's mind, the market is the primary mechanism of the

new order responsible for the dispossession of his economic opportunity and the diminishment of his power and privilege. For this reason, Jason's market philosophy is governed less by financial common sense than by a determination to retaliate against a perceived socioeconomic determinism:

Well, I just want to hit them one time and get my money back. I don't want a killing [. . .] I just want my money back that these dam jews have gotten with all their guaranteed inside dope. Then I'm through; they can kiss my foot for every other red cent of mine they get. (*SF* 270)

Jason's section is peppered with anti-Semitic references, which in tandem reveal a conspiracy theory bred of his feelings of powerlessness. For Jason, Jews embody the "foreign" elements that have taken control and redefined the socioeconomic order so that it is unrecognizable to "true" Americans:

Well, I reckon those eastern jews have got to live too. But I'll be damned if it hasn't come to a pretty pass when any dam foreigner that cant make a living in the country where God put him, can come to this one and take money right out of America's pockets. (*SF* 221)

Though the specifics of Jason's resentful market philosophy are objectionable, based as they are in notions of racial superiority and xenophobia, his sense of being determined by market forces beyond his control registers opposition to a fundamental component of the existing socioeconomic order based in capitalism.⁹ Despite Jason's irrationality and impending sense of doom, he issues a warning revealed as remarkably prescient by the privileged view of hindsight. After receiving a market advisory via telegram that reads, "The market will be unstable, with a general downward tendency," Jason fires back a response: "Market just on point of blowing its head off" (*SF* 282).

Jason's reactionary stance toward forces perceived to be aligned against him leads him to a newfound populist affinity with the "common man" and to feelings of

class resentment that he expresses in a familial context. Noting that hill farmers are in the predicament of producing a crop for speculators to "whipsaw on the market," Jason poses a rhetorical question to show sympathy: "Do you think the farmer gets anything out of it except a red neck and a hump in his back?" (*SF* 219). Later, Jason widens the scope of his conspiracy theory with a populist edge:

Only be damned if it doesn't look like a company as big and rich as the Western Union could get a market report out on time. Half as quick as they'll get a wire to you saying Your account closed out. But what the hell do they care about the people. They're hand in glove with that New York crowd. Anybody can see that. (*SF* 261)

This paranoid sympathy for the powerless is less a matter of sincerity than a means of expressing a sense of exploitation that Jason feels within the Compson family. On one level, Jason views the family as yet another mechanism of the deterministic forces apparently intent on dispossessing him. Feeling exploited, Jason fashions himself the working-class Compson. When Mrs. Compson confides that Jason is the only member of the family who "isn't a reproach to me," he responds, "I never had time to be. I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground. I had to work" (*SF* 207).

The sale of the pasture for Quentin's education is obviously a sore point for Jason, who says in reference to his father that "I never heard of him offering to sell anything to send me to Harvard" (*SF* 227). Not only that, but Jason recognizes that the "loss" on this "investment" has only added to the family's diminished social status, recognizing that it is more fodder for the town's suspicion that "the whole family's crazy" (*SF* 268).

The decline of the Compson family, suspicions of town gossip about the family's mental instability, the menial tasks associated with his job, and a steady rain of bad news from the stock market—all of these factors remind Jason of his inability to satisfy

the insatiable desires for wealth, status, and success that the new socioeconomic order have inspired in him. Jason seeks to compensate for his diminished socioeconomic capital by exerting harsh control in the domestic sphere to regain a sense of stability and order. Jason harps on the opportunities denied him and the sacrifices he has made and continues to make in order to provide for the family; this provision is underscored by Jason's common refrain to the family and servants that he is the only one "man enough to keep that flour barrel full" (*SF* 238-39). Because of his role as provider, Jason feels justified in lording over the household and employing deception and cruelty in an attempt to gain material and emotional compensation for his tremendous sacrifices. Jason's scheme to steal the money that Caddy sends to her daughter is a case in point. He reconciles the moral deficiency of his actions by imagining that cashing the actual checks and spending money on Lorraine, while allowing Mrs. Compson to perform a ritualistic burning of fake checks, achieves worthy ends: offering his mother some level of comfort and reimbursing Jason for the failed job prospect in Herbert's bank and his sacrifices to the cause of family preservation.

Jason's compensatory need to be lord of the manor is further illustrated in his relationship with Caddy's daughter Quentin. For Jason, Quentin is the embodiment of the familial and socioeconomic forces that have rendered him powerless. Associating care for Quentin with the failed job prospect, Jason says with noticeable irony that "instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me " (*SF* 225). Because Jason's desire to control Quentin proceeds from his lack of power and agency in a fluid marketplace, his efforts to exert that control mimic more stratified socioeconomic arrangements. Accordingly, when Caddy tells Quentin to expect money

in the mail, Quentin visits Jason at the feed store to demand what is rightfully hers. "It's mine. She sent it to me. I will see it. I will" (*SF* 244), Quentin insists, as she grabs for the money order that Jason keeps from her. Jason immediately thwarts this attempted "insurrection" by imposing what amounts to a share agreement—as "lord," he will collect the full "profit" and then dole out a small percentage to the "tenant" who has, in effect, earned it. But the attempt to regulate Quentin through this system ultimately instills in her an urge to mount resistance, making her in one respect much like her uncle Jason. Quentin's rebelliousness leads Jason to reaffirm his initial assessment of his niece: "Like I say once a bitch always a bitch" (*SF* 305).

Although Jason's remark is a unifying detail that lends a formal element of closure to his section, the familial power struggle between uncle and niece extends throughout the final section of the novel as well. Staging her ultimate rebellion against Jason's established domestic order, Quentin lays claim to the lock box full of the entire sum that her uncle has appropriated. When Jason reports this "theft," the sheriff's suspicion is directed toward Jason, an indicator of the reputation for unscrupulousness assigned to Jason in the community. "My house has been robbed," Jason implores before asking, "are you going to make any effort to recover my property, or not?" (*SF* 351). The sheriff's refusal to pursue Quentin effectively denies a communal sanctioning of the domestic order that Jason has tried to maintain. In the end, Quentin becomes yet another accomplice in the vast, seemingly cosmic conspiracy to dispossess him:

Of his niece he did not think at all, nor of the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years: together they merely symbolised the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it. (*SF* 354)

As objectified reminders of the financial success apparently destined to remain just beyond his reach, Caddy's daughter Quentin and the money prove every bit as elusive for Jason as Caddy was for his brothers Benjy and Quentin.

That the struggle for power and profit between Jason and Quentin plays out against a communal backdrop in the final section of the novel is significant. The aforementioned exchange between Jason and the sheriff is an instance of how a communal perspective enters the novel in the final section to lend greater objectivity to a saga which has heretofore unfolded subjectively. Even more demonstrative, though, is the impassioned sermon by Reverend Shegog, witnessed by a visibly moved Dilsey and a characteristically whimpering Benjy. The narrator stresses the idea that the sermon is not an expression of Reverend Shegog as an individual but the organic sentiments of a community. For we learn that at the beginning of the reverend's sermon "the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words" (*SF* 340). There is a revolutionary theology on display in the sermon, as Reverend Shegog imagines a negation of distinctions rooted in material wealth: "Wus a rich man: whar he now, O breddren? Wus a po man: whar he now, O sistuhn?" (*SF* 341). The Reverend's vision of Calvary fixes on "de thief en de murderer en de least of dese" (*SF* 342), showing an affinity for the outcast and downtrodden. The brutality of the crucifixion, though, paradoxically brings new life—the resurrection, which Reverend Shegog describes in revolutionary terms as a victory of the "arisen dead whut got de blood and de rickilickshun of de Lamb!" (*SF* 343). The sermon serves

as a fitting counterpoint to Quentin's uprising against Jason, infusing her act of familial rebellion with broader social significance. For, as the novel increasingly lays bare, the inner turmoil of the Compson family is bound to the outer turmoil of social reality. This dynamic corresponds to the relationship between the form of the *The Sound and the Fury* and the contextual forces informing its production.

The concluding section marks the full expansion of the social vision that develops through the course of *The Sound and the Fury*. Through the more objective view of the narrator in this section, Faulkner depicts a social order in noticeable flux, suggested in the uprisings staged indirectly by Reverend Shegog and directly by Quentin. Each of these challenges to established order raises the prospect of social insurrection and a redistribution of power and wealth. Luster's attempt to change the course of the carriage in the concluding episode of the novel is another representative uprising, which is more than Jason can tolerate, not only because of the frightening bellows that Benjy lets fly but because it signals so openly a challenge to authority. With his position in the social order far from stable, Jason is compelled to exert what control he can by consolidating his remaining power over those even more powerless than he. In a move that represents this attempted consolidation, Jason jumps onto the carriage in full public view, whips Luster with the reigns, and forces him to turn the carriage around so that "cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place" (SF 371). But this notion of order is illusory, making Jason's display of power, like Talliaferro's in *Mosquitoes*, another expression of a frustrated desire to assert control.

This sense of diminished power and instability is reinforced in narrative terms by the insufficient attempt to impose closure on a narrative that inherently resists such a conventional form of containment.

On the spectrum between the competing aesthetic ideologies engaged in the Literary Class War, *The Sound and the Fury* moves closer to social realism than traditional readings of the text would allow—particularly those that hold the novel forth as an example of modernist orthodoxy. Along these lines, through a considerable revision in form, the novel fuses the stream-of-consciousness modernism of the Benjy section with the more linear and collective narrative style of the concluding section to achieve a comprehensive social vision. This vision comprehends not only the forces of social upheaval but also the urgency to restore order, as the final scene punctuates. Both *Mosquitoes* and *The Sound and the Fury* can be read to demonstrate Faulkner's keen awareness of social upheaval, as these novels comprehend in terms of narrative the revolutionary impulses he seemed compelled to imagine. With the onset of the Depression came greater social unrest and even the specter of insurrection. The urgency to consolidate power amid this disruption became an urgent political objective that, in turn, registered in various forms of cultural expression. Faulkner's fiction was no exception, as he developed a fascination with ambitious characters holding designs on absolute power. And this fascination progressed, as we shall now see, in the context of mounting concerns over the potential rise of fascism in the midst of the ineffectual political leadership, widespread social discontent, and chronic economic uncertainty that seemed permanent fixtures of everyday life in America during the years spanning the Great Depression.

End Notes

¹ As a matter of fact, Hemingway attracted the same sort of criticism, focused mainly on his preoccupation with bullfighting and the other acts of *machismo* that fill his stories and novels. See Gold, "Hemingway—White Collar Poet."

² See, for example, Joyce W. Warren, "Faulkner's 'Portrait of the Artist'" and Claus Dauffenbach, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Aesthete: Faulkner's *Mosquitoes*."

³ For an early treatment of the interwoven themes of sex and art, see Mary M. Dunlap, "Sex and the Artist in *Mosquitoes*." Later examinations have brought gender theory to bear on this line of inquiry. See Lisa Rado, "'A Perversion That Builds Chartres and Invents Lear Is a Pretty Good Thing': *Mosquitoes* and Faulkner's Androgynous Imagination" and Judith Bryant-Wittenberg, "Configurations of the Female and Textual Politic in *Mosquitoes*." For analysis of ideas related to language, see Kenneth William Hepburn, "Faulkner's *Mosquitoes*: A Poetic Turning Point," and John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language* 45-50.

⁴ I should also mention briefly Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931), a book often cited in tandem with Cowley's as exemplary of the noticeable impulse among intellectuals to critique the literary tradition of the twenties in the early years of the Depression. Wilson examines the work of many paragons of modernism (Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, and Proust, among others) and groups them under a general heading as Symbolists. Wilson contends that these writers show a certain sense of helplessness in the face of a rising bourgeoisie and thus retreat into reverence for form and art for art's sake as a way to validate the solitary stance of a writer removed from social reality in a self-imposed and celebrated exile. In the imagination, Wilson contends, these writers seek a freedom unavailable to them in social reality but instead achieve only the inevitable despair of loneliness and isolation.

⁵ From a contemporary perspective, there are obviously serious gender issues to address in the relationship between Patricia and Gordon. Foremost, perhaps, is the obvious fact that the social relations here remain firmly patriarchal. In psychological terms, Gordon has merely projected his feelings for the statue onto Patricia. Thus the struggle to confine her movement derives essentially from the same impulse to control that led him to create the dismembered sculpture. Though Patricia clearly has more freedom than the statue, she still remains largely the blank that Gordon seeks to fill with his creative drive. While I recognize this "gender trouble," to borrow Judith Butler's phrase, I am more concerned in this instance with demonstrating Gordon's willingness to abandon the aesthetic concept of the solitary creative genius in favor of a paradigm that acknowledges the importance of social relations in providing artistic inspiration and, to a significant degree, in producing art. This aspect of the novel amounts to an implicit critique that aligns Faulkner with a major shift in aesthetic ideology taking place at the end of the 1920s.

⁶ Though there are numerous examples, I am thinking demonstrably of Andre Bleikastein, *The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury*, which privileges a psychological approach but focuses on structure as well. Donald M. Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels*, uses the opposite paradigm in his chapter on *The Sound and the Fury* (3-22), allowing structure a prominent role which is supported by psychological observations. In *The Play of Language in Faulkner's Novels*, Matthews devotes a chapter to *The Sound and the Fury* in which he studies its linguistic structure and considers as well the psychological implications.

⁷ Discovered among papers at Rowan Oak, the two versions of the introduction were edited by James B. Meriwether and published in the *Southern Review* and in the *Mississippi Quarterly*. The chronological order of the versions was the source of some critical debate. Citing biographical data, Panthea Reid [Broughton] convincingly argues that the *Southern Review* version anticipated the *Mississippi Quarterly* version; she aptly distinguishes between the first "romantic introduction" and the "more matter-of-fact" revision ("Faulkner's Cubist Novels" 61n). I choose to quote exclusively from the second version because tensions between subjective and objective experience correspond to those in the novel that my reading highlights. For further comparison between the two versions of the introduction, see Reid [Broughton], "The Economy of Desire: Faulkner's Poetics, from Eroticism to Post-Impressionism."

⁸ Abandoning the style and subject matter of *Soldier's Pay* and *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner turned to his "postage stamp" of soil, creating his Yoknapatawpha in *Flags in the Dust*. But, despite Faulkner's considerable regional and emotional investment in this saga set during the Civil War, publishers were not interested. After numerous rejections and substantial cuts, the novel was published as *Sartoris* in 1929, but the experience had long since engendered in Faulkner a deep-seated resentment of the literary marketplace and a renewed commitment to notions of artistic purity and integrity expressed in both the writing of *The Sound and the Fury* and subsequent recollections of that creative process.

⁹ Jason's anti-Semitic sentiments are in line with a prevalent ideology that emerged after World War I. In *Antisemitism in America*, Leonard Dinnerstein points out that the war had left Americans fed up with internationalism and "frightened that foreigners would corrupt the nation's values and traditions" (78). Consequently, many Americans agreed with 1920 presidential candidate Warren G. Harding's call for a return to "normalcy." Dinnerstein notes that this return "meant remaking the United States into what it symbolized in the minds of old stock Americans" (78). The false consciousness of this ideology is revealed in the common perceptions of Wall Street that it inspired. Increasingly, those who felt disenfranchised in the new economy of consumption, in which financial institutions were gaining increasing power, imagined a Semitic takeover of Wall Street. Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts, in *The Day the Bubble Burst: A Social History of the Wall Street Crash of 1929*, note that market

volatility would result in heightened talk of "shylocking" and "Jewish-style deals," despite the fact that this conspiracy theory defied reality. In actuality, by the end of the 1920s, "Wall Street was still three-quarters white Protestant, a WASP enclave in a city where nine tenths of the population were Catholic, Jewish, or black" (Thomas and Morgan-Witts 59).

CHAPTER THREE

POWER BY DESIGN: FAULKNER AND THE SPECTER OF FASCISM

With the economy in disarray and the social order in jeopardy, Americans in the Depression era understandably entertained visions of strong leadership to restore the nation's prosperity and purpose. A steady stream of articles and books from some of the nation's foremost intellectuals reflected upon the potential rise of a dictator figure playing on fear itself in order to manipulate a desperate populace and to accomplish the rise of fascism in America. The ironic title of Sinclair Lewis's provocative novel *It Can't Happen Here* (1935)—a fictional identification of authoritarian signs appearing on America's political landscape—issued a statement that the intellectual community responded to in both the affirmative and the negative. Raymond Gram Swing's *The Forerunners of American Fascism* (1935) and Lawrence Dennis's *The Coming American Fascism* (1936) marked opposite points on the spectrum of concern over the possibility that fascism might surface in the United States. Swing gave voice to the fear that fascism would arrive under cloak, emerging as a threat veiled in the institutions and traditions of American democracy. Dennis, on the other hand, predicted that an overt show of force would signal the American incarnation of the fascist state, and his book expressed a noticeable longing for a system of consolidated power and economic planning that would maintain private ownership and market principles under the rubric of a corporate state. Taken together, these works represent the dialectical forces active in a Depression-era culture that maintained both fear and fascination in response to the notion of a great dictator achieving absolute power by design in the midst of economic strife and social unrest.

Despite the emergence of organizations such as the German-American Bund and William Dudley Pelley's "Silver Shirts," taking their cues from the Nazi Party in Germany, fascism in America remained for the most part a specter—an elusive signifier far more often assigned than claimed in the rhetorical tactics of political and cultural discourse. Such was the case with Faulkner, whose violent fictional content and perceived lack of social realism prompted literary critic Maxwell Geismar to conclude with noticeable parenthetical maneuvering that "it is in the larger tradition of reversionary, neo-pagan, and neurotic discontent (from which Fascism stems) that much of Faulkner's writing must be placed" (152). For writers and critics aligned with the aesthetic ideology of social realism, the charge of fascism served as a means of marginalizing authors who appeared too enamored of formal experimentation and the individualism inherent in the appreciation of "art for art's sake." Based largely on Faulkner's modernism, then, he could be associated with, say, Ezra Pound and thus figured as an opponent of the enterprise to integrate art and social reality. However, Geismar's attempt to link Faulkner and fascism now stands exposed as a product of its time, a cry of wolf lacking the substance which has led to evaluations of other notable figures of modernism whose connections to fascism were made explicit—Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and Paul de Man, to name a few.¹

For all its political posturing, Geismar's remark nevertheless serves as a point of departure for mapping tangible and compelling intersections between Faulkner's fiction and the preoccupation with fascism extant in the American culture during the Depression era. The tools of ideological analysis are especially suited to such an endeavor, but the temptation to fall into a reductive pattern of inquiry looms large. So I should stress at

the outset that my objective here is not to document or to discern Faulkner's ideological position relative to fascism as a basis for actual political systems—for instance, how Faulkner himself "felt" about Mussolini's rise to power in Italy or Hitler's Third Reich per se. Rather my intention is to explore how Faulkner's fiction is implicated in the discourse around fascism in the cultural context of the Great Depression. This discursive formation was perhaps most evident in popular media—productions of film and radio to which Faulkner's fiction bears striking relations. Michael Denning identifies traits common to cultural representations of fascism in the thirties that serve well in approaching Faulkner from this comparative standpoint. Denning's overview seeks to define an "aesthetic of anti-fascism" (375) as exemplified in the work of Orson Welles during the latter half of the thirties and the first half of the forties. Although Denning approaches fascism ultimately from the standpoint of leftist opposition, his characteristics nevertheless can be applied more generally to establish categories of cultural forms that evoke what he calls "the rhetoric of fascism and anti-fascism" (375). These characteristics generally include: (1) the gangster theory of fascism; (2) the celebration of power for the sake of power; and (3) the prominent feature of characters cut from the mold of the "great dictator" or "gigantic hero/villains" (Denning 375-76). To these I would add a fourth characteristic: representations of violence, particularly mob violence and lynching stemming from appeals to notions of racial and national purity.

Fixed on relevant aspects of Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, "Dry September," and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the critical lens forged from these characteristics will bring into focus how the discourse around fascism in the thirties functions as a constitutive force in regard to Faulkner's literary production. This influence is

measurable in terms of stylistic components, thematic elements, and aspects of character development that contribute to an overall sense of form. Viewed in this context, these formal elements serve not only as determinants of aesthetic value but also as ideological inscriptions on Faulkner's texts that help to document the cultural history of America's encounter with the specter of fascism during the Depression.

* * *

The beginning of William Faulkner's engagement of the discourse around fascism in the American culture of the thirties can be traced to his most controversial novel, *Sanctuary*, published in 1931. When the sensational and provocative tale of gangster Popeye Pumphrey, college co-ed Temple Drake, and stoic attorney Horace Benbow appeared in print, large numbers of Americans were feeling the devastating effects of the Depression and, consequently, were growing increasingly impatient with what was perceived as a lackluster and even uncaring response to the crisis from the Hoover Administration. The ineffectual effort to reverse the tide of economic depression between the stock market crash of 1929 and the election of FDR in 1932 created a sense of frustration and skepticism which led many Americans to reevaluate the nation's basic institutions and founding principles. Works of popular culture aided this collective enterprise substantially—perhaps none more so than the rash of gangster stories that became wildly popular during the transition from the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression. The public consumed these stories in the form of novels such as Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, published in 1929; however, film became the primary medium

for providing a seemingly insatiable public with the exploits of gangsters and the lurid underworld they inhabited. Andrew Bergman notes that after the release, in 1930, of the classic gangster film *Little Caesar* (starring Edward G. Robinson and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.) fifty more such films followed before the end of 1931 (3). In many respects, the gangster was the ideal cultural icon for the early years of the Depression, embodying both the intense desperation and the steely determination to survive that many Americans felt in their everyday lives. Bergman offers a deft analysis of how the gangster film functioned in the early years of the Depression as a protective device for the great American success story and other cherished myths that seemed to be in danger of extinction:

The outlaw cycle represented not so much a mass desertion of the law as a clinging to past forms of achievement. That only gangsters could make upward mobility believable tells much about how legitimate institutions had failed—but that mobility was still at the core of what Americans held to be the American dream. (7)

At the same time gangster films performed this important social function, they staged proto-fascist cultural fantasies of authoritative leaders who took decisive action in the face of adversity even as they raised concern about an endangered rule of law. This cultural context illumines Faulkner's *Sanctuary* as a text influenced at various levels by the contemporaneous fixation on gangsters—an expression of narrative, social, and economic desire and a prelude to the explicit engagement with fascism that would appear in later cultural forms.

Connecting Faulkner's *Sanctuary* to the gangster theory of fascism represented in *Little Caesar* and the copycat films that it inspired is a much easier prospect when we consider just how attuned Faulkner was to American popular culture at the time he

wrote the novel. Of course, it was this element of topicality that for a long time relegated *Sanctuary* to inferior status in the Faulkner canon. Based on distinctions between high and low art and between what Faulkner claimed to write for craft and merely for cash, the novel was viewed often as a mere financial venture. The longstanding perception of *Sanctuary's* inferiority was based in large part on Faulkner's own assessment of the novel in an introduction to the 1932 Modern Library reprint. Riddled with inaccuracies and embellishments, the introduction is yet another illustration of Faulkner's disregard for facts when constructing the events of his life and work. Although in many ways it obscures more than it reveals about the production of *Sanctuary*, I would agree with Sondra Guttman's contention that it remains a valuable source, because it "represents an important moment of self-presentation in Faulkner" (16). Indeed, from this moment we stand to gather much in the way of *Sanctuary's* reaction to constitutive forces active in its cultural context.

One of the immediately striking features of the introduction is Faulkner's construction of *Sanctuary* as a mass commodity—above all, a work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, to apply Walter Benjamin's often cited phrase. Faulkner claims to think of the book as "a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money" (vi) and thus dispossessed of what Benjamin calls "aura"—that singular alluring quality of an original work inevitably diminished by the process of reproduction. For Faulkner, the aura of *The Sound and the Fury* could remain intact, "because I had done it for pleasure. I believed then that I would never be published again. I had stopped thinking of myself in publishing terms" (vi). But *Sanctuary* is clearly a different matter—a work conceived from and tarnished by the acquisitive ulterior motives and the attention

to consumer desires inherent in its production. Accordingly, Faulkner goes on to explain how the publication of *Sartoris* altered his self-perception and gave life to *Sanctuary*:

I began to think of myself again as a printed object. I began to think of books in terms of possible money. I decided I might just as well make some of it myself. I took a little time out, and speculated *what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends*, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine and wrote it in about three weeks and sent it to Smith, who had done *The Sound and the Fury* and who wrote me immediately, 'Good God, I can't publish this. We'd both be in jail.' (vi; emphasis added)

Here Faulkner not only reinforces the commodification of *Sanctuary* but alludes to its topical quality—a work highly conscious of its cultural milieu and designed for mass consumption rather than fashioned as a singular work of "pure" art like *The Sound and the Fury*. With his ear on the track, so to speak, Faulkner clearly detected the lurid interest in the underworld that had contributed to the enormous popularity of *Little Caesar* and created the wave of gangster films appearing in the same year as *Sanctuary*. Constructed as a work of popular culture, Faulkner's novel bears as much relation to this genre of film as to contemporary works of literature. After all, it was *Sanctuary* that first attracted Hollywood's attention to Faulkner and initiated his storied relationship with the film industry. Presumably, Hollywood executives at the time recognized what influential critics would later seek to downplay: that Faulkner had a keen awareness of the "current trends" he sought to exploit, as his sensational gangster tale evidences. That awareness explains why Faulkner is "the most cinematic of novelists" (Kawin 5).²

Like the gangster films popular in the early years of the Depression, *Sanctuary* features an enigmatic figure capable of eliciting both the fear and the fascination that the Depression-era public found so captivating in outlaws. Faulkner introduces his gangster,

Popeye, with a striking use of imagery, creating a visual frame that evokes the discovery shot in film. Drinking from a stream, Horace Benbow, the gentlemanly attorney who comes to embody the conscience of the novel, sees his own image broken by ripples in the water which captures as well "the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat" (S 4). This fractured form is quickly reassembled, however, when Horace looks up from the water and beholds Popeye with clarity:

He saw, facing him across the spring, a man of under size, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette slanted from his chin. His suit was black, with a tight, high-waisted coat. His trousers were rolled once and caked with mud above mud-caked shoes. His face had a queer, bloodless color, as though seen by electric light; against the sunny silence, in his slanted straw hat and his slightly akimbo arms, he had that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin. (S 4)

Popeye strikes a classic gangster pose reminiscent of film—much like, for instance, *Little Caesar's* Caesar Enrico Bandello, who shares in common with Popeye a small frame packed with remarkable ambition and ruthlessness, particularly when it comes to carrying out his designs on absolute power. Through mythical allusion, Faulkner establishes Popeye as the sinister guide poised on the bank of the Styx to shatter Horace's narcissistic contemplation and to lure him into the murky depths of the underworld. And there is clearly more than the width of a stream separating these two men, as Faulkner takes great pains to oppose Horace and Popeye so as to delineate the struggle for viability and power staged in the remainder of the novel.

In *Sanctuary*, as in the gangster films, the characters embody social concepts that imbue their conflicts and relations with ideological significance. Horace represents the logic of the rational establishment, as his frequent appeals to ethos make clear. Philosophically, Horace lives by the mantra that he speaks to the falsely accused Lee

Goodwin in an effort to convince him to reveal Popeye's presence at the scene of Tommy's murder: "You've got the law, justice, civilization" (S 132). From his enlightened perspective, Horace keeps a close watch for signs of societal collapse, ever wary of civilization's fragility and the possibility that it might descend further into incivility, chaos, and even anarchy. Goodwin shares Horace's belief in civilization, though his faith is much more practical, based on a sense that the rule of law demands that his innocence alone will prevent his wrongful conviction. While Horace and Goodwin represent faith in the justice system, Temple Drake embodies that system for Horace and subsequently for the Jefferson lynch mob that forms in defense of her "honor."

Opposed to Horace's concept of civilization, Popeye represents the element of disorder, for he despises the lofty notions so valued by Horace and the rule of law so trusted by Goodwin.³ Not only does Popeye refuse to accept the principles that Horace valorizes, but he is determined to destroy them in favor of the fundamental code of gangster naturalism that might makes right. The primary vehicle of this destruction is rape, as Popeye's brutal violation of Temple yields a range of destabilizing effects. For Horace and for the mob, the bodily violation of Temple signifies the vulnerability of the body politic and a crisis in the system of law and order. A familiar patriarchal construct surfaces here: the men contest the terms of civilization and justice on a field of representation embodied by Temple.⁴ With these characters poised in representative light against the backdrop of a volatile social order, then, *Sanctuary* explores the intense and often violent nature of power relations and thus becomes implicated in the politics of

cultural discourse represented in the gangster films that introduced proto-fascist images and themes into American popular culture.

A fundamental component of the gangster theory of fascism is that the lead gangster in many ways prefigures the fascist dictator. In the case of *Little Caesar*, for example, Rico methodically carries out his designs on power, moving up the ranks of the Vettori mob family in Chicago and enhancing his reputation as a ruthless and ambitious criminal. Like the fascist dictator, Rico relies heavily on appearances in order to amplify his power—a feat made all the more difficult by his slight stature. The higher he rises, though, the more Rico knows that he must foster an aesthetic that conveys a sense of his rightful authority as a means of further consolidating power and achieving absolute control over the Chicago syndicate. By assuming a sort of legendary status not only in the underworld but also in the society at-large, Rico attempts to impose a sense of structure on an underworld that is inherently unstructured given its ethos of gangster naturalism. In *Sanctuary*, a similar aesthetic envelops Popeye, for it is constructed largely from anecdotal evidence of his intense capacity for ruthlessness and cruelty and especially from his legendary marksmanship. For example, when Horace implores Goodwin to pin Tommy's murder on Popeye, Goodwin refuses because "I've seen him light matches with a pistol at twenty feet. Why, damn it all, I'd never get back here from the courtroom the day I testified that" (S 132). The aesthetic constructed from lore empowers Popeye to the point that he is equally feared in his presence and in his absence—an important condition of Popeye's design on power. In contrast to Rico in *Little Caesar*, Popeye remains for the most part a sinister and shadowy figure lurking at the margins of action and continually posing the menacing threat that violence will erupt

upon his arrival. However, like Rico, Popeye relies on aesthetic means to amplify his power and thus to maintain order through fear, manipulation, and the ever-present threat of violence.

While the gangster theory of fascism focuses understandably on the lust for power in defining the individualistic gangster as a prototype for the fascist dictator, this theory also places significant emphasis on the violent criminal methods employed not only to affect the social formation of the underworld but also in response to conditions in the society as a whole. As we have seen, critical reception of Faulkner tended to focus substantially on the violent nature of his work; frequently, *Sanctuary* was cited as evidence of this disturbing Faulknerian emphasis. But *Sanctuary* was certainly not alone in attracting the notice of critics troubled by representations of violence and criminal activity and the readily apparent social implications of such representations. In fact, the gangster films appearing in the cultural context of Faulkner's novel drew similar responses. Not surprisingly, much of this concern came from politicians and civic organizations disturbed by the gangster films' apparent glorification of violence and mayhem in defiance of law and order. In response to this considerable public pressure, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) crafted a code intended to regulate depictions of criminal activity and violence in contemporary film. The code stipulated that breaking the law must "never be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy with the crime as against law and justice or to inspire others with a desire for imitation" (qtd. in Bergman 5).

Other aspects of the code focused specifically on representations of murder and brutal crime, emphasizing in both instances that the depictions should not display vivid

detail that might inspire copycat crimes. In another telling section of the code, the MPPDA declared, "Revenge in modern times shall not be justified" (qtd. in Bergman 5). Concerns over potential imitation and depictions of vengeance betray the dominant ideology that shaped these codes. This regulatory effort seems motivated, at base, by the desire to prevent the sort of chaos that these films represented from playing out in the streets and presumably ushering in a restructured social order. Bergman offers a concise and cogent explanation of this social dynamic: "It was a jittery society that felt compelled to denounce, and filled theatres to watch, outlaw protagonists" (6). Faulkner's *Sanctuary* was noticeably responsive to this paradoxical arrangement which pitted the consumer desire for representations of underworld mayhem against the anxieties of a dominant ideology that would seek to regulate these representations in the interest of preserving established order.

One of the more noticeable instances of this negotiation in *Sanctuary* is the portrayal of violence as a palpable force lurking always beneath the surface of apparent calm and waiting at any moment to erupt. This representation is accomplished quite remarkably through the depiction of Temple, who attracts a menacing male gaze with virtually every appearance she makes in the novel. When Temple first arrives on the scene, for instance, she is described from the perspective of leering town boys who often showed up for dances and "watched her enter the gymnasium upon black collegiate arms and vanish in a swirling glitter upon a glittering swirl of music," her darting stare appearing "cool, predatory and discreet" (S 29). Even Temple's name is the focus of this gaze, as revealed later by Gowan Stevens when he chides her for trying to appear beyond the pale of the town boys who look at her longingly. Berating Temple, Gowan says,

"Think you can play around all week with any badger-trimmed hick that owns a ford, and fool me on Saturday, don't you? Dont think I didn't see your name where it's written on that lavatory wall" (S 38). Significantly, these two gazes in such close textual proximity serve to construct Temple alternatively as "lady" and "whore"—the binary opposition standard in the ideology of pure Southern womanhood to which Temple, like Caddy Compson before her, is subjected. Like Caddy's dirty drawers, the inscription on the bathroom wall is a precursor to the much more pronounced violation that is to come. For now, though, the constitutive male gaze not only subjects Temple to an oppressive gender ideology, but it does so in a manner that foregrounds social class by juxtaposing the town boys and Gowan as the agents of this gaze. It is important to note the correspondence of the alternative forms of Temple's character ("lady" and "whore") to the ideological conflict present in a dominant class that professed its integrity at the same time it fearfully contemplated a sordid "fall" into the lower ranks or, much worse, a brutal violation (i.e., revolt) stemming from class hostility. Not only does Temple embody the justice system, then, but in so doing she represents the concerns of a dominant class that relies on the perceived viability of this system in the interest of its own perpetuity. From this standpoint, representations of violence in the novel—most of them related somehow to Popeye's violation of Temple—can be read as constituting and constituted by the same class anxieties active in the gangster films and the response to them from the "jittery society" (Bergman 6) comprised of fans as well as the censorial forces fearful of the shift in power and reorganization of social order that these films projected into popular consciousness.

The locus of violence in *Sanctuary* is the volatile relationship between Popeye and Temple, culminating in the novel's infamous signature episode—Popeye's raping of Temple with a corncob. The rising action preceding this brutal act compounds its eventual impact, as Faulkner charts what Horace later calls "a logical pattern to evil" (S 221) with chilling certitude. From the very first moment that Temple encounters Popeye, there is a sense of foreboding—aimed from Popeye's eyes, the male gaze intensifies, infused with a sinister quality not readily apparent in the description of the attentive town boys. A note of class difference is immediately injected into the exchange, as Temple asks Popeye to give her and Gowan a ride back to town in the wake of their car accident. When Temple offers payment to a reluctant Popeye, he reacts angrily and says to Gowan, "Make your whore lay off me, Jack" (S 49). The word choice is telling, for it signals to Temple and Gowan that their understanding of class distinctions that render Popeye servile and inferior are subject to reversal in this underworld setting—the debilitated old Frenchman's Bend plantation which is a base of operation for bootlegging. While suggesting the demise of social distinctions familiar to Temple and Gowan, the fallen plantation also serves as an ominous backdrop for the violent encounter set to unfold. The description of the estate reveals that "nowhere was any sign of husbandry—plow or tool; in no direction was a planted field in sight—only a gaunt weather-stained ruin in a somber grove through which the breeze drew with a sad, murmurous sound" (S 41). This barren image calls to mind Benjamin's observation that the fascist aesthetic requires a lack of productivity so that it might replace nature with violence (680). Such is the case in this setting, as the presence of Temple stimulates (in

every sense of the word) the production of violence that ultimately Popeye will harvest, fittingly enough, in the corn crib.

The volatility caused by Temple's presence on the estate is immediately apparent. When she enters the room where the bootleggers and Gowan have gathered, for example, the tension becomes palpable. First, a drunken Van grabs her by the wrist and invites her to sit on his lap, urging Tommy to make room with a directive that acknowledges the class distinctions amplified by Temple: "Move down, Tommy [. . .] Aint you got no manners, you mat-faced bastard?" (S 65). Van's unwelcome advance mobilizes Gowan who stands ready, at least from his perspective, to defend Temple's honor. Ironically, Gowan finds himself defending an honor he has earlier called into question, suggesting that his defense is less about protecting Temple per se than about pronouncing and preserving the class distinction encoded ideologically in the concept of honor applied to her in this context. But it is Goodwin who asserts his prerogative, attempting to shield Temple and to defuse the potential conflict. That Goodwin has to stage Temple's defense punctuates Gowan's inability not only to protect Temple but also to articulate the basis of his protective urge. Reminiscent of Quentin Compson's failed attempts to assume the mantle of gentleman, an extremely intoxicated Gowan can only manage to utter shards of the chivalric code he tries to invoke. Angered by Van's refusal to leave Temple alone, Gowan says, "—ginia gentleman; I dont give a—" (S 68). Later, after the conflict has escalated, Goodwin attempts to intervene once again, but Gowan resists: "'Got proteck. ' Gowan muttered ' . . .girl. 'Ginia gem. gemman got proteck.'" (S 73). Like the barren estate, Gowan and his code of honor are rendered non-productive and ultimately powerless, a condition suggested by Gowan's

severe beating at the hands of Van and the emasculation that it apparently accomplishes: "[Gowan's] hair was broken about his face, long as a girl's" (S 73). In contrast, it is Popeye who holds the power here. Significantly, the invocation of his name and his legendary marksmanship immediately precedes the brutal beating of Gowan. The violent attack on Gowan comes so swiftly that it registers only in absence, once it is "gone like a furious gust of black wind, leaving a peaceful vacuum" (S 72). The dark and tempestuous image conveys the sudden force of violence, but it also creates a sense of displacement stemming from the absence of vivid detail—a distancing effect magnified in the infamous rape scene.

For obvious reasons, the rape of Temple Drake lends itself to interpretations based in psychoanalytic theory.⁵ As in the case of *The Sound and the Fury*, however, there is much insight to be gained from extending the examination from the interior to the exterior—in terms of the rape scene, then, to consider its profound social implications. As I have already suggested, the abandoned plantation offers a setting in which class divisions active in the broader social order are subject to reversal, owing mainly to the power that Popeye exerts in defining this underworld milieu. However, Popeye's vision does not engender complete acquiescence, for Goodwin and Ruby appear resistant to the restructuring that Popeye seeks to bring about through threatened and actualized violence. Out of moral conviction and an apparent desire for peace and stability—a stark contrast to Gowan's nominal chivalry—Goodwin does attempt to protect, and thus essentially to preserve, Temple in response to the threat posed by Popeye. Though tinged with noticeable hostility, Ruby's repeated acknowledgement of Temple's class distinction essentially confirms the social hierarchy that Popeye seeks to

destroy. And the rape is the signature act of destruction, representing Popeye's brutal violation of Temple and the social formation that she represents.

The rape scene begins with Temple confined to the corn crib by Goodwin under the watchful eye of Tommy, presumably to offer her protection from Van's clutches and, well, sanctuary from Popeye's menacing presence. However, instead of providing safety, the crib functions in the manner of Foucault's Panopticon—a confining space in which Temple becomes a spectacle for the voyeuristic gaze that has fixed on her from the outset of the novel.⁶ First, her appointed protector directs the gaze with "a diffident, groping, hungry fire" as he begins "to rub his hands slowly on his shanks, rocking a little from side to side" (S 101). But Popeye assumes control of the gaze once he descends ominously into the corn crib from the top floor of the barn, standing before Temple and "thrust[ing] his chin out in a series of jerks" (S 101) in a noticeably sexualized gesture. The phallic imagery compounds this sexual tension, with Temple eyeing Popeye and taking note of "the pistol behind him, against his flank, wisping thinly along his leg"; next, we are told, Popeye "waggled the pistol slightly and put it back in his coat, then he walked toward her" (S 101). The potency suggested by the phallic imagery stands in opposition to the reality of Popeye's sexual impotency. This feature of Popeye's character is a variation on a familiar theme in the gangster genre. In *Little Caesar*, for example, Rico takes what amounts to a vow of celibacy, choosing instead to channel all his energy with almost religious devotion toward his ambitious design on power. A common trope, de-sexualizing the gangster serves to diminish his sinister threat and to punctuate his will to power, thus maintaining a healthy balance between fear and fascination for the audience to behold. In *Sanctuary*, however, Popeye's impotency

feeds a sexual deviancy apparent in his use of the corn cob to rape Temple and his voyeuristic employment of Red as essentially a stud to Temple. Instead of offering a source of identification and unity, then, Popeye's response to sexual frustration contributes to his alienation, clearly delineating him as aberrant and Other in his propensity to commit violent acts.

In constructing the rape scene, Faulkner generally anticipates a post-production-code technique, resisting graphic representations that leave little to the imagination. But I would argue that the technique stems less from a censorial compulsion than from an attempt to collectivize the violation of Temple from the perspective of an expansive social vision. Unlike the vivid descriptions at other points in the novel (the "discovery shot" of Popeye cited above, for instance), the rape of Temple is recounted with an absence of particulars. Still, the scene conveys Popeye's predatory nature and Temple's sheer vulnerability, which is underscored by her futile cry for help to Pap, the blind and deaf old man seated nearby. The violence is displaced primarily through Faulkner's use of pronouns with increasingly remote antecedents, a formal decision that places distance between the brutal action and the characters involved:

Moving, he made no sound at all. [. . .] She could hear silence in a thick rustling as he moved toward her through it, thrusting it aside and she began to say Something is going to happen to me. She was saying it to the old man with yellow clots for eyes. "Something is happening to me!" she screamed at him . . . "I told you it was!" she screamed, voiding the words like hot silent bubbles into the bright silence about them until he turned his head and the two phlegm-clots above her where she lay tossing and thrashing on the rough, sunny boards. "I told you! I told you all the time!" (S 102)

Emphasis shifts here from the personal violation that Temple feels ("Something is happening to me!") to an admonishment delivered via second person ("I told you!").

Ostensibly, Temple's outrage is directed at the old man, but the direct address also works to project the displaced violence outward and thus to share the experience. This projection underscores the representative component of the violation, as it registers in a range from the personal to the social through the remainder of the novel. The impact of the rape is felt most immediately, of course, by Temple whose post-traumatic stress is evident in her facial expression, which is described from Ruby's point of view as being "like a small, dead-colored mask drawn past her on a string and then away" (S 104). Taken by the gangster Popeye to the shyster city of Memphis, Temple will eventually come to call her captor "daddy" (S 231), the symbolic replacement of Judge Drake indicating the culmination of Popeye's design on power. In turn, the abduction of Temple and the unfolding mystery of her violation traced by Horace pose the threat of disruption in a social order growing increasingly skeptical of traditional means of ensuring stability and exacting justice.

The social implications of the rape foreground the novel's concern over the rule of law and thus establish another intersection between *Sanctuary* and the gangster theory of fascism. Bergman explains one of the more subversive views active in the gangster films of the early thirties: "What was negative and despairing surfaced in their treatment of the law. A viable state commands a viable law, and the law depicted, at its best, was never more than something to beat. At its worst, it scarcely seemed to exist" (13). Gangster films like *Little Caesar* and *The Public Enemy*, which was released in 1931 with James Cagney in the lead role, exposed a central paradox of Depression-era America: that the only means of satisfying the demand for success dictated by the American dream appeared to be outside the rule of the law. In particular, public officials

and agents of law enforcement were represented as ineffectual or corrupt, often constructing bureaucratic obstacles to the very justice they were entrusted to maintain. For instance, *City Streets* (1931), starring Gary Cooper, casts law enforcement officers as the thugs, transferring the redemptive value to the outlaws. Such depictions reflected the lack of confidence that Americans held in the established system of order and, in turn, the admiration they had for the gangsters' decisive action in maintaining a code of justice in the underworld, violent though it usually was. As Bergman points out, the "endorsement of the power of the mob reflected an intense desire for authority and an impatience with indecision and obstacles—obstacles which got defined as the law" (114). By extolling the virtues of the outlaw over the law, the gangster films of 1930-32 offered incisive social commentary that seemed to sanction a radical restructuring of society in response to the frustrations of economic depression and ineffectual leadership from government officials and institutions. In representing the dynamic conflict between the established rule of law and the challenge posed by the ethos of gangster naturalism, *Sanctuary* bears certain similarities to its cinematic counterparts but also features telling variations that resonate with ideological significance and ultimately register the novel's dissent from the radical social commentary expressed in the gangster films.

What *Sanctuary* does share in common with the gangster films is an acknowledgement that the institutional means of dispensing justice are not merely fallible but inherently flawed and prone to corruption. Consider, for example, the depictions of public officials and agents of the law in the novel. Eustace Graham, the district attorney in Jefferson, is portrayed as a political opportunist, more concerned with advancing his career in the Goodwin murder trial than seeing that justice is done. Horace sets the tone

of Graham's portrayal, referring to him as "Damn little squirt" (S 185) when Narcissa mentions his name. Horace then charges that it was Graham who had Ruby and her child evicted from the hotel for "public effect, political capital" (S 185). Confirmation of Horace's charges, which must be taken with a grain of salt in light of the impending trial, can be found in Graham's willingness to compromise the ethical standards assigned to his public office when Narcissa pays him a visit. When she inquires as to Horace's chances for a victory in the trial, Graham says without much prodding, "This is purely confidential. I am violating my oath of office; I wont have to tell you that. But it may save you worry to know that he hasn't a chance in the world" (S 263). Graham's opportunism is further on display during the trial when he employs unethical maneuvers to gain favor with the jury and to manipulate public opinion. A case in point is Graham's irrelevant reference to Ruby and Goodwin's unmarried status designed to undermine her testimony (S 269-70).

Compounding this troubling depiction of public officials in the novel is the presence of Senator Clarence Snopes, a character whose perpetual lack of cleanliness serves as an obvious metaphor for his questionable political *modus operandi*. Senator Snopes abides by a sort of libertarian belief that "a man aint no more than human, and what he does aint nobody's business but his" (S 187), a belief that invariably sets his private desires at odds with the sworn duties of his public office but nevertheless affords him the necessary cover to deny his remarkable hypocrisy. Critical of Eustace Graham's abuse of his office for political gain, Senator Snopes clearly exhibits his own opportunistic bent in using the information he gains about Temple's whereabouts in Memphis to his own advantage. In his various dealings, the senator confirms the self-

assessment that he offers to Horace when he first encounters him on the train: "I aint hidebound in no sense, as you'll find out when you know me better" (S 206). The characters of Senator Snopes and Eustace Graham would have been at home in *Little Caesar*, *The Secret Six*, *City Streets*, or the numerous other gangster films that depicted public officials in an unflattering light and in so doing reflected common perceptions in society of a justice system crippled by apparently inherent graft and corruption.⁷

But *Sanctuary* differs in a key respect from the gangster films with their harsh and comprehensive indictments of established institutions supposedly designed to protect and preserve justice and to maintain law and order. While the gangster films can be interpreted to celebrate the proto-fascist ethos of gangster naturalism as at least a decisive alternative to the ineffectiveness of a corrupt legislative and judicial system, *Sanctuary* resists such an endorsement by locating the conscience of the novel—albeit a conscience in crisis—in the character of Horace Benbow rather than in Popeye, the gangster. It is Horace, after all, who professes with sincerity that "I cannot stand idly by and see injustice—" (S 119). The long dash here leaves ample space for the numerous manifestations of injustice that Horace will stand idly by and witness, as his faith in law and civilization is shattered through the course of his quest to find Temple and to prevent Goodwin's false conviction. For the most part, Horace wages this pursuit of justice on a conceptual plane, existing above what he deems the "free Democratic-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha" (S 128) so prone to the corrupt practices of Eustace Graham and Senator Snopes. In this regard, Horace is like Cicero, whom he invokes when Ruby offers him sexual favors in return for legal services rendered in defense of Goodwin. "O tempora! O mores! O hell!" cries Horace in disbelief that Ruby assumes

his service to stem from base self-interest rather than a commitment to justice and to the preservation of "the harmony of things" (*S* 275). Ruby's frank offer of compensation and Horace's appalled rejection of it serve to underscore the inherent conflict between Horace's idealistic perceptions of the law and the corrupt system that he must negotiate in order to vindicate Goodwin. In order to achieve this goal, Horace knows that he must solve the mystery that centers on Temple Drake—a mystery that forces him, as it turns out, into the role of sleuth in search of clues that stand to reveal not just the details of the crime but also the harsh conditions of social reality that his conceptual frame of mind has heretofore prevented him from recognizing.

In the first leg of his quest to find Temple, Horace pays a visit to the university post office, where he suffers an instance of mistaken identity, at least as far as his vocation is concerned. Wary of Horace's inquiry as to Temple's whereabouts, the postal clerk asks, "Are you another detective?" (*S* 171). Horace offers a muddled response, finally insisting, "It doesn't matter" (*S* 171). On the contrary, Horace's foray into the detective business is quite significant, not only because it represents, as a story within the story, Faulkner's homage to the popular hard-boiled detective fiction (a close relative of the gangster stories) but also because of the social and ideological function that the traditional detective story has performed. From the perspective of Marxist theory, as Dennis Porter explains, the traditional detective story "involves the celebration of the repressive state apparatus or at least of that important element of it formed by the police" (121). However, what is lacking in this formula, Porter remarks, is any acknowledgment of fallibility in the law—so much so, in fact, that "the law itself is never put on trial" (122). The agent of this infallible apparatus is, of course, the detective, whose

investigation "represents in its way the exercise of lucid power over an identified enemy of society" (125). In this respect, the detective serves as a stabilizing force, offering reassurance to the established order that the only logical outcome of any internal threat is that it will be detected, exposed, and incarcerated. For the dominant class, then, the detective story is entertaining insofar as it reassuring—that is to say, insofar as the familiar formal conventions of the story signal the foregone conclusion that any disruption caused by the crime will give way to a restored order once it is solved.

If, as Porter suggests, the traditional detective story "adapts itself easily to the changing objects of popular anxiety" (127), then it is not surprising at all that Faulkner's incorporation of the genre into his gangster story is imbued with irony. In his comparison of *Sanctuary* to the hard-boiled detective fiction especially popular as the twenties gave way to the thirties, Eric J. Sundquist, following Andre Malraux, points out the fundamental inadequacy of Horace Benbow as a detective "who is powerless to prevent gross misapplications of justice and incapable of revealing why such evil as the novel continually dwells on should occur" (50).⁸ Not only that, but Faulkner breaks nearly all the rules by subverting key narrative conventions of the traditional detective story. For example, Faulkner not only depicts the crime, but he makes little effort to hide the perpetrator, except from Horace whose position of dramatic irony highlights his failure as an agent of the law—first as a "detective" and then as a lawyer. Furthermore, Faulkner features the trial prominently in the novel—a component missing from the traditional detective story, with the notable exception of Agatha Christie's "Witness for the Prosecution." Traditional detective fiction resists description of the criminal's life outside the circumstances of the crime and generally concludes with the exposure of the

criminal, leaving the brand of punishment to the reader's imagination. On both counts, Faulkner is guilty of infractions, which occur at the end of the novel in the misplaced exposition that recounts Popeye's upbringing before revealing his apprehension by the law and, finally, his execution.

These subversions of the traditional detective story represent in narrative terms the system's chronic failure to perform as expected and enable the novel "to induce in the reader nervous terror rather than aesthetic submission" (106), as Clifton Fadiman keenly observed in an early response to *Sanctuary*. Although Horace sets out to solve the crime, what he discovers instead is that he is powerless—impotent really—when it comes to performing the desired social function of the "detective"/lawyer as an agent with heightened powers of surveillance and a reassuring sign of stability to the established order. Instead, what Horace comes to discover in the course of his investigation is that the noble concepts he cherishes no longer seem to apply in a system now apparently guided by Popeye's codes of gangster naturalism. Jay Watson aptly describes this outcome as something of a Foucauldian reversal: "Foucault's Panopticon is turned inside-out: the outlaw becomes its silent overseer, while the official representatives of law and the law-abiding are reduced to inmates, the inspected. Popeye has beaten the law at its own game" (63).

The success of Popeye's effort to subvert the justice system and to disrupt the established order is apparent in the trial of Lee Goodwin. Presumably a means of seeking justice in the case of Tommy's murder, the trial becomes instead a spectacle of social disruption. While Goodwin is the nominal defendant, Horace's sensibility stands trial as well, his grand notions of law and civilization facing harsh scrutiny before

standing first exposed and then essentially convicted as obsolete. The trial intensifies the dramatic irony on display during Horace's search for Temple and, especially, during his visit to Memphis when Temple's account of the murder and rape forces him, at last, to acknowledge the power of evil that the other characters—and indeed the entire novel—have taken for granted all along. The conflation of Little Belle and Temple in the subsequent nausea-inducing vision of the rape, complete with the sound of shuffling corn shucks, is a psychosomatic overture to the destruction of Horace's refined sensibility that will occur through the course of the trial.

The narrative convention of dramatic irony is skillfully enhanced by the distance that Faulkner constructs between Horace and the participants in the trial, a distance measured noticeably in units of class distinction. From the very outset, Horace misinterprets the events of the trial, exposing a difference between his expectations rooted in class ideology and actual outcomes. Clearly, Horace lacks Eustace Graham's understanding of audience. Graham's allusion to the fact that Ruby and Goodwin are not married—a statement punctuated by Ruby's cradling of their child in her lap—demonstrates the district attorney's awareness that Goodwin is being tried not only by the court but also by the court of public opinion. In Horace's conceptual view, however, the letter of the law, with its foundation in the noble cause of justice, is the ultimate audience. Consequently, he misreads Graham's ploy as a sign of desperation. "Dont you see your case is won?" he assures Ruby. "That they are reduced to trying to impugn the character of your witness" (S 270). Horace operates on the faulty assumption that the ethos of the trial—and, by extension, of the community—accepts as given his honor-bound sense of character informed by a class-specific system of values revealed in his

remark to Ruby that "God is foolish at times, but at least He's a gentleman" (S 280).

Insulated by confidence in this divine sanction, Horace feels no compulsion to acknowledge the observers of the trial as any more than a mass of humanity which he perceives with increasing objectification:

Above the seat-backs Horace could see their heads—bald heads, gray heads, shaggy heads and heads trimmed to recent feather-edge above sun-baked necks, oiled heads above urban collars and here a there a sunbonnet or a flowered hat. (S 281)

From his abstracted perspective, Horace initially holds fast to the belief that the justice system is, after all, his world—a place that offers certain sanctuary from and powerful opposition to the underworld of Popeye, with its unscrupulous trafficking in graft, corruption, and evil. Confident of the conceptual integrity of the justice system, then, Horace cannot yet tap into Ruby's "deep reserve of foreboding" (S 270), which signals to her and to the reader the emptiness of Horace's initial reassurance that he still knows the ways of his world: "You may know more about making whiskey or love than I do, but I know more about criminal procedure than you, remember" (S 270). As the trial proceeds, of course, Horace will develop his own sense of foreboding, coinciding with the arrival of Temple and prompting his epiphanic admission ("I know what I'll find before I find it" [S 282]) that ushers in the denouement of the trial. Adding insult to injury, Graham supplants Horace as the caretaker of justice, albeit a vigilante justice cloaked in rhetoric of chivalry that professes to honor "that most sacred thing in life: womanhood" and pledges to exchange paternal safety for Temple's story: "Let these good men, these fathers and husbands, hear what you have to say and right your wrong for you" (S 284-85). Rendered impotent first by his conceptual sensibility and now by

the painful recognition of its limitations, Horace is left to stand idly by and see injustice prevail in the cruel form of Temple's perjury. Representing the end of "civilization" as Horace would have it, this destruction of the Temple, so to speak, is born out of a submission to Popeye's design. But it is also stems from a tacit alliance with the mass of observers who now share, as a result of the perjury, a "collective breath" (S 286) that will fan the flames eventually consuming the falsely convicted Goodwin in a frenzy of vigilantism.⁹

Had Faulkner ended *Sanctuary* with Goodwin's immolation, or even with Horace's dejected and defeated return to Kinston, then it would have come much closer to the sentiment commonly on display in the gangster films of 1930-32: that desperate times require desperate measures, even to the point of adopting the basic power principle that might makes right illuminated by the gangster theory of fascism. For the duration of the novel, Popeye's brutal crime precludes the level of sympathy for the devil, as it were, that enticed moviegoers to cheer Edward G. Robinson's Rico in *Little Caesar* and James Cagney's Tommy Powers in *The Public Enemy* as heroes in alternative pursuit of the American dream. Upon first inspection, the final section of the novel, which reads in large part as Popeye's psychosocial history, might seem an attempt to lend him at least some level of sympathy by offering, in effect, explanation of his pathological nature as largely a product of his cruel upbringing. Sundquist does well to note the tenor of social realism on display in the final section, which calls to mind Dreiser and Crane in painting Popeye as "rather a compendium of naturalistic doom" (48). For Sundquist, though, Faulkner's foray into naturalism here ultimately serves the cause of critique, revealing the limitations of naturalism as a literary form and philosophical system and eventually

"exposing the moral void of psychoanalysis and social science, the conspicuous fields of inquiry that bring naturalism into the twentieth century and conspire to make justice a subject of pathological study" (49). It is worth noting, however, that these limitations and failures are more apparent in retrospect than they likely would have been in the cultural context of the novel, especially in light of the emergence of social realism as a revitalized literary form. Moreover, the gangster films displayed a visible sociological curiosity in depicting the lives of outlaws as formed by the environment of gangster naturalism. Wary of the growing controversy that would result in the production codes, for instance, the producers of *The Public Enemy* championed the film as essentially a case study designed to explore the social conditions that could produce a Tommy Powers (Bergman 10-13). Producers figured that if they could sell their products as attempts to explain the criminal mind, then they could skirt the charge of celebrating violence, mayhem, and social disruption.

In this cultural context, the cold ethos of gangster naturalism offered a troubling model for constructing social order; however, naturalism employed in the service of sociological insight could be viewed as a reassuring form, capable of tracing "a logical pattern to evil" (S 221) for an established order unsettled by the social implications of the gangster craze. Evoking naturalism, the curious final section of *Sanctuary* represents an aesthetic act of containment rooted in the desire to impose order on a social system rendered chaotic and unstable. As we have seen, what can be termed the radical center of the novel, extending basically from the rape scene to the aftermath of the trial, goes far in contemplating the possibility of a radically revised social order, but only in terms of the threat posed by Popeye as a source of disruption. The association of social

transformation with proto-fascist themes leaves the novel closed to alternatives beyond the established social order, such as it is. Because contemporary social conditions and the popular form of the gangster story were resistant to favorable representations of the justice system, Faulkner, like the gangster figures, had to circumvent the letter of the law, in a sense, to render an aesthetic containment. Accordingly, the final section of the revised *Sanctuary* demonstrates resistance to the laws of narrative convention, featuring exposition as afterthought and a drastic alteration in form and tone accomplished by Faulkner's shift into a naturalistic mode of social realism. This shift conveys the sense of a higher law inscribed in Faulkner's text apparently capable not only of "explaining" Popeye's motivation but also of girding the fallible system of justice so as to ensure his conviction and execution as a logical condition of "natural" order. In this respect, *Sanctuary* might be read as "a profoundly conservative document" (Sundquist 59).

As in *Mosquitoes*, however, this representation exposes a dominant ideology insistent upon equating "natural" order with conditions favorable to its own continued viability. With Popeye convicted, a turn of events cast more in terms of submission than apprehension, the deputy assigned to guard the gangster remarks, "It's them thugs like that that have made justice a laughing-stock, until even when we get a conviction, everybody knows it wont hold" (S 312).¹⁰ Significantly, the very publicly staged execution of Popeye proves the guard wrong and, on a social level, appears to signal reestablished order.¹¹ From this standpoint, the "natural" chain of events leading to Popeye's execution and the sheriff's final words to him—"I'll fix it for you" (S 316)—might offer some reassurance to an apprehensive dominant class wary of the social upheaval embodied in the gangster figure. But this containment is, at best, a quick fix,

for the final words of the novel immediately comprehend "the embrace of the season of rain and death" (*S* 317) manifested in the numerous representations of mob violence that establish further connections between Faulkner's texts and the discourse around fascism active in the Depression era.

* * *

By 1932, the wave of gangster films had diminished to a slow trickle. At this point, the proto-fascist themes evident in this cycle gave way to more explicit fascist themes in a series of films that appeared from 1933 to 1937 and reflected an ongoing fascination with mob violence and vigilante justice in the American culture. While gangsters were still featured in films, they were now depicted more often than not as insidious and sinister figures intent on disrupting the rule of law. Simply put, the gangsters of post-1932 Hollywood were more like Faulkner's Popeye Pumphrey than Edward G. Robinson's Rico Bandello or James Cagney's Tommy Powers. In place of the gangster, it was now representations of the public that reflected the desire for decisive action in the vacuum of ineffectual leadership and subsequently the need for a concerted effort to impose restraint. This progression can be traced from films that posed vigilante justice and mob violence as viable and necessary alternatives in times of desperation to those that explored mob mentality with a cautionary resolve. Running the gamut from endorsement to ambivalence to condemnation, these representations of mob action maintained a responsiveness to contemporary politics. It is no coincidence that favorable depictions of vigilantism coincided with the recognition that more than the transition

from Hoover to FDR would be necessary to end the Depression, while cautionary treatments emerged virtually in lock step with the cohesive social and political formations of the New Deal and the Popular Front. In the latter half of the thirties, with Popular Front anti-fascism reaching its zenith, Orson Welles extended cultural explorations of mob mentality with his 1937 Mercury Theater production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which preceded a less welcome staging of mass hysteria prompted by his infamous radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in the following year. For Welles and other artists/activists, representations of mob violence were part of an overriding fascination with and opposition to the rise of fascism playing out on the international stage. From a domestic standpoint, though, forms of cultural expression stressed the Popular Front's insistence that fascism and racism were virtually synonymous, as manifested in the heinous practice of lynching still active primarily in Faulkner's South and influential in the culture as an issue that defined social consciousness in the thirties. All of these examples serve to document the cultural history of an American preoccupation with mob violence and vigilante justice that spanned the Great Depression and exerted remarkable influence on Faulkner's literary production.

While Hollywood entertained the idea—at least until 1933—that mob action could be a constructive social force, Faulkner was not so generous in his representations, consistently casting such action as a destructive, though sometimes inevitable, force contrary to the cause of justice or reasonable reform. In this respect, Faulkner anticipated attitudes projecting from Hollywood in the mid-thirties in a series of lynching films, including *Black Fury* (1935), *Fury* (1936), *Black Legion* (1937), and *They Won't*

Forget (1937). Claiming to probe a chronic social ill in America, makers of these films obscured the historical and social reality of lynching by blatantly discounting race as a contributing factor and instead focusing on lynching primarily through the prism of class conflict.¹² Forged predominantly from the ranks of the working class, the mobs in these films were comprised of people portrayed as inherently ignorant, chaotic, and unruly. At a time when the harsh conditions of the Depression invited social protest among the scores of unemployed, such depictions sent the unmistakable signal that the masses were incapable of governing and therefore needed to be governed by a social system that could restrain them. Or, as Bergman remarks, these films "argued from authoritative benevolence to the irrationality of the governed" (122). Consequently, these representations functioned ideologically to promote fear of mass mobilization stemming organically from the working class and to naturalize the legitimacy and authority of the existing social system favorable to the dominant class. Understood in this cultural context, Faulkner's representations of mob violence and vigilante justice can be read as responsive to this ideological formation and thus active in an ongoing political struggle through means of cultural expression.

The lynching of Lee Goodwin in *Sanctuary* offers an instructive case in point for exploring this dimension of Faulkner's fiction. As we have seen, there is a clear line of distinction drawn between Horace and the townspeople of Jefferson gathered to observe the spectacle of Goodwin's trial. That this distinction is decidedly social in nature is illustrated by Horace's condescending tendency to see the spectators in court not as peers but rather as a collective mass of humanity. This perception is evident much earlier in the novel, too, as the display of Tommy's corpse attracts a crowd to the town square

and especially to the music stores where "a throng stood all day, listening," as if in a trance, to "ballads simple in melody and theme, of bereavement and retribution and repentance" (S 112). It is this easily manipulated crowd that supplies a pool of jurors to convict Goodwin falsely in court and a mob of executioners to sentence him to death under the improvisational rule of vigilante law. District Attorney Eustace Graham, a product of the working class, is depicted as a skillful manipulator of this "throng" of his peers.¹³ Inciting mob violence explicitly, Eustace cites in open court the gynecologist's supposed claim that the rape is "no longer a matter for the hangman, but for a bonfire of gasoline" (S 284). Eustace's base appeal to mob rule is represented as a perversion of the civilized rule of law that Horace valorizes. It is important to note the undertones of class difference girding this opposition: while Eustace may wield power over the masses from which he rose, he lacks Horace's gentlemanly reverence for the law and thus appears incapable of bearing the duties of his office in a manner that promotes individual and civic responsibility as well as peace and stability in the social order. Indeed, Graham's incendiary call for vigilante justice leads to the formation of a mob from the ranks of townspeople who seem gullible and irrational by nature. Confirming this inclination, the jury's false conviction of Goodwin after only eight minutes of deliberation suggests the abandonment of reason and rational judgment. The hasty verdict signals the onset of mob mentality in the wake of social disruption brought about by the disclosure of the rape.

Represented in the novel from Horace's point of view, the lynching unfolds in the form of an apocalyptic vision for an apprehensive dominant class. Still reeling from the verdict, Horace encounters "a shifting mass filling the street, and the bleak, shallow yard

above which the square and slotted bulk of the jail loomed" (S 293). In the way of reassurance, the sheriff applies his interpretive powers to the form of this mass movement: "When a mob means business, it dont take that much time and talk. And it dont go about its business where every man can see it" (S 293). From the perspectives of the sheriff and Horace, this initial incarnation of the mob even appears at first "quite orderly" (S 293). But such appearances are deceiving, for only a bit of agitation is needed to incite the mob to action. Anticipating a common convention of the lynching films, the agitation in this case comes largely from outsiders who question the resolve of the community to achieve justice by whatever means necessary. The outsiders' instigation also highlights the fickle nature of the townspeople and their misguided motivations. Clearly, this mob-in-progress is bent on avenging the rape rather than the murder, acting out of a sense of chivalry that parodies and perverts the gentlemanly codes of conduct associated with Horace. Referring to Temple, one of the men gathered in the street says, "I saw her. She was some baby. Jeez. I wouldn't have used no cob" (S 294). According to this line of reasoning, the crime was not that Temple was raped but that she was not raped "properly." This twisted motivation for anger and revenge, echoed later by the Kinston carriage driver who is described mainly in terms of his fall in the ranks of social distinction, underscores the depravity of the class-specific mob mentality now unleashed.

The description of the lynching conveys a dominant impression of civil unrest consistent with the triumph of mob mentality in Jefferson. As the mob forms, Horace sees the hotel proprietor running in the street toward the fire consuming Goodwin. Swept up by the mob, the hotel proprietor embodies a social order in disarray; having

abandoned his post, he appears to Horace as "ludicrous; a broad man with his trousers clutched before him and his braces dangling beneath his nightshirt, a tousled fringe of hair standing wildly about his bald head" (S 295). Contributing further to this sense of chaos and absurdity are the vivid sensory images registered from Horace's point of view:

Against the flames black figures showed, antic; he could hear panting shouts; through a fleeting gap he saw a man turn and run, a mass of flames, still carrying a five-gallon coal oil can which exploded with a rocket-like glare while he carried it running. (S 296)

Entering the fray, Horace bears witness to the immolation of Goodwin in a "blazing mass" (S 296)—a phrase that encompasses both the fire and the mob that sets it with vengeful intent. The repetition of the word "mass" occurs throughout the scene and reinforces not only the mob mentality on display but also a sense of its origin in the masses. The rampage of violence that Horace witnesses reinforces his sense of impotence with respect to his duties as an agent of the law; in this respect, Horace stands in contrast to the virile mob that rapes Goodwin with a corncob as part of its ritualistic torture. Bearing witness to this chaos, Horace is paradoxically engulfed by a profound silence, which further alienates him from the mob and from his surroundings: "Horace couldn't hear them. He couldn't hear the man who had got burned screaming" (S 296). The powerful aesthetic effects yielded by this episode make for a close encounter with mob mentality that must have been especially unsettling for contemporary readers fearful of actual mob violence and the social disruption it would engender. But the impact of these aesthetic effects must have strengthened as well the case for maintaining order in response to the threat so vividly depicted—a maneuver that prefigures a key component of the lynching films produced later in the decade.

The lynching depicted in Fritz Lang's *Fury*, for instance, bears striking resemblance to the lynching of Lee Goodwin in *Sanctuary*. Whether or not Faulkner's novel had any direct bearing on Lang's film, the similarities demonstrate at the very least shared aesthetic features largely constituted by ideological forces active in the cultural context. Like Lee Goodwin, Joe, the protagonist of *Fury*, initially places his trust in the rule of law, declaring to his racketeering brother that "times have changed. The people are against you monkeys now." After a year of working hard to save money, Joe sets out to marry his fiancée, but runs into trouble in a small town when flimsy circumstantial evidence makes him the prime suspect in the kidnapping of a prominent citizen's daughter. Rushing to judgment, the townspeople convict Joe in the court of public opinion, according to the rumor-mill logic expressed by a woman who insists that "in this country people don't land in jail unless they're guilty." Dawson, a Eustace Graham-like manipulator, incites the mob by declaring, "An attack on a girl hits us ordinary people where we live, and we're gonna see that politics don't cut any ice." Dawson is aided by an outside agitator who eggs on the townspeople by questioning their commitment to justice. In response to the frenzied call, "Let's have some fun," the mob storms the jail and sets it ablaze with Joe left inside. The scene recalls the immolation of Goodwin, with disturbing images of the frenzied mob captured in vivid close-ups. At one point, there is a shot of Joe making a futile attempt to free himself through a barred window, the flames rising up to engulf him. The film then falls silent as it intersperses shots of Joe and close-ups of wild faces in the mob, a technique reminiscent of Faulkner's description of the fire consuming Goodwin as "soundless: a voice of fury like in a dream, roaring silently out of a peaceful void" (S 296).

Both Faulkner's novel and Lang's film depict the lynching of white men—a choice that serves to emphasize class rather than race as a primary factor. The mobs in *Sanctuary* and in *Fury* are comprised largely from the ranks of the lower classes and coalesce in response to the violation of a young woman of higher social status. Unable to perform the role of "gentlemen" as socially scripted, though, the men comprising these mobs lash out with indiscriminate violence in the misconstrued name of justice. Capturing the nature of the violation represented in both works, the governor in *Fury* says after the lynching, "The very spirit of government has been violated, the state disgraced in the eyes of the world by this brutal outburst of lust for vengeance." *Sanctuary* and *Fury* both depict this lust as class-specific in origin. In the hands of people like Eustace Graham and Dawson, assumes the logic, the cause of justice is almost certain to evolve into the chaos of mob rule. But, if lynching stems from the lust for vengeance, then this logic exposes these representations of lynching to be agents of desire as well. Specifically, they function as formal expressions of the social desire to maintain established order by conveying impressions of the masses as inherently volatile and in need of restraint by a resurgent rule of law to fill the vacuum of authority left by the wave of vigilante justice.¹⁴

This pattern of representation is even more pronounced in Faulkner's "Dry September," a short story that explores the pathological nature of mob violence once again through the prism of lynching. Published in 1937, "Dry September" appeared in the same year that the cycle of lynching films initiated by *Black Fury* ran its course with the release of *Black Legion* and *They Won't Forget*. The latter film is useful for situating Faulkner's story in a revealing cultural context. Directed by Mervyn Leroy, *They Won't*

Forget was billed as an investigation of lynching as a social issue requiring decisive action from an activist federal government. Bergman explains how this transparent intention affected the final cut: "Like so many Warner efforts at public education, Leroy's film had the studied concern, depth, and texture of an editorial cartoon" (120). Like *Fury*, *They Won't Forget* obscures the racial dimension of lynching. Instead, the film highlights regional division: set in the South, it tells the story of a teacher originally from the North who is arrested for the murder of a student and victimized by an ambitious district attorney who stirs up sectional animosity in an effort to get a conviction and to further his career. Pardoned by the governor, the teacher is then dragged from a train by an angry mob and lynched. Significantly, no one suffers consequences for the mob action, revealing a destabilizing absence of authority. In this regard, the film constructs a sort of social nightmare for the dominant class, playing on fear as a means of asserting the need for decisive action to restore and preserve order.

Although not in the didactic vein of Leroy's *They Won't Forget*, Faulkner's "Dry September" performs a similar function in its graphic depiction of a rampant mob mentality that exposes an absence of authority in a disrupted social order. The opening line of the story introduces the elements of chaos and destruction, describing atmospheric and social conditions conducive to the mob mentality already in formation: "Through the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass—the rumor, the story, whatever it was" (CS 169). This climate informs the opening scene in the barber shop, which serves as a site of communal negotiation. Established here are the social forces entering into conflict in response to the ill-defined rumor that Will Mays, a black man, sexually assaulted Minnie Cooper, a

white woman. Hawkshaw, the proprietor, expresses the logic of established order, imploring the men in the shop to seek truth rather than to be consumed by the fire of rumor and innuendo. But Hawkshaw's appeal only elicits derision from the other men who accuse him of being a "niggerlover" (CS 170) and a traitor to his heritage: "You better go back North where you came from. The South dont want your kind here" (CS 171). As in *They Won't Forget*, the theme of sectional antagonism figures prominently in Faulkner's story. These followers coming under the spell of mob mentality are only in need of a leader to inspire them to action. And McLendon assumes this role, fanning the flames ignited in the exchange between Hawkshaw and the other men. Aiming a "hot, bold glance that swept the group," McLendon mobilizes the mob with the obligatory aid of an outside agitator and a firm ultimatum: "Well, [. . .] are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?" (CS 171). Whether or not the incident actually occurred is of little consequence to McLendon, who favors the spectacle of power over the search for truth in imposing law and order. As a counterpoint to Hawkshaw, McLendon thus embodies the suspension of reason that accompanies vigilantism and propels the mob toward the lynching of Will Mays. With mob mentality now ascendant, Hawkshaw, like Horace Benbow, is rendered powerless and inarticulate, declaring with futility, "I cant let—" (CS 173). Though he joins the ranks of the mob with the hope of defusing it, Hawkshaw's weak declaration foreshadows his inevitable failure to prevent the lynching.

In contrast to Hollywood's lynching films and in spite of accusations that he was blind to social injustice in his region, Faulkner's story delves into race as an essential component of the lynching, as the exchange in the barber shop makes abundantly clear.

But, as in so much of Faulkner's fiction, race intersects with gender and class in this story to define the terms of a struggle for power raging in a destabilized social order. As the narrative stresses, Minnie Cooper's reaction to the racially explosive rumor surrounding her and Will Mays is based on her sense of inadequacy in relation to gender and class assumptions dominant in Jefferson. Minnie is depicted in many respects as the stereotypical "old maid," a woman whose life corresponds to the extended dry spell affecting the environment of the story. The narrator defines Minnie's diminishment explicitly in terms of her waning sexuality and her declining social status. Reared among "comfortable people," a youthful Minnie was able to exchange her "nervous body" and "hard vivacity" for the opportunity "to ride upon the crest of the town's social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious" (CS 174). But this period ended with Minnie's cruel initiation into class consciousness, which registered, according to the narrator, in terms of a bodily transformation: "That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look" (CS 174). Now Minnie is left to fill her "empty and idle days" with fantasy, inspired by repeated visits to the movie theatre in an attempt to forget that "men did not even follow her with their eyes anymore" (CS 175).

From the narrator's point of view, Minnie's refusal to deny the rumor Will Mays is an attempt to assert herself to the community as a viable object of sexual desire and to reclaim some form of social distinction, albeit a dubious form at best. Given the nature of the accusation, it is not surprising that the prelude to the lynching conveys the power of mob mentality with unmistakable sexual overtones. Crowded in the car with Will Mays in tow, the mob experiences a sort of performance anxiety in anticipation of the

lynching: "Where their bodies touched one another they seemed to sweat dryly, for no more moisture came" (CS 177). What is at first a "stumbling clump" (CS 177) soon evolves into an orgy of violence. Even Hawkshaw succumbs to the frenzied attack on Will Mays, for we learn that "the barber struck him also" (CS 178). The sexually charged energy invoked by the lynching extends as well to Minnie, inspiring in her the desired effect of awakening:

As she dressed for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. (CS 180)

In addition to the internal transformation, the lynching also enables Minnie to attract once again the attention of the men in town. As Minnie sashays down the sidewalk in her new dress toward the movie theatre, "even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed" (CS 181). But Minnie is ill-prepared for the power of this transformation accomplished through violence and thus spirals into an inexplicable and hysterical laughter that releases the full volume of her awakened sexual energy. McLendon's energy, too, is spent by the lynching—a condition that extends the sexual reference to its logical conclusion. Having returned home from the lynching, McLendon sweats profusely, wiping his naked torso with his shirt and "panting" (CS 183), as if in the aftermath of an intense sexual encounter.

Significantly, Faulkner resists a graphic depiction of the lynching, leaving the reader instead to conjure images of the violence exacted on Will Mays by McLendon and

his mob. The aesthetic choice to render a diegetic lynching shifts the emphasis from the victim to Hawkshaw, whose pronounced limp punctuates his impotence in relation to the lynch mob led by the potent McLendon. Although the text indicates that Hawkshaw "reached the highroad" (CS 179) after jumping from the car, it is clear that he has done so only in literal terms. Hawkshaw's complicity, though not total, strips him of the moral authority he displays at the beginning of the story. The absence of such authority leaves a void, which is signified in terms of silence and darkness in the final lines of the story: "There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars" (CS 183). The aesthetic effect here draws attention to the lack of public authority that enables the reign of vigilante justice to go largely unchecked and to extend perhaps beyond the events of the narrative. In terms of the social order represented in the story, this void is left in large measure by a nascent dominant class—a condition reinforced formally and ideologically through point of view. The explanation of Minnie's reaction to the rumor about her and Will Mays, for instance, is clearly based on gender and class assumptions that expose the narrator's complicity in a patriarchal social order. However, like Horace Benbow, the narrator remains distant from the action, interpreting—and likely misinterpreting—events in retrospect rather than altering them in actuality. One implication here is that the condition of a nascent dominant class is inherently volatile and highly conducive to the mob mentality and violence on display in the text. "Dry September" thus parallels *They Won't Forget* in contemplating the social nightmare of mob rule produced in a vacuum of dominant-class authority.

Representations of mob violence in *Sanctuary* and in “Dry September”

demonstrate Faulkner's indirect engagement of the discourse around fascism primarily through thematic association. *Light in August*, however, constitutes a much more explicit treatment of fascism and further indicates Faulkner's use of lynching to represent and negotiate the politics of social upheaval.¹⁵ Published in 1932, *Light in August* features one of the most graphic depictions of violence in all of Faulkner's fiction—the lynching of Joe Christmas at the hands of Percy Grimm. A militant nationalist, Grimm materializes seemingly out of nowhere to perform this swift and brutal act of vigilantism and then disappears once his mission is accomplished. From a formal standpoint, Percy Grimm's addition to an already crowded cast of characters seems curious. On the one hand, his brief yet explosive appearance might be read as yet another in a series of disruptions that propel the narrative in fits and starts to its conclusion; on the other hand, it might be viewed as Faulkner's frustrated response to an unwieldy narrative that resists definitive conclusion. However, Percy Grimm makes much more sense as a character when considered in relation to the discourse around fascism developing in the cultural context of the novel. Casting Grimm as an inevitable product of the social disruption depicted in the text, Faulkner's novel anticipates representations in the cultural context that would compel Americans to consider fascism as a domestic possibility rather than an international phenomenon.

In moving toward an explicit treatment of fascism through Percy Grimm, *Light in August* carries forward the frantic concern over social order reflected in *Sanctuary*, registering this concern similarly in the portrayal of key characters. As in *Sanctuary*, major characters in *Light in August* can be viewed as embodiments of disorder whose

internal conflicts both reflect and affect the destabilized social order they occupy. Lena Grove's disruptive contribution comes mainly in terms of her unorthodox approach to motherhood—particularly her inability to name the father of her child and her reluctance to name the child after he is born. Both of these deferrals challenge the conventions of a patriarchal order invested in naming and lineage as indicators of stability. Aptly named, Joanna Burden adds the weight of historical conflict to a narrative obsessed with the workings of memory—especially the uneasy and often turbulent coexistence of past and present, a raw theme in *Light in August* that gains refinement in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Home to Joanna, the Burden estate is a historical site of social conflict. The community and the estate have been forever at odds, "the descendants of both in their relationship to one another ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear" (*LA* 42). Ironically, though, it is the spilling of Joanna's blood that inspires a reconciliation of sorts, at least from the standpoint of the community. With the Burden estate in flames and Joanna nearly decapitated, the community can essentially redefine her in its own terms as a violated white woman; thus she becomes a powerful symbol of social disruption and the urgent need for restored order. In the eyes of the community, Joe Christmas figures as the agent of this disruption, destabilizing the social order with the conflict over his racial identity. In the transformation from internal to external conflict, Joe's racial uncertainty presents an irreconcilable contradiction for a social order largely dependent upon the black/white racial binary for its structural integrity. Betraying the relation of this contradiction to Joe's fate, the communal voice representing Mottstown explains, "He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad" (*LA* 331).¹⁶

One of the immediate dangers of social disruption, as *Sanctuary* makes clear, is that it fosters mob mentality. *Light in August* is even more methodical than its predecessor in tracing and, indeed, retracing this powerful social force as it proceeds through narrative progressions, regressions, and digressions toward the inevitable violence carried out by Percy Grimm in the zeal of vigilantism. Once again, mob mentality is distinctly associated with the lower ranks and marginalized sectors of the social order. Accordingly, among the crowd gathered at the Burden estate to watch the flames are "the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north" (*LA* 271). From the narrator's point of view, these onlookers seem prehistoric, staring at the fire "with that same dull and static amaze which they had brought down from the old fetid caves where knowing began, as though, like death, they had never seen fire before" (*LA* 272). Motivated apparently by primeval instinct, they "canvass about for someone to crucify," acting on the belief that Joanna's burning body "cried out for vengeance" (*LA* 272, 273). Similar in form, the mob that takes shape in Mottstown after the initial apprehension of Joe Christmas is heralded by Doc Hines—a vocal, if not respected, advocate of lynching the convict. Situating the Hineses in the social order, the narrator explains that they "appeared to live in filthy poverty and complete idleness, Hines, as far as the town knew, not having done any work, steady work, in twentyfive years" (*LA* 322). With Hines relegated to its margins, the mob is nevertheless composed specifically from the middle and lower echelons of the social order: "the merchants, the clerks, the idle, and the curious, with countrymen in overalls predominating" (*LA* 326). Despite the appeal from the Mottstown sheriff to "respect the law" (*LA* 335), it is clear from Hightower's subsequent ruminations, which

are inspired by the distant church music he hears through his window, that the mob will inevitably rule: "Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence [. . .] the violence identical and apparently inescapable And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?" (LA 347).

In the end, of course, it is not religion per se but rather the quasi-religious fervor of nationalism that inspires what Hightower insists on deeming a "crucifixion" but what is to the mob clearly a lynching. The lynching takes place in chapter 19, a crucial section of the novel that introduces two new characters surprisingly late in the game—Grimm, as mentioned above, but also Gavin Stevens, Jefferson's district attorney. Stevens shares much in common with Horace Benbow: as a lawyer-gentleman, Stevens occupies the same stratum of the social order as Benbow. Even though Stevens is much more adept at mingling with the masses on the town square, he exhibits the same tendency as Benbow to apply a conceptual point of view to pressing events of the day. The sequence in which Stevens ruminates on the yin-yang nature of Joe Christmas's black and white blood is a case in point. From a passive and remote stance, Gavin Stevens is content to interpret events, while Percy Grimm means to alter them through decisive action. This juxtaposition of interpretation and action is reinforced by an abrupt formal transition in the chapter from Stevens to Grimm that reflects the shifting dynamic of power in the social order. From both a textual and social standpoint, then, it is the absence of Stevens that enables the presence of Grimm and the vigilantism he inspires and manipulates.

Although Grimm seems to spring *ex nihilo* from the text, his relationship to impending developments in the cultural context is rife with revealing connections. The representation of Percy Grimm suggests that Faulkner was at the cusp of a movement to

explore through various forms of cultural expression the potential rise of an organic fascism in America. Again, film offers a particularly instructive means of illuminating an important aspect of Faulkner's work by contextual light. Within a year of *Light in August's* publication, Hollywood released two films that translated the international rise of fascism into national terms. First, *Mussolini Speaks* (1933), produced by Columbia Pictures and featuring the then familiar narrative voice of Lowell Thomas, offered Americans a noticeably favorable view of Mussolini's fascist program in Italy. Referencing the economic crisis in America, the film documents the three stages of Mussolini's response to what Thomas calls a "similar" crisis in Italy: (1) restoration of order to society; (2) renewed economic prosperity and modernization; and (3) militaristic expansion inspired by appeals to racial purity and national identity. One segment of the film features a re-enactment of the march on the Italian Parliament by Mussolini's brigade of uniformed Black Shirts. At the end of the film, the staying power of this force is suggested by shots of para-military camps filled with loyal Italian youth training for future service as Black Shirts. The tone of the film is laudatory, casting Mussolini in a favorable light as a strong, effective leader and a model worthy of emulation in America.

More explicit than *Mussolini Speaks*, *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) dramatizes the evolution of Judson C. Hammond, President of the United States, from a democratic leader into a fascist-style dictator. Produced by William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Studios, the film was transparent in its attempt to endorse the need for consolidating power in the hands of a strong leader in response to socioeconomic crisis. However, much like fascist political systems, the film spirals inevitably toward violence in its frenzied celebration of power. At one point, the Green Jackets, a deputized legion

of zealous para-military agents, rounds up a large group of gangsters whose immigrant roots are made clear; the legion executes them on Ellis Island against a silhouette conspicuously featuring the Statue of Liberty. Operating under the assumption that desperate times require desperate measures, these films transformed the proto-fascist fantasies inscribed in the gangster films into explicitly political forms that imagined a homegrown American fascism emerging from fields made barren by uninspired and ineffectual leadership.

By the time these films prompted large audiences to contemplate the potential rise of fascism in America, Faulkner had already offered something of a sneak preview in the form of Percy Grimm's limited engagement. Grimm's nationalism is, of course, a major factor that aligns him with fascism. The provincial setting of the novel undergoes a rapid expansion in scope fueled by Grimm's expression of national identity, which is informed by notions of racial superiority. The description of Grimm's philosophy captures what would likely be the essence of an organic American fascism. As the narrator explains, the loyalty that Grimm holds for his concept of nation is

as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass: a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life. (*LA* 427)

Although Grimm sets out to "preserve order" (*LA* 427) in response to the impending threat of mob violence, it is he and his band of para-military special deputies clad in khaki shirts who advance mob mentality. Betraying his undemocratic inclination, Grimm dismisses the will of the people with the firm statement that "there won't be any need for

them even to talk” (LA 427) and asserts the prerogative of his soldiers to impose a sort of martial law. In this move, Grimm looks forward to *Gabriel’s* President Hammond who dispenses with the inconvenience of pluralism by dissolving the Congress and imposing his own rule by threat of military action.

Despite Grimm’s lack of respect for the *vox populi*, he commands a substantial following based on that intangible and mysterious charisma essential to powerful fascist leaders. It was this style of leadership, for instance, that led many to brand Huey Long a fascist. As Yoknapatawpha’s answer to Il Duce, Grimm is able to broaden his appeal, because

without knowing they were thinking it, the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion had been quicker and truer than theirs. (LA 432)

True to the form of fascism, though, any sense of common purpose is consumed by the egotism of the leader. The pursuit of Joe Christmas by Grimm and his militia/mob quickly evolves, then, into a violent display of Grimm’s individual lust for power. Unsatisfied with Joe’s death at the hands of an impromptu firing squad, Grimm is compelled to perform castration—an exclamation point to the lynching so gruesome that even his faithful followers cannot bear to watch the spectacle.

Robyn Wiegman discusses the social significance of castration as part of the lynching ritual:

In severing the black man’s penis from his body, either as a narrative account or a material act, the mob aggressively denies the patriarchal sign and symbol of the masculine, interrupting the privilege of the phallus and thereby reclaiming, through the perversity of dismemberment, the black male’s (masculine) potentiality for citizenship. (83)

The nature of Joe's "blackness" remains, of course, the source of much critical debate. Joe represents the unimaginable for Grimm, steeped as he is in the ideology of national and racial purity essential to fascism. For this reason, Grimm is compelled by ideology to erase Joe's existence from the social order through the ritual of lynching as public spectacle. The sexualized component of Grimm's action exposes the magnitude of his lust for power and thus establishes him further as a harbinger of organic fascism.

When asked about Percy Grimm many years after the publication of *Light in August*, Faulkner seemed to marvel at his own prescience, insisting that "I wrote that book in 1932 before I'd ever heard of Hitler's Storm Troopers, what he [Grimm] was was a Nazi Storm Trooper, but then I'd never heard of one then" (Blotner and Gwynn 41). Whether or not Faulkner knew of Nazis in particular, the depiction of Percy Grimm suggests that he was familiar enough with the discourse around fascism to manage a palpable literary representation of how fascism might surface on the American political landscape. It is important to stress that Faulkner's exploration of fascism through the character of Percy Grimm differs from those in *Mussolini Speaks* and *Gabriel Over the White House* in that it occurs as part of a far more complex work. Moreover, far from celebrating Grimm, Faulkner fashions him as the culmination of multiple forces that converge in the murder of Joanna Burden and the brutal lynching of Joe Christmas as indicators of social disruption and urgent reminders of the need for restored order. Informed by dominant-class anxiety, Faulkner's representation of Percy Grimm is useful in revealing the discourse around fascism as a means of negotiating the politics of social upheaval rather than of achieving the transformation of America's social and political system into a fascist regime.

Although the Percy Grimm section of *Light in August* shares many aesthetic features in common with *Mussolini Speaks* and *Gabriel Over the White House*, its ideological milieu is more consistent with that of such films as *This Day and Age* and *Wild Boys of the Road*. These films projected the chaos of mob rule, tempered in the end by a return to established order as the only viable alternative. This pattern occurs in *Light in August* as well, as the chaotic narrative structure and the horror of Percy Grimm give way in the end to the light-hearted tale recounted by the Tennessee traveling salesman. The familiar form evokes the style of Southwestern humor and suggests in its heightened comfort level an attempt at aesthetic containment similar to the one enabled by the mode of naturalism in the concluding section of *Sanctuary*. Despite this sudden shift in tone and form, the perspective afforded by 1932 must have rendered Percy Grimm and the organic fascism he inspires a timely and perhaps inevitable force to be reckoned with. That was still the case in the mid-thirties when Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* and brought to life Thomas Sutpen to strike the pose of the “great dictator” just as Popular Front anti-fascism evolved into a powerful cultural formation.

* * *

In February of 1936, eight months prior to the publication of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, the American Artists' Congress convened in New York City to pledge opposition to the spread of fascism abroad and at home. The organization was inspired in large measure by the American Writers' Congress, which had met in the previous year with the struggle against fascism topping its agenda as well. The considerable energy

that artists devoted to the cause of anti-fascism stemmed from a fundamental belief expressed cogently by Lewis Mumford in his stirring address to the Artists' Congress: "The irrepressible impulse of Art may upset the whole Fascist program" (64). The unity of artists on display in the congresses and the numerous other organizations devoted to the cause of anti-fascism lent credence to Benjamin's conclusion that the fascist program to fuse aesthetics and politics would encourage the politicization of art (681). This cultural enterprise was advanced mainly under the auspices of the Popular Front.

Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams point out that

for the strategists of the Popular Front the central issue was the choice between war and fascism on the one hand, peace and democracy on the other. They chose to emphasize the fight against fascism rather than the fight against capitalism. (5)

With the less doctrinaire approach of the Popular Front, the left sought to construct a broad alliance against an enemy manifested in the menacing forms of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco—the “great dictator” figures who were strutting and fretting their hour upon the international stage. For this reason, the rigid categories professed in, for instance, the Literary Class War loosened in response to the tangible and immediate threat of fascism. Artists of various aesthetic and ideological inclinations were thus recruited for the cause, and many responded to the call through art and activism.

By the mid-thirties, with fascism on the march and the Popular Front mobilized in response, forms of cultural expression had generally reconciled the ambivalence evident in *Gabriel Over the White House* and *Mussolini Speaks*. While representations of fascist-style figures still exhibited and attracted fear and fascination, the dominant culture could scarcely tolerate the portrayal of a “great dictator” successfully achieving power

by design, except as rising action preceding a certain demise. Still, as Denning comments, "the tale of the 'great dictator' haunted the Popular Front imagination," evidenced by works such as Peter Blume's surrealist painting *The Eternal City* (1937), which features Mussolini's head springing from a classical vista, and Charlie Chaplin's classic 1940 film *The Great Dictator* (376). In American culture, the Popular Front imagination tended to translate fascism into American terms. Accordingly, "great dictator" figures tended to bear familiar traits associated with industrialist "robber barons" or racist and nationalist demagogues—a representational tactic that consolidated the natural enemies of the left.

One of the artists most exemplary of this technique was Orson Welles, who emerged in the latter half of the thirties as a major force in the culture. From then until the late fifties, Welles engaged, reflected, and influenced the discourse around fascism. The result, as Denning explains, was that Welles's most prolific and provocative mode of narrative was the allegory of anti-fascism centered on the figure of the "great dictator." As Welles's work demonstrates, the allegory of anti-fascism incorporated myths of American capitalism and internalized anxieties over race and class associated with the politics of social upheaval. In the Depression era, Welles's use of this form extended roughly from the Mercury Theater production of *Julius Caesar* in 1937 to the release of *Citizen Kane* in 1941 and found expression in various cultural forms. Consequently, Welles's work from this period exhibits key aesthetic and ideological features of the anti-fascist allegory.

Many of these features are present in Faulkner's *Absalom*, specifically in the account of Thomas Sutpen and his design on power, which results in the rise and fall of

Sutpen's Hundred. In my view, Sutpen fits the mold of the "great dictator," and his story fits the mold of the anti-fascist allegory. In aesthetic terms, then, Sutpen's story shares much in common with those that Welles would produce, even though the ideological and political implications are at times divergent.

Such an interpretation rests on the now commonplace assertion that *Absalom* is a novel concerned first and foremost with history. Indeed, *Absalom*'s complex narrative structure is in many ways an exploration of how we construct history and how history constructs us by "always reminding us never to forget" (AA 289), Shreve says. In this respect, *Absalom* is a novel concerned with history as a life force driven by the dialectical relationship between past and present. Although *Absalom* is a novel about history, it is not a historical novel—at least in the sense that Georg Lukàcs defines the genre. Lukàcs has taught us that setting alone does not confer upon a text the status of authentic historical novel; on the contrary, many so-called historical novels reveal substantially less about the past than they do about the present. Such novels, in effect, stage contemporary concerns with the trappings of history serving, in effect, as props.¹⁷ To some degree, *Absalom* falls into this category, as the story of Sutpen—Faulkner's "great dictator"—internalizes, represents, and indeed re-presents Depression-era anxieties and social desires active in the discourse around fascism and, more specifically, in the form of the allegory of anti-fascism.

Sutpen mirrors the "great dictator" figure first and foremost in terms of the enigmatic aura that renders him a source of fear and fascination from the moment he arrives in Jefferson. The first reference to him in the novel captures the charisma that will aid his design on power and make him a constant source of awe, intrigue, and

animosity even some forty years after his death when his story again comes to life.

Sutpen emerges in a visual image that evokes the arrival of a god in ancient mythology:

"Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize watercolor" (AA 4). In an image that calls to mind Blume's painting of Mussolini, Faulkner creates a juxtaposition here between figure and landscape that establishes Sutpen as a force of disruption, capable of altering the social canvas dramatically. And Sutpen exercises this capability immediately, with his arrival causing a ripple effect in a community at first mesmerized by his magical quality. Soon after Sutpen's emergence on the scene, "the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen*" (AA 24).

Like Welles's "great dictator" figures, Sutpen wields influence through sheer power rather than thoughtful persuasion. So the townspeople "thought of ruthlessness rather than justice and of fear rather than respect, but not of pity or love" in relation to Sutpen (AA 32). As Rosa Coldfield discloses, albeit with considerable bias, there was certainly no love lost between Sutpen and the community when he marched into town to marry her sister Ellen and thus to stake a claim on legitimacy in the social order. Faced with this intrusion, the community views Sutpen as "a public enemy" (AA 33). Even as they seek to incarcerate him, though, the community is clearly under the Sutpen spell. Taking to the streets behind Sutpen, proudly clad in his familiar frock coat and beaver hat, the townspeople form a procession which ironically evokes the pied-piper mentality of a fascist parade. Despite the animosity, the show of resilience on Sutpen's part gains him a certain amount of legitimacy, which is conferred symbolically by the bond that

General Compson and Mr. Coldfield post on his behalf. Sutpen is thus free to marry Ellen, to further his design on power, and to secure a position in the social order with the construction of Sutpen's Hundred. Mr. Compson explains to Quentin the pleasure that Sutpen derived from his standing once his design had reached its apex: "He was not liked (which he evidently did not want anyway) but feared, which seemed to amuse, if not actually please, him" (*AA* 57).

At this point in the novel, it is not too difficult to imagine Sutpen as a compatriot of Welles's Charles Foster Kane. Both men are ruthless yet charismatic figures driven by the will to power toward an imperial vision that leads them toward isolation and despair. Indeed, the parallels between Sutpen's Hundred and Kane's Xanadu are numerous. Both visions betray their bearers as "great dictator" figures by exposing what we might call a fetish of infrastructure, which is informed by aesthetic and ideological influences. As Hitler and Mussolini demonstrated, an initial phase of the fascist program was to impress upon the people a sense of restored order through the restoration and advancement of roads, bridges, and buildings. While such projects brought material improvements, they also provided structural support to the dictator's design on power by providing aesthetic and ideological reinforcements of the political program underway. For Sutpen, the fetish of infrastructure fixes on the large mansion he wants to construct as a display of his wealth and power and an added instrument of the mystique he cultivates. The construction of the mansion is a vast project, taking more than two years to complete and attracting all the while a steady stream of onlookers intrigued by Sutpen's design. This design is so grand that the French architect must temper the "grim and castlelike

magnificence at which Sutpen obviously aimed, since the place as Sutpen planned it would have been almost as large as Jefferson itself at the time" (AA 29).

Although Sutpen's Hundred may not rival Jefferson in size, the estate and its proprietor do become significant determinants of social order. Even before his rise to power, Sutpen affects the conflict between stability and social unrest in Jefferson. After all, it is Sutpen's presence that inspires the "vigilance committee" to mob action and his defiance that forces the mob to disperse "like rats, scattered, departed about the country" (AA 44). However, by transforming the potential chaos of mob action into a progressive force to further his design on power, Sutpen demonstrates his ability to achieve and his potential to maintain order. For the community, this capability is most apparent in Sutpen's relationship with his band of Haitian slaves. Repeatedly cast as a menacing threat, these slaves seem predisposed by nature to wreak havoc, at least as far as the community is concerned. This pattern is established when they are introduced in the novel as a "band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men" who arrive on the scene "carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest" (AA 4). Presumably this element of peace stems from Sutpen's proven ability to control the "wild" men in his charge and from the fear that he could unleash the "wild" men if he chose.

In the tradition of the "great dictator," Sutpen accomplishes a controlling authority over his slaves in organic fashion by ritualistically joining their ranks in order to demonstrate the wide range of his power. For instance, he shares in the back-breaking work to carve Sutpen's Hundred out of the thick forest; the master and his slaves become caked with mud that obscures boundaries constructed from assumptions based on racial

difference and division of labor. Yet, as Sutpen's wrestling match with one of the slaves demonstrates, his purposeful descent is less a show of solidarity than a means of consolidating and reinforcing his standing as a powerful master. Rosa Coldfield explains: "It seems that on certain occasions, perhaps at the end of the evening, the spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself" (AA 21). In effect, Sutpen stages the wrestling matches to replay the conflict that first established him as a master of Haitian slaves and thus to reaffirm his position of dominance.

Although the details of Sutpen's personal history prior to his arrival in Yoknapatawpha are sketchy at best, Quentin does tell Shreve a story handed down to him from General Compson and Mr. Compson about Sutpen's experiences on a sugar cane plantation during a slave revolt. With Sutpen, the plantation owner, and his family barricaded in the main house, Quentin narrates, a mob of slaves formed outside preparing to take action. But Sutpen "just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them" (AA 205). Quentin explains that Sutpen even showed the scars from the violent incident to General Compson as proof of his feat. Inscribed with this reference to the Haitian slave revolt, Sutpen's allure as a strong leader capable of maintaining order is amplified. In conjunction with the wrestling bouts, the self-inspired legend of Sutpen's heroism in Haiti strengthens his hand in the community, positioning him as a force of restraint between the "wild" band of slaves and the citizens of Jefferson frightened by their presence in the community.

Faulkner's representation of *Haitian* slaves is relevant both to the historical setting of Sutpen's story and to the interpretation of it as an allegory of anti-fascism. In the pre-Civil War era, which frames much of Sutpen's story, Haiti was a palpable symbol with dual meaning: for the dominant culture in the South, it was a reminder of the potential for insurrection and violent retribution; for slaves and abolitionists, it served as a source of inspiration in the fight for freedom. Noting the influence of the Haitian slave rebellion on insurrections in America, Kevin Railey points out that Sutpen's arrival in Yoknapatawpha, in 1833, roughly coincides with the 1831 slave rebellion in Virginia led by Nat Turner. For Railey, the fear of Sutpen and the willingness on the part of community leaders to accommodate him stem from the "many historical precedents for the possibility of those like Sutpen leading a band of men, both white and black, against the citizens of Jefferson" (136). In a regional context, this historical connection lends much insight into Faulkner's invocation of Haiti in *Absalom*.

But there are broader implications related to the cultural context of the novel that should be considered as well. In particular, the Popular Front's insistence on linking fascism and racism contributed to the ongoing resonance of the Haitian rebellion as a cultural narrative in America. The Haitian slave rebellion was transformed by African-American activists into a metaphor for resistance to institutional forms of prejudice and to lynching. In 1936, Orson Welles staged a Negro Theatre production of *MacBeth* in Harlem; the change in setting from Scotland to Haiti in the years following the rebellion rendered the play one of his earliest explorations of power and race, which were essential components of the discourse around fascism.¹⁸ In the anxious thirties, Denning observes, "the story of Haiti's black Jacobins was one of the few narratives in American

popular culture that allowed the representation of black insurrection” (397). In the cultural context of *Absalom*, then, the Haitian association would make Sutpen less a sign of insurrection than a strong leader able to prevent insurrection through sheer power.

The references to Haiti in the text expose a bifurcated system of influence informed by the historical setting of Sutpen's story and by the cultural context encompassing the novel's production and initial reception. This system is even more vividly on display in the parts of the Sutpen saga set during the Civil War. The war takes a heavy toll on Sutpen's Hundred, bringing hard times after a period of rapid expansion. But Rosa explains that she, Judith, and Clytie countered despair with hopeful thoughts of Sutpen's eventual homecoming, "*knowing that he would need us, knowing as we did (who knew him) that he would begin at once to salvage what was left of Sutpen's Hundred and restore it*" (AA 124). Rosa confirms to Quentin the fulfillment of her prediction upon Sutpen's return: "*We were right about what he would intend to do: that he would not even pause for breath before undertaking to restore his house and plantation as near as possible to what it had been*" (AA 129). That Sutpen becomes a vibrant symbol of restoration and renewal in a period of devastating crisis has relevance not only to the Civil War setting in the novel but also to the Depression and particularly to the discourse around fascism.¹⁹ The desire for Sutpen's strong leadership further casts him in the mold of the "great dictator" figure able to reconstruct order from the detritus of catastrophe—an essential component of the fascist mystique and of the anti-fascist allegory.

Sutpen's return, however, is far from triumphant. The internal and familial conflicts, which come into relief against the historical backdrop of war, set in motion

Sutpen's downfall and the ultimate failure of his design on power. Denning contends that the demise of Welles's Charles Foster Kane begins with "the loss of his magic" (390)—the mysterious aura that attracts fear, fascination, and, to some degree, sympathy for the devil. The loss of Sutpen's "magic" stems primarily from the intrusion of the past on the present—in particular the element of miscegenation that challenges the ideological underpinnings of Sutpen's design. As we have seen, much of the Sutpen mystique derives from displays of power that blur the boundaries between master and slave only to delineate them with increased clarity and force in the end. Yet Sutpen cannot obscure the inherent paradox between the ideology of racial purity that girds his dominance and the actuality of miscegenation that informs his history and determines his ironic legacy. In describing this legacy, Shreve enumerates the deaths that expand Sutpen's story to tragic proportions, articulating an economy of race in which "it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen" with a significant yet elusive remainder:

You've got one nigger left. One nigger Sutpen left. Of course you cant catch him and you dont always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you've got him there still. You still hear him sometimes. Dont you? (AA 302)

The howling figure of Jim Bond offers emphatic punctuation to the failure of Sutpen's design. Bond represents the blurring of a color line that Sutpen sought to maintain in theory, if not in practice, as a means of preserving his power. By the same token, Bond haunts the Jefferson social order, because he undermines the ideology of racial purity on which it relies for structural integrity.

The relevance of Faulkner's emphasis on miscegenation extends beyond the confines of the social system represented in the text. At a time when the eugenics

movement was in flourish and lending substantial influence to the early stages of Hitler's "final solution," Sutpen's failure as a "great dictator" figure challenged theories of racial purity and white supremacy essential to the aesthetic and ideological components of fascism. From this perspective, Sutpen's story reads as an allegory of anti-fascism every bit as attuned to its historical and cultural moment as those offered by Welles and others more conspicuously aligned with the Popular Front's anti-fascist crusade. It is most fitting, then, that three years after the publication of *Absalom*, Faulkner offered to donate the manuscript to raise funds for the Loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War. Faulkner made the offer in a letter to Vincent Sheean and agreed to sign a statement of support to be issued by the League of American Writers on the issue of the Spanish conflict. In the letter, Faulkner wrote: "I most sincerely wish to go on record as being unalterably opposed to Franco and fascism, to all violations of the legal government and outrages against the people of Republican Spain" (qtd. in Blotner 2: 1030). This pledge of solidarity was worthy of the most ardent Popular Front advocate. Furthermore, it indicates his sense of urgency with regard to the fascist threat and establishes that, while not a delegate or member, he had probably known about the League of American Writers from its inception in 1935.

While *Absalom*'s exploration of history and power offers glimpses of a more progressive Faulkner with respect to race, the novel nevertheless still retains the sense of dominant-class anxiety informing earlier representations of fascist themes. We have already noted the tendency in Faulkner's work and in other forms of cultural expression to blend fascist themes with elements of class conflict active in the contemporary politics of social upheaval. The story of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom* is certainly no exception.

While we may read Sutpen's story as an anti-fascist allegory aligning Faulkner with a fundamental cultural enterprise of the Popular Front, we must also take into account class assumptions inscribed in the form of the text that limit the novel's progressive social vision.

Although *Absalom* is for the most part the story of Thomas Sutpen, it is not, after all, Sutpen's story. What we learn of Sutpen, we must glean from multiple—and sometimes competing—points of view. Sutpen is thus entirely a creature of narrative who springs to life "out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking" (AA 243) or, more specifically, out of the oral machinations of the narrator, Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve. For all the power Sutpen amasses in the social order of Jefferson, we must remember that he wields very little in the narrative structure of the text. Sutpen never speaks for himself, and so we are left only with the words of those who speak for him; in effect, these accounts are all we can really *know* of Sutpen. Gauging the ideology of the aesthetic, we can see that this elaborate narrative framework surrounding and defining Sutpen is constructed mainly from a perspective that reinforces a sense of social order as defined by the dominant class. For this reason, the logic encompassing all points of view assumes that Sutpen's insatiable drive to accomplish his design must stem from his desire to rise from humble origins.

The birthplace of this desire is the Tidewater plantation, where Sutpen is shown the backdoor by a planter's house slave and thus given a harsh lesson in the ways of social distinction. Prior to this incident, Quentin imagines, Sutpen had no clear sense of class divisions; he assumed ownership and wealth to be arbitrary rewards. Quentin explains further that "it never occurred to [Sutpen] that any man should take any such

blind accident as that [wealth] as authority or warrant to look down at others, any others. So he had hardly heard of such a world until he fell into it" (AA 180). As Richard C. Moreland explains, the slight Sutpen receives at the Tidewater plantation functions as a primal scene of class consciousness and awakens in him a furious determination to seek power through conflict (8-12). Quentin supplies Sutpen with an analogy that raises the specter of class warfare in reference to the Tidewater planter and his kind. Speaking to his father, the young Sutpen says:

If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn't it? [. . .] But this aint a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see? (AA 192)

This element of class conflict lends a cautionary element to Sutpen's story as told by the cadre of narrators. Subject to the limitations of the form, Sutpen's actions and motivations are defined strictly in terms of a dominant social system that either absorbs, reveres, or repels him, depending upon his ability to reflect its codes and values on a grand scale. The form of the text thus ensures that there is no alternative to this system and no space beyond the aesthetic containment for Sutpen to construct his own story.

From a structural standpoint, the story of Thomas Sutpen is to *Absalom* what the discourse around fascism was to the broad cultural narrative of social unrest in the thirties: a means of mediating disruptions in social order under the safety of aesthetic containment. Cultural production and the politics of social upheaval converged in the discourse around fascism, creating a set of visual and textual terms for representing power by design in artistic form as a means of negotiating the deployment of power at a

time of national crisis. Faulkner was fluent in this language, speaking in a timely manner to concerns that raised the specter of fascism in America. While Faulkner could adopt more than one voice in this ongoing conversation, the accent remained for the most part consistent. And it was formed in large measure by dominant-class anxieties that enabled Faulkner to comprehend the force of class disruption and to imagine, if not always to sanction, the sort of fundamental social transformation it could inspire. In many ways a product of the Depression, Faulkner's literary production was thus immanently responsive to the overarching conflict between order and upheaval. This conflict was especially intense in rural America, where social and economic despair fanned the flames of unrest and prompted many, including Faulkner, to consider the prospect of an agrarian revolution.

End Notes

¹ I have specific works in mind here: Paul Morrison, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Paul de Man*, and Frederic Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*.

² For the most part, conventional wisdom in Faulkner studies has held that Faulkner's knowledge of film and the film industry left much to be desired. Accounts of Faulkner's Hollywood experiences cast him generally as a stranger in a strange land—a perception bolstered by anecdotal evidence such as Faulkner's famous exchange with Clark Gable (Blotner 1: 751). Such accounts inform and are informed by the notion of Faulkner as a solitary artist removed from immediate concerns in the interest of creating a "pure" and "high" art, unless financial necessity forced him to channel in the "low" art of film. Whether Faulkner saw a lot of films or knew much about film per se, *Sanctuary* suggests that he clearly had the capability to tap into popular trends such as the gangster craze and fashion stories with potential for cinematic adaptation.

³ On a related note, Lawrence Hanley, in "Popular Culture in Crisis: King Kong Meets Edmund Wilson," reads Popeye as a character "who belongs to the popular fiction and film genres of the period that metaphorically equated America's urban working classes with crime and disorder" (257).

⁴ Guttman situates this dynamic in the context of social anxieties arising from industrialization in the South. For Guttman, the narrative of Temple's rape corresponds to a cultural narrative of Southern industrialization as articulated in the main by the Southern Agrarians who imagined a feminized South being "raped" by the force of Northern industry. See Patricia Yaeger, "Beyond the Hummingbird: Southern Women Writers and the Southern Gargantua," for a broader discussion of the gender ideology informing such narratives. See Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* 109-39, for further discussion of how this gender ideology informs Faulkner's work.

⁵ See, for example, André Bleikasten, "Terror and Nausea: Bodies in *Sanctuary*," and Kathleen M. Scheel, "Incest, Repression, and Repetition-Compulsion: The Case of Faulkner's Temple Drake."

⁶ In Foucault's view, as expressed in *Discipline and Punish*, the Panopticon is a device of social control emergent when the modern penal system took shape in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. Though initially a feature of the prison system, the Panopticon eventually extended outward through forms of social control exerted in the construction of what Foucault calls "the disciplinary society" (209). The result: society becomes the Panopticon. Jay Watson applies panoptical social theory comprehensively to Popeye's control over the Frenchman's Bend bootlegging operation and the Memphis underworld as well as his disruption of law and order in Jefferson. Watson's reading relates well, I think, to my interpretation of Popeye with respect to the proto-fascist outlaws in the rash of gangster films.

⁷ Categorizing a genre closely related to the gangster films, Bergman cites a cycle of films appearing in 1932 and featuring graft and corruption in the city. More specifically, he categorizes a sub-genre featuring "shyster lawyers and shyster politicians" (23). In depicting Eustace Graham, then, Faulkner anticipates the key thematic device of *Lawyer Man* and *The Mouthpiece*, and in depicting Senator Snopes, he likewise anticipates *The Dark Horse*, *The Phantom President*, and *Washington Masquerade*. See Bergman 23-29.

⁸ The contextual framework of my reading corresponds to Sundquist's: "*Sanctuary* is less dependent on Faulkner's native Southern traditions than his other major novels, and it engages more directly than any of them the violent realities of contemporary life, in this case the realities of a country poised at a point of passing from the Roaring Twenties to the Depression Thirties. It belongs emphatically to the genre of 'hard boiled' fiction of that period [. . .]" (45-46).

⁹ In the original text of *Sanctuary*, Faulkner represents this alliance more explicitly in terms of class distinction. Upon Temple's arrival at the courthouse, Horace experiences a revelation: "He realised now that it was too late, that he could not have summoned her; realised again that furious homogeneity of the middle classes when opposed to the proletariat from which it so recently sprung and by which it is so often

threatened" (SO 260). Kevin Railey convincingly asserts the usefulness of this original passage for comprehending the larger significance of Temple's perjury. For Railey, the earlier version helps to define the cooperation between Judge Drake and Eustace Graham, resulting in the perjured testimony, as representative of a shifting social formation—a consolidation of power between segments of the middle class that essentially excludes other classes. Horace's sense of abandonment in response to this shift leads Railey to conclude that "even though the Jefferson society in this book can be associated with the bourgeois, middle class, the novel's narrative perspective—Horace's perspective—has more to do with that of an aristocratic paternalist" (70). I find that the class-specific language in the original version illuminates a level of class anxiety not so specifically expressed in the revision but nevertheless active. What is particularly striking to me is the emphasis on collective mobilization that develops in the conclusion of the trial: "The room sighed [. . .]" and "the heads turned as one [. . .]" (S 286, 288). In the revised text, then, the narrative perspective conflates the crisis in the rule of law—or the decline of "civilization," as Horace would have it—and the unification of the middle and lower classes represented by the tacit agreement between Judge Drake and Eustace Graham and the consequent mobilization of the masses that it inspires.

¹⁰ It is worth noting here the symmetry between Goodwin's and Popeye's convictions. Both men are convicted for crimes they did not commit. And, in both cases, the jury deliberates for eight minutes. This symmetry lends further credence to my contention that the final section represents an attempt to restore order in response to the upheaval stemming from Goodwin's trial—an aesthetic endeavor that must be recognized, I reiterate, for its ideological nature and political implications.

¹¹ An illustration of the ideological function of the gangster's execution for those interested in maintaining the status quo can be found in the controversy over Howard Hawks's gangster film, *Scarface* (1932). In response to a viewing of the film, the New York censor board insisted that the gangster figure in the film be hanged according to the rule of law and that the title of the film be changed to *Shame of a Nation* (Bergman 14).

¹² Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck offer a historical perspective, referring to the five decades intervening the end of Reconstruction and the Great Depression as the "era of lynching" (17). During that period, Tolnay and Beck document, an estimated 2,462 African-American men, women, and children were lynched by mobs in the South. Although instances of lynching occurred prior to 1880, "radical racism and mob violence peaked during the 1890s in a surge of terrorism that did not dissipate until well into the twentieth century" (Tolnay and Beck 17). Lynching surfaced as a major source of concern in the thirties due to increases in documented cases in 1933 and in 1935. Drafted by NAACP lawyers, an antilynching bill was presented to Congress in 1934. FDR refused to lend public support to the bill for fear of alienating Southern lawmakers whose votes were needed for advancement of the New Deal. In 1935, a filibuster led by Southern lawmakers stalled the progress of the antilynching legislation (Schlesinger 436-38).

¹³ Graham's working-class roots are explained in detail. For instance, we learn "the town remembered him as driving wagons and trucks for grocery stores" and that he was a waiter in the commons (S 262). The recounting of Graham's biography casts him initially as a self-made man, rising up from his humble origins and gaining an allowable amount of respect: "He graduated well, though without distinction" (S 262). But the rhetoric of the self-made man is quickly undermined by the revelation that Graham's rise was supported in large measure by questionable poker tactics. The poker anecdote establishes Graham as a corrupt figure with little regard for rules and further establishes his *modus operandi* in counterpoint to Horace's.

¹⁴ In *Fury*, oddly enough, it is not only the incensed D.A. who champions this resurgence but also the victim. Having somehow escaped the jailhouse fire, a jaded Joe plots his vengeance for the now attempted lynching in compliance with the justice system: "They'll hang for it according to the law which says if you kill somebody, you gotta be killed yourself. [. . .] They'll get a legal sentence and a legal death." Giving new meaning to the concept of *habeas corpus*, Joe appears during the trial of 22 citizens indicted for the lynching. Thus a trial corrupted by ambitious reporters, evidence mailed anonymously from Joe to the D.A., numerous instances of perjury committed by the citizens, and a climactic swooning confession ends, in a variation on the sidebar, with a kiss between Joe and his fiancée, Katherine, in front of the Judge's bench. Though much less compelling, the ending of *Fury* hearkens back to the final section of *Sanctuary* by offering reassurances that the spirit of the law prevails, even as the letter of the law fails miserably.

¹⁵ Although my concern here is with Faulkner's fictional representations of lynching, I am compelled to call attention to a disturbing public pronouncement that Faulkner apparently made on the issue. In "Faulkner and Lynching," Neil R. McMillen and Noel Polk examine a letter to the editor of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* dated February 15, 1931 and signed "William Falkner." McMillen and Polk make a strong case for the authenticity of Faulkner's authorship of the letter, noting that "it is astonishing for the baldness of the racial attitudes it expresses, its virtual defense of lynching as an instrument of justice" (3). Indeed, the letter concludes on a perplexing note given what we have seen in Faulkner's approach to mob mentality and lynching in his fiction: "I hold no brief for lynching. No balanced man will deny that mob violence serves nothing, just as he will not deny that a lot of our natural and logical jurisprudence serves nothing either. It just happens that we—mobber and mobbee—live in this age. We will muddle through, and die in our beds, the deserving and the fortunate among us. Of course, with the population what it is, there are some of us that won't. Some will die rich, and some will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline, to make a holiday. But there is one curious thing about mobs. Like our juries, they have a way of being right" (qtd. in McMillen and Polk 6). One is hard pressed to attribute such expressions to the man who would sit down months later to write *Light in August* and who would later expose the hollow ignorance and brutality of mob rule in "Dry September." But Faulkner was in this regard

a product of the time, the personal and fictional voices entering into conflict over a profound social issue that was "anything but settled" (McMillen and Polk 13).

¹⁶ My concern here is less with the cause of social upheaval than with its violent effects and its resonance in the culture with respect to the discourse around fascism. For an interesting take on the relationship between race ideology and social upheaval in *Light in August*, see Railey 96-105. My reading of *Light in August* shares with Railey's the basic contention that the novel's central concern is a crisis in social order. Railey defines this crisis, though, within a Southern paradigm, arguing that it reflects paternalistic anxiety over a transformed socioeconomic system that allows greater mobility. Although I arrive at conclusions similar to Railey's, my path is decidedly different, owing to the Depression-era cultural context in which I situate the novel.

¹⁷ Here I summarize a general argument made in Lukàcs's *The Historical Novel*. See in particular the first chapter in which Lukàcs defines the genre and uses Walter Scott's fiction as a means of testing his theory.

¹⁸ Welles's production was one of many forms of cultural expression concerned with Haiti. Others included *Black Jacobins*, a history of the Haitian Revolution by C.L.R. James; *Touissant L'Ouvreture*, a play also by James; *Haiti and Black Empire*, plays produced by the Federal Theatre's black companies; *Emporer of Haiti*, a play by Langston Hughes adapted into an opera, *Troubled Island*; and the proletarian historical novels *Drums at Dusk* and *Babouk* by Arna Bontemps and Guy Endore respectively (Denning 396). See John T. Matthews, "Faulkner and Proletarian Literature" 178-86, for a comparison of *Absalom* and Endore's *Babouk*.

¹⁹ Understandably, the Civil War would become a site of representation and negotiation for Depression-era concerns, as one national crisis prompted the culture to reflect on another. The most popular instance of this phenomenon was the 1939 film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The power of Scarlett O'Hara's resilient declaration, "I'll never be hungry again," arguably related to and derived as much from the period of its production and initial reception as the historical events depicted in the film.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORDER AND UPHEAVAL: FAULKNER'S CONFLICTED AGRARIAN REPRESENTATIONS

The damaging effects of the Great Depression registered noticeably in rural America, home to the small farmer and repository of many ideals which had been established in the nation's infancy. At least since Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, the yeoman farmer had remained one of the most enduring figures of strength in the American mythos. But hard times in rural America, extending from the otherwise prosperous twenties through the destitute thirties, altered the symbolic value long attached to this cultural icon. During the Depression, the suffering of small landowners, tenants, and sharecroppers exposed the harsh realities of a market-driven economy with virtually no safety net. Striking at heart of the country, the forces of nature, economics, and politics seemingly conspired to deprive small farmers of their livelihoods and their independence, breeding a sense of helplessness and frustration in farm families. Once a symbol of vibrancy and abundance, the small farmer now became a gauge for measuring weakness and want, not only in terms of the economy but also with regard to the professed ideal of self-reliance—an essential component of agrarian and American identity.

Options for small farmers in such dire straits were limited. One response was to invoke the latent agrarian radicalism which had inspired uprisings against the British in the eighteenth century and had fueled the Populist movement in the late nineteenth century. John A. Simpson, president of the Farmers' Union, alluded to the logical conclusion of such social protest in a letter to President Roosevelt written in 1933: "My candid opinion is that unless you call a special session of Congress [. . .] and start a

revolution in government affairs there will be one started in the country" (qtd. in McElvaine 147). The threatening tone of Simpson's remarks suggests how active was the revolutionary impulse in rural America; the challenge for potential insurgents, however, came in identifying the enemy. The maze of financial institutions and transactions that defined the socioeconomic circumstances of the farmer in an age of credit made for a depersonalized atmosphere. Many in rural America found themselves, therefore, in the same predicament as the angry dispossessed tenant in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. With each attempt to assign blame to an individual displaced to a faceless corporate entity, Steinbeck's tenant is left with the perplexing and paralyzing question: "Who can we shoot?" (49).

Not only was the blame displaced, but also the farm families, many of whom faced the same prospect as the Joads in Steinbeck's novel. Families who had established roots in the same plot of soil for generations were dispossessed and disenfranchised and compelled to search elsewhere for means to continue farming—a harrowing experience for a segment of the American population that placed great stock in staying put. The result was widespread social unrest in rural America which V. F. Calverton captured vividly in his 1934 article "The Farmer Cocks His Rifle." Calverton traced the historical currents of social protest in rural America steering the small farmer to the point thus described: "Today, however, with land values at their nadir, and confronted with the impossibility of even meeting the costs of production, [the small farmer] has hung up his ploughshare and taken to his gun" (728). Wary of rural dissidence and the potential for the spread of social upheaval, government, law enforcement, and dominant-class hegemony mobilized to preserve established order.

The forces of order and upheaval converged in the plight of the small farmer and in so doing affected not only rural America but also an American culture with deep ideological roots in agrarian soil.

With its comprehensive social vision, Faulkner's fiction of the Depression era demonstrates sympathy for the dispossessed and disenfranchised small farmers and an acute awareness of the systematic oppression that compounded their suffering.

However, it also displays a noticeable wariness over the prospect of an uprising in rural America that might lead to fundamental changes in the structure of the social order.

Faulkner's literary production in the Depression era is thus marked by conflicted agrarian representations stemming from his material and ideological investment in a dominant class threatened by social instability. As we have seen in other works, this condition registers in terms of thematic content and formal structure, determining the level of social consciousness reached in a given text and inscribing the text with features of the external politics encompassing its production. As he translates the forces of order and upheaval at play in rural America into resonant literary themes, this element of Faulkner's fiction becomes even more acute. These themes are present in works spanning the Depression era: Faulkner's fourth novel, *As I Lay Dying*, his short story "Barn Burning," which reappears in revised form in the opening section of *The Hamlet*, and "The Tall Men," another short story. Consideration of these texts not only reveals a progression in the themes of order and upheaval as Faulkner employs them in response to conditions in rural America but also further demonstrates the significant extent to which the cultural context of the Great Depression informs his literary production.

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Faulkner's conflicted agrarian representations must have stemmed largely from the complex familial and social history that informed his perspective on farming in general and his response to rural class conflict in particular.¹ Much has been made of the wide shadow cast by William Faulkner's great-grandfather, William C. Falkner, for whom he was named. Known as the "Old Colonel," William C. Falkner was a defining and legendary figure, not only in Falkner family folklore, but also in the annals of Mississippi history in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A Confederate veteran, the Old Colonel was a southern American Renaissance man—a captain of industry who founded a railroad company in the hamlet of Ripley, Mississippi; an influential statesman who remained a fixture in state politics for years; and an author who was best known for his book *The White Rose of Memphis*.

The diversity of the Old Colonel's financial holdings reflected the various pursuits that occupied him in his life. His main interest was Gulf and Chicago Railroad, which grew considerably during Reconstruction and fulfilled all expectations set by its ambitious primary shareholder. But Falkner also developed a substantial farming operation—substantial enough prior to the Civil War to profit from slave labor—and thus established an interest in agriculture that would remain a fixture in the Falkner family in the decades to come. Accordingly, William Faulkner's grandfather, John Wesley Thompson Falkner, known as the "Young Colonel," counted farming among his multiple occupations. In addition to running the railroad, a duty assumed after the Old

Colonel was gunned down in public by a vengeful political opponent in 1889, J.W.T. also maintained a law practice, served as a city alderman and state legislator, and held a prominent position in a local bank in Oxford, Mississippi, until he was rather unceremoniously forced out late in life by an alliance of younger colleagues. William Faulkner's father, Murry Falkner, had a passion for the railroad business and by the turn of the century had worked his way up from shoveling coal to managing the company in his father's stead. From this position, Murry expanded his holdings, purchasing a share of the Ripley Drug Company and, in the Falkner tradition, a farming operation of his own. The Falkners apparently had a deep-seated need to keep a hand in the soil, so to speak, perhaps as a means of tempering the family's industrial base in the complexion of regional identity.

Murry was not able to continue the Falkner legacy of occupational variety, however, as the Old Colonel's philosophy of diversification grew more incompatible with a declining family fortune and changing times. With little warning, J.W.T. put the profitable railroad company up for sale in 1902, confounding most observers who saw the move as astonishingly unwise. The Young Colonel summoned Murry and his family to Oxford to make a new life. Deprived of his labor of love, Murry attempted a series of ventures that proved unfulfilling and mostly unsuccessful. The first, a livery stable, offered Murry at least partial access to his longstanding dream of riding the open range as a cowboy. But with modernization came rapidly growing reliance on the automobile and thus the untimely end of Murry's business. Consequently, he was left to devise other means of supporting his family. Murry cited an innate Falkner aversion to sales as the reason for failed mercantile enterprises, such as a hardware store and a local

heating oil franchise. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Falkners, much like the Compsons in *The Sound and the Fury*, could see a pattern of diminished means and status, plainly set against the backdrop of an unfolding social history fraught with divisive class politics.

Though a prominent Mississippi family, the Falkners were from the hills of the Northeast and so not in lock step with the quasi-aristocratic planter families of the Delta to the West. Because the red clay of the hills did not produce the same yields as the rich sandy loam of the Delta, the socioeconomic structure in the area was not based as firmly on agricultural production. In contrast to the plantocracy of the Delta, the hill country was much more open to industry and a growing mercantile economy as modernization progressed in the region after the turn of the century. Agricultural production was divided into smaller units comprised of small farms operated by families who either owned or rented the land as a sole means of sustenance or by farm managers working for families like the Falkners who kept these operations as sidelines. The integration of agriculture and industry in the hills of Mississippi testified to the fact that King Cotton did not enjoy an absolute monarchy. The result was a more fluid socioeconomic order that prevented men like the Old and Young Colonels from lording over their region with the same level of confidence as the Delta planters. While influential hill families like the Falkners formed a dominant class and culture, the socioeconomic structure did not allow for the relative insulation and stability that their counterparts in the Delta achieved. As the Falkner decline illustrates, there remained the prospect that dominant-class status and sensibilities might contend with the reality of middle-class means. Consequently, the dominant class in the hills had to remain responsive to the reality of

destabilization and the possibility of displacement that came with the fits and starts of an economy developing a greater reliance on industry and marketplace principles.

The complexity of class relations in the hills was evident in the Falkners' storied relationship with Lee Russell, governor of Mississippi from 1920 to 1924, who assumed the populist mantle of his predecessors, James K. Vardaman and the infamous Theodore Bilbo. Reared in a poor family, Russell received both his baccalaureate and law degrees from the University of Mississippi, all the while enduring snubs and taunts from privileged classmates who came from the state's elite families. J.W.T. Falkner hired Russell as an associate in his law firm, but placed strict limits on this association guided by the logic of a dominant class intent on maintaining established order. While J.W.T. had resigned himself to work with Russell, he wanted the lines of social distinction to remain clear. On one occasion, the Young Colonel slammed the door in Russell's face when the young associate came to his boss's home to pay a visit, making it abundantly clear that their relationship was to remain strictly business.

In 1903, not long after Russell joined the law firm, J.W.T. suffered a stunning and humiliating defeat in his race for another term in the state legislature. The Young Colonel was swept aside in a wave known as the "revolt of the rednecks"—an insurgency of populism with Mississippi's poor white small farmers at the crest that ushered in Vardaman, Bilbo, and eventually Russell to Mississippi's highest political office. Hill pragmatism dictated that the Falkners walk a fine line in this era of populist sentiment, which explains why J.W.T. subsequently backed Vardaman—a move the Delta planters would never make—and, later, why John Falkner, Jr.—J.W.T.'s son and William Faulkner's uncle—ran Russell's first gubernatorial campaign in Oxford and the

surrounding areas. The Falkner support eventually paid off when Russell was able to offer Murry gainful and steady employment, appointing him assistant secretary of the University of Mississippi. Russell, who had relied on receiving favors from the Falkners to boost his career, was now in a position to dispense them. The irony of the complex relationship between Russell and the Falkners could not have been lost on a young William Faulkner. Although Faulkner could appreciate the tenacity of Russell and his admirable work ethic, his rise to power was a visible reminder of the power and influence that the Falkner family had been forced to relinquish in a changing social order. In the context of the particular familial and social history of class relations that Faulkner occupied, his own conflicted view of Russell was a precursor to the ambivalence with which his fiction represents and responds to the class conflicts and negotiations that arose during the Depression—especially those involving the small farmers with whom Faulkner often sought to identify.

When asked his vocation, Faulkner would often respond that he was a "dirt farmer"—another indication of his malleability in assuming socially constructed roles. Like many of Faulkner's versions of the "truth," this one had at least some basis in reality. In fact, Faulkner did continue the family tradition of keeping a hand in the soil when he purchased a 320-acre tract of land, in 1938, with the proceeds from the sale of movie rights to *The Unvanquished*. Located in the stingy hills northeast of Oxford, Faulkner's purchase was dubbed Greenfield Farm; he tapped his brother John, or "Johncy" as the family called him, to be the manager. The farm allowed the brothers identification with the yeoman farmer ideal, as evidenced by John's recollection: "The fields were grown up in button willow and we had to clear that out first. We ripped

them out of the rich bottom land with middle busters on the tractor" (178). The passage calls to mind both Otis Town, the protagonist of John's novel *Dollar Cotton*, and Thomas Sutpen of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*—two men who sought to shape the land into a form of self-reliance. Greenfield's crops were corn and hay, which were grown mainly to sustain the livestock that the brothers viewed as the primary yield. At first, Faulkner expressed an aversion to cows—this despite the fact that his fiction is ripe with bovine imagery—and so the brothers decided to start out raising mules instead. The choice was prophetic, given that stubbornness and unwise business decisions would prevent the farm from achieving its potential profitability. Faulkner's insistence on raising mules in the emergent era of tractors is reminiscent of his father's anachronistic investment in a livery stable at the dawn of the automobile age.

Not intensely driven by the profit motive, Faulkner was more often guided by a generosity which he often extended to those in his charge. At one point, Faulkner discovered that Johncy had raised prices in the commissary on Greenfield Farm in the wake of a rise in wholesale prices. Faulkner demanded that his brother reverse the decision, insisting that the laborers who lived on the place were not to blame for the wholesale increase and thus should not suffer for it. Though one could argue that it smacked of paternalism, Faulkner's action in this instance was certainly in direct contrast to the widespread price-gouging that was especially egregious during the Depression—another plight of poor farmers that Steinbeck immortalized in *The Grapes of Wrath*. For the most part, the profit that Faulkner gained from Greenfield Farm could not be measured in monetary terms. Instead, this enterprise offered him a welcome escape from the pressures of his craft, a way to know the small farmers of his region on

their own terms, a chance to restore the family legacy of agricultural production, and an opportunity to regain some of the social status that the Falkners had lost.

The beginning of Faulkner's initiative to restore his family's good name through the acquisition of property had begun in 1930 when Faulkner purchased what was known in Oxford and Lafayette County as "the old Shegog place." The relatively large house with white columns was located adjacent to Bailey's Woods, which Faulkner later bought to increase the estate he had named Rowan Oak. Though not of Sutpen proportions, the establishment of Rowan Oak was a grand design—one apparently inspired not only by a need to settle down but by a desire to reclaim his family's former position in the Oxford social order. Faulkner's daughter Jill called Rowan Oak "the symbol of Pappy's life of being somebody" and explained further that "everyone in Oxford had remembered that Pappy's father ran a livery stable, and this was just a way of thumbing his nose at Oxford. [. . .] a nice old house [that] had a certain substance and standing to it" (qtd. in Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography, One-Volume Edition* 261). While the house had standing in terms of social perception, it was barely standing in the more material terms of infrastructure. However, in a plan fraught with social symbolism, Faulkner was determined to oversee a complete renovation. Drawing on the work ethic that he so admired in the hill farmers of the region, Faulkner performed as many of the renovation tasks as he could—for instance, replacing the rotting rafters with new ones to bolster the stature that was intended for Rowan Oak both literally and figuratively.

While Greenfield Farm let Faulkner claim at least nominally the mantle of "dirt farmer," the grand design of Rowan Oak was often an outlet for his dandyish side,

which had been frequently on display since adolescence. Faulkner's affinity for stylish clothes and affected mannerisms during his Ole Miss days had led to his being dubbed by classmates "The Count," a nickname later revised even more derisively by Oxford residents as "Count No 'Count." In a move that illustrates why such names attached readily to Faulkner, the now established master of Rowan Oak would host a traditional English hunting breakfast on his estate in the spring of 1938. The guests were decked out in full regalia and staged a procession down South Street in Oxford toward Rowan Oak. Certainly not the "dirt farmer" on this occasion, Faulkner donned the standard attire of the fox-hunting country gentleman, complete with a red coat, breeches, and a riding helmet.

Through what can be termed class schizophrenia, Faulkner demonstrated in his agrarian role-playing the capacity to adopt different subjective positions. In a regional context, he was staging through social performance one of the chief ideological conflicts of southern history—the ongoing struggle between interpretations of the aristocrat and the yeoman to serve as the South's defining historical figure. Posing as the country gentleman, Faulkner tended to draw from English antecedents, whereas his grandfather and great-grandfather preferred the model of the southern aristocratic planter. Both ancestors struck this pose with care, wearing white suits and panama hats while they amassed their fortunes primarily from industrial and capital investment. Carolyn Porter has linked this contradiction in the Falkner family to a broader contradiction in southern historiography—the ideological maneuver to apply the cosmetics of agrarian aristocracy to the base of a southern economic order structured on modes of capitalist production. Historical treatments of the yeoman farmer have been

employed toward that end as well. Specifically, Porter cites the case of Southern Agrarians such as Frank Owsley, who painted an embellished picture of the antebellum South as a democracy of hardworking and content small farmers. This idealistic picture obscured the actual acquisitive desires of the yeomanry to obtain more land and to reap larger profits from increased exploitation of labor and resources. As social concepts and historical figures, Porter argues, both the aristocratic planter and the yeoman farmer have been used to mask the material reality of the more common figure—"the parvenu capitalist entrepreneur of the antebellum Southwest" (211), a self-made man like the Old Colonel who was invested in the American tradition of Progress and shared much more in common with his northern industrialist counterpart than any panama hat could conceal. For Faulkner, reliant on a literary marketplace structured by modes of capitalist production, alternating the roles of the country gentleman and the "dirt farmer" was perhaps a means of obscuring, in an even more contradictory manner than his forebears, his identity as an artistic version of the parvenu capitalist entrepreneur.

While a diachronic assessment of the agrarian role playing that Faulkner displayed in the thirties explains much about its nature, a synchronic view uncovers further ideological implications that illuminate the conflicted agrarian representations present in the fiction of the Depression. Faulkner's cultivation of agrarian identities can be viewed, on one level, as complicit in the general trend in American culture of holding forth a romantic ideal of the rural lifestyle. With industrial capitalism attracting much of the blame for the Depression, many Americans dreamed of going "back to the land" not only as a way of surviving but also of curing the sense of reification that had come to be associated with labor under modernization. The ideological character of this

response is apparent in the fundamental contradiction at its heart. For the idyllic notion of rural life expressed variously in the culture stood exposed as fantasy by a wealth of circumstantial evidence—in particular, the powder keg of revolt in rural America that threatened to ignite at any moment and the mass exodus of dispossessed small farmers who could no longer make a living from the land. Still, for significant numbers of Americans during the Depression—and I would count Faulkner among them—aspiring to the vocation of farming offered hope of renewal, self-reliance, and stability.

That Faulkner shifted so visibly between the roles of aristocrat and yeoman has special significance in relation to the class dynamics of the Depression. As we have seen, by the end of the 1920s the Falkner family had suffered a decline from a position of significant wealth and social status, established by the Old Colonel, to a less stable position in the dominant class—the Falkners retained an afterglow of their former status but now faced the Compsonian admixture of upper-class sensibilities and middle- or lower-class means. As a subject of this particular family history, Faulkner entered the Great Depression with a sense of the social and economic instability that would plague so many Americans during this chaotic period in history. Ironically, Faulkner managed to swim against this tide of history by actually increasing his worth in the thirties in an effort to restore his family name. Still, he was not immune to the constant fear of losing what he had gained, especially in light of his penchant for taking on new financial obligations. Faulkner thus found himself among the scores of uncertain Americans whose sympathies were intensely conflicted—between the upper class to which they aspired or had once belonged and the working class with which they could now identify on the basis of shared fears and concerns. While these dueling sympathies contributed

to the alternating roles of country gentleman and "dirt farmer" that Faulkner fashioned in his life, they were far more productive forces in his fiction. In fact, they largely shape not only the engagement of Faulkner's texts with the major Depression-era themes of order and upheaval but also the conflicted agrarian representations that result.

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The first novel that Faulkner published in the thirties was *As I Lay Dying*, the tragic and often darkly comic story of the Bundren family and their harrowing journey from country to town to lay deceased wife and mother Addie Bundren to rest. While the ostensible purpose of the quest is Addie's burial, members of the Bundren family have underlying personal agendas as well. Anse longs for a set of dentures; Vardaman dreams of getting a toy train; Cash wants a record player; and Dewey Dell desperately needs "medicine" to terminate her unwanted pregnancy. In the confines of the Bundren family, then, a unifying collective purpose—or, to apply the parlance of social philosophy, a common good—is at odds with individual needs and desires that threaten to divide the family along the lines of competitive self-interest. Though the Bundren family is the central focus of the novel, Faulkner offers repeated reminders—mostly observations from neighbors and onlookers—that the journey of the Bundrens is measured by the watchful eye of an established social order wary of the upheaval that this death march signals. This sense of upheaval extends as well to the form of the text, which bears the aesthetic marks of the ideological positions it has internalized. As in *The Sound and the Fury*, the modernist form of *As I Lay Dying* betrays a persistent

social consciousness that emerges from the fractured subjective positions and experiences of individual characters in order to comment on collective concerns active not only in the social order depicted in the text but also in the broader one existing beyond its pages.

A central concern represented and negotiated in *As I Lay Dying* is the potential for social unrest, which stands to threaten the stability of the established social order. As we have seen, Faulkner's interest in this particular issue has a basis in a particular familial and social history. But it also has a direct correlation to the immediate historical context of the novel. Joseph Blotner describes the moment Faulkner turned to the story of the Bundren family:

On October 25, 1929, the day after panic broke out on Wall Street, he took one of these [onion] sheets, unscrewed the cap from his fountain pen, and wrote at the top in blue ink, 'As I Lay Dying.' Then he underlined it twice and wrote the date in the upper right-hand corner. (1: 633)

Given the circumstances, we might be tempted to read the novel as an allegory of contemporary socioeconomic conditions. Such a reading might cast Addie, repeatedly described as a worn-out work horse, in the role of an American economic system facing an imminent but as yet uncertain death, indicated by the curious first-person, past progressive title. Rather than expanding this allegorical reading, however, I merely offer it as a possibility in order to suggest that while *As I Lay Dying* is undoubtedly a timeless novel, it is a timely one as well. Though the novel has "universal" qualities, such as an epic narrative structure that conveys a variation on the archetypal quest, it is also shaped by its ideological response to conditions that fueled the politics of social upheaval in rural America.

Though *As I Lay Dying* is ostensibly the story of the Bundren family told predominantly by the Bundren family, we are constantly reminded that this family exists in a larger social order. We learn early in the novel from Tull that Anse has relied frequently on the aid of the community to sustain his family. As Tull explains, "Like most folks around here, I done holp him so much already I cant quit now" (*AILD* 33). The perception of Anse as a communal charge is reinforced later when Tull recounts Uncle Billy's claim that God helps Anse for the same reason as the community: "He's done it so long now He cant quit" (*AILD* 89). Though members of the community are fully aware of the assistance provided to Anse, he is too hypocritical to admit to himself or to anyone else that he is dependent. Accordingly, when Darl insists at one point in the journey that his father borrow a bucket to mix the cement for "setting" Cash's broken leg, Anse utters his common refrain: "I wouldn't be beholden, God knows" (*AILD* 206). Instead, he allows Darl to send Dewey Dell for help—a move that secures the assistance but allows Anse to persist in the delusion that he is not "beholden." Anse's capacity for denial inspires a heightened sense of self-reliance in Jewel, who has a steely determination to earn his keep and to deny offerings of help in any form. When the Bundrens stop at Samson's farm, for instance, Jewel insists on paying for the feed that Samson offers to Jewel's prized horse. Jewel even projects his pride onto his stallion, pointing out to Samson that "I feed him a little extra and I don't want him beholden to no man" (*AILD* 116).

Such scenes, repeated throughout the novel, convey what would prove a thematic staple in the culture of the Great Depression—the resistance to dependency that resulted when Americans interpellated by the ideology of individualism found

themselves forced by circumstances to seek a helping hand from the community. In this respect, Faulkner's Bundrens anticipate Steinbeck's Joads in their determined effort—even to the point of denial and delusion—to maintain a sense of dignity in the face of moving from a position of self-reliance to dependency. In depicting the social relations between the Bundrens and the surrounding community, Faulkner foreshadows the complex negotiations that would take place between the proud but desperate victims of the Depression and the communal network of aid. Some nine years later, Steinbeck would vividly illustrate this form of exchange in the famous truck-stop scene in *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which the Joads get a loaf of bread and some candy at a reduced price, thanks to the kindness of a server and her customers who recognize that the Joads desperately need both help and the illusion that they have not received any.

Time and again in Faulkner's novel, the bottom line of assistance to the Bundrens is obscured by their own insistence—primarily expressed by Anse and Jewel but also by Cash's hyperactive work ethic—that they are not dependent on the community for survival. Moreover, the members of the community who offer Anse and his family support seem to recognize the family's need to preserve a sense of independence by resisting help. In the scene cited above, for example, Samson invites the Bundrens to stay for dinner, but Anse clearly perceives the offer as a handout. Sensing Anse's reservation, Samson stresses the social rather than the economic dimensions of the offer, pointing out to Anse that "when folks stops with us at meal time and wont come to the table, my wife takes it as an insult" (*AILD* 116). Here Anse holds fast to his refusal, but later in the journey when the Bundrens' plight has worsened, he accepts a similar invitation from Armstid. Still unable to shoulder the

burden of obligation himself, however, Anse transfers the "debt" to Addie: "It's for her sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you" (*AILD* 182). To a certain extent, then, *As I Lay Dying* interrogates the notion of self-reliance rooted in the ideology of individualism by exposing a reliance on community that sustains the Bundrens, despite Anse's professions to the contrary.

Stressing the Bundrens' relationship to the larger community allows for instances of explicit social commentary in the novel. Anse offers most of this commentary, which is expressly populist in tone and stresses the social and economic injustice suffered by the oppressed "common man." In one of Anse's monologues, he insists, "It's a hard country on a man; it's hard" (*AILD* 110). What makes it so hard, Anse goes on to suggest, is the systematic exploitation of the poor small farmers under capitalism: "Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer" (*AILD* 110). While there is populist strength in Anse's message, the hypocrisy of the messenger ultimately casts doubt on its credibility. Prior to Anse's exhortation, we have learned of his alleged aversion to hard work, most explicitly from Darl: "I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it" (*AILD* 17). Rather than the wholesome, strong, and devoted ideal of the yeoman farmer, Anse comes across as a shifty and acquisitive character who is out to take full advantage of circumstances to gain profit—in the case of this journey to town, the new set of teeth

that he mentions repeatedly and presumably the new bride whom he introduces sight unseen to the family in the final passage of the novel.

As a result of Anse's untrustworthiness, his rage against the established order is apparently intended to be taken with a grain of salt. In my view, we see here a conflicted agrarian representation which conveys a sense of ambivalence toward the class of small farmers who waged a political struggle for greater social equality and economic security during the Depression. This attitude is evident not only in the portrayal of Anse's character but also in the kind of justice he envisions. Faulkner stops short of having Anse call for an immanent solution, preferring instead to have him stress a transcendent reversal of fortunes. Referring to heaven, Anse explains, "Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord" (*AILD* 110). Not the proletarian call for immediate political transformation, Anse's vision occurs in the teleology of a promised eternal justice in which the poor finally gain their just reward through the benevolent workings of a divine arbiter. For those who could not wait for eternity, though, the option of revolution seemed a much more productive course of action, as Faulkner recognized.

Faulkner represents the impulse toward revolution in the form of barn burning, which captures the essence of social unrest in a defining and historically resonant act.² Ostensibly, Darl's burning of Gillespie's barn is an act of familial rebellion prompted by his need to bring about a swift and definitive end to the horrific death march of the Bundren family. At base, then, Darl's defiance is motivated by the indignity his mother has suffered—her body hauled on the back of a wagon through the countryside while emanating an increasingly more pungent odor and attracting a flock of ever present

buzzards circling overhead. However, as in *The Sound and the Fury*, what occurs in the family resonates with social implications that extend from text to context. Regardless of his subjective motivation, Darl's act is subject to the interpretation of the established order. And it is important to note Faulkner's care in situating the barn burning in the context of a dominant ideology rooted in capitalism which is articulated quite explicitly in the text. Significantly, we find that Darl recalls his defiant act in reified terms. He continually refers to Addie as a horse, relegating her to the level of beast of burden or labor commodity. The same is true for Jewel who enters the fiery barn and "seems to materialise out of the darkness, lean as a race horse in his underclothes in the beginning of the glare" (AILD 218). As the fire rages, Jewel, Mack, and Gillespie attempt to save as much of the property as possible, rescuing mules, cows, and horses from the burning barn. Only after the stock has been saved does Jewel try to retrieve Addie's body from the flames, mounting the coffin as he would his prized stallion and "riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes him forward and clear" (AILD 222). Sustaining burns during the rescue, Jewel gives off "a thin smell of scorching meat" (AILD 222), further indicating his having undergone reification in the process of aligning himself with the frantic attempt to preserve Gillespie's property.

As a harbinger of social unrest, the barn burning episode goes directly to the question of Darl's sanity, a central aesthetic and ideological conflict in the novel. Viewing the barn burning strictly in familial terms suggests that Darl is the most sane Bundren, a dubious distinction indeed. After all, Darl is the only one who appears to recognize the insanity of the burial journey, which has more to do with satisfying individual needs than fulfilling Addie's last wish. However, examined within the

dominant capitalist ideology, Darl's act is branded as the ultimate insanity, for it threatens the very foundation of the socioeconomic order—the ownership of private property. Even within the family, Darl is perceived as a threat to this sacred principle. As Anse ponders the threat posed by Darl after the barn burning, Jewel advises, "Catch him and tie him up," and then adds with trepidation, "Goddamn it, do you want to wait until he sets fire to the goddamn team and wagon?" (*AILD* 233). For Jewel, the team and wagon have been invested with added value, given that Anse secured them in a backhanded deal with a Snopes in which he agreed to trade Jewel's stallion without his son's permission. Jewel must protect the team if he has any hope of reversing Anse's deal and protecting his prized property.

While Jewel's urgency to protect his investment largely determines his response to the barn burning, Cash is able to examine Darl's act from a more rational perspective. Still, given his name, it is not surprising that a capitalist mentality informs Cash's interpretation. Initially, Cash tries to reconcile what Darl has done through the prism of exchange-value: "Of course it was Jewel's horse was traded to get her that nigh to town, and in a sense it was the value of the horse Darl tried to burn up" (*AILD* 233). When Cash factors in the human dimension, he comes close to making sense of the act; he even admits that "I can almost believe he done right in a way" (*AILD* 233). Despite this bit of sympathy, Cash's inclination is to uphold the principle of private ownership, as he insists that "nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property" (*AILD* 233). Later, considering Darl's commitment to the state asylum, Cash experiences the same sort of ambivalence. On the one hand, he insists that "there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built

with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his own sweat into" (*AILD* 238); thus destroying capital must be crazy. On the other hand, dire straits force him to admit that "I aint so sho that ere a man has the right to saw what is crazy and what aint" (*AILD* 238). Although desperate circumstances force Cash to share the logic of burning the coffin and thus to recognize at least some justification for property destruction, he ultimately cannot oppose the fundamental concept of private ownership that supports the established social order. From this perspective, Cash can be viewed as a conflicted subject of capitalism.

The contradiction exposed in Cash's dilemma is analogous to an ideological conflict prevalent in the social context of the novel. The economic chaos wrought by the market crash forced desperate citizens to weigh the options of social protest and perhaps revolution versus preservation of the established order based in capitalism. Foremost among America's potential revolutionaries were small farmers, who had endured years of hardship long before the crash. Referring to the initial years of the Depression, Robert S. McElvaine observes, "The clouds of agrarian unrest had been gathering since 1920. Those clouds were mature enough to produce small but powerful storms of violence in the Hoover years" (91). The question on the minds of many small farmers, McElvaine adds, was how to define the nature of violence directed against the established order—as revolution or patriotism. The comments of one small farmer offer lucid illustration of these alternative interpretations:

They say blockading the highways is illegal. I says, "Seems to me there was a Tea-party in Boston that was illegal too. What about destroying property in Boston harbor when our country was started?" (qtd. in McElvaine 92).

Through the interdependency of family and community present in the text, Faulkner is able to raise the same ideological quandary about Darl's act of resistance: Was it an illegal act or an instance of necessary revolution?

If the central ideological question that Faulkner poses in respect to Darl is a timely one, so is the apparent response, which is suggested by Darl's fate. Within a familial context, the novel does evoke noticeable sympathy for Darl as a character whose resistance, as it turns out, is motivated by desperate circumstances. However, the novel shows that this sympathy does not extend so easily to Darl as a representative of social upheaval, as the swift intervention of the state makes clear. Patrick O'Donnell contends that the novel points to state authority as one of the constitutive aspects of a "civic" identity in the characters. Because the Bundrens feel this identity threatened by Darl's act of resistance, they submit to what O'Donnell, following Althusser, calls the state apparatus—in this case represented by the asylum and its officials who subdue Darl and take him to Jackson for confinement. As a result, O'Donnell argues, "Darl is the sacrifice paid to the State so that the Bundrens can complete their epic journey and continue with business as usual" (90). While committing Darl to the asylum protects the Bundrens' place in society, it also preserves stability by removing what the community perceives to be an immediate threat to private property and a sign of potential social upheaval. Thus the conflicted logic that the novel exposes so vividly in Cash's response to the barn burning contributes to the surrender to state authority which is designed to bring about at least some sense of resolution. Consequently, Darl's internment can be read, on one level, as an ideological response founded on the social concept of private property. The severity of the penalty—Darl effectually loses all

rights as a citizen—reveals the strength of the notion that ownership of private property is a natural and even sacred right not to be challenged in the least. In depicting this deference to state authority, then, Faulkner illustrates the workings of a dominant ideology that employs concepts of property and ownership to define the terms of social order.

The effects of this political struggle between disruption and established order register also at the level of form in *As I Lay Dying*, exposing the ideological dimensions of Faulkner's aesthetic decisions. Even a cursory reading of the text will confirm that Faulkner carries forward in this novel his interest in certain formal practices associated with high modernism. The novel is divided into numerous sections, each constituting a subjective account from a character either involved directly or indirectly in the events that unfold during the Bundrens' journey. We readers are left to discern from these multiple and often fractured perspectives a workable narrative that can be sufficiently comprehended; the use of the journey as a unifying device is certainly helpful in this regard. A further nod to modernism is found in the descriptive language of the novel, which employs various degrees of abstraction to evoke vivid and often curious images. For Darl, the sun rising above the horizon is "poised like a bloody egg upon the crest of thunderheads" (*AILD* 40). Probably the most memorable instance of abstraction in the novel is Vardaman's laconic attempt at signification: "My mother is a fish" (*AILD* 84). Such descriptive tendencies have led to the assertion that certain effects of Faulkner's narrative technique share much in the way of aesthetics with abstract movements in painting such as Cubism.³ Certainly one of these shared traits is a self-conscious treatment of form displayed primarily in Darl's monologues. Ironically, though, this

emphasis on form often serves the cause of realism as effectively as it does abstraction.

Consider the novel's opening paragraph, which illustrates Darl's reliance on spatial points of reference:

The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laidby cotton, to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision. (*AILD* 3)

With such visual images, Faulkner evokes a stark pastoral aesthetic that anticipates the fusion of post-Impressionist interest in shapes and lines with the visual clarity of social realism that we find in, say, the Depression-era paintings of Thomas Hart Benton or the photographs that would comprise the Farm Service Agency collection.⁴ In each case, elements of figural placement, order, and design aid in the vivid depiction of rural life. My point here is simply that Darl effectually serves as ground zero for continuing negotiations between the aesthetic ideologies of formalism and social realism that Faulkner's text internalizes.

As arguably the most enigmatic figure in the novel, Darl is central to an understanding of how key aesthetic decisions constituting the form of the text yield political implications that extend to its cultural context. One does not have to progress very far in one of Darl's monologues to get the sense that he is a character *in* the world of the text but not *of* that world. In many respects, Darl is typical of characters found in works of high modernism; his service in World War I, for instance, aligns him with Hemingway's traumatized and alienated soldiers who came home only in a geographical sense. Like the transparent eyeball Emerson describes, Darl is an omnipresent watcher; he even recalls with detailed accuracy conversations he has not witnessed in person.

And he seems to possess a mystical intuition, much like the one T.P. attributes to Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, that allows him to penetrate the façade of secrecy others have constructed. His sensing that Jewel is not Anse's son and that Dewey Dell is hiding an unwanted pregnancy are cases in point. Darl's manner of speaking also sets him apart from his family and the surrounding community; his considerable gifts of expression wax poetic and reveal a streak of intellectual prowess combined with lyrical mysticism. Considering these gifts, Darl's detachment from a community that prides itself on work rather than contemplation is predictable. Tull states the communal verdict that reveals Darl's alienation as a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I have said and I say again, that's ever [there's never a] living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much" (*AILD* 71). The form of Darl's monologues confirms this isolated perspective and leads Donald M. Kartiganer to identify in this character a heightened vision that is "sharp, but with the clarity of the disengaged" (30). Though Kartiganer emphasizes this sense of disengagement solely within the parameters of the text, we do well to recognize the broader ideological nature and political consequences of this aesthetic effect.

Because of Darl's alienation from members of his family and from the community, it is not surprising that his interior perceptions are so far removed from the perceptions of other characters who have a voice in the novel. Nor is it surprising that his perception of the barn burning conveys the aesthetic effect of distance. Darl's description of the barn burning illustrates how his preoccupation with form works to resist the social dimensions of his action by introducing a dominant note of abstraction. Having set the raging fire, Darl records its progress with typical emphasis on spatial

design: "The front, conical façade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin on the sawhorses like a cubistic bug, comes into relief" (*AILD* 219). Viewing the burning barn in these terms evokes stasis and prevents Darl from anticipating the ramifications of his action. For Darl, the barn burning occurs without social context; from his perspective, his action is suspended like the buzzards he sees circling above the wagon "with an outward semblance of form and purpose, but with no inference of motion, progress or retrograde" (*AILD* 227). Darl surveys the scene in the manner of a painter viewing a canvas. Inspired by creative genius, the barn burning is a work of "art" with significant form that enables Darl to express intense pain over the loss of his mother and the subsequent humiliation that the journey toward burial in Jefferson has caused.⁵ In this case, Darl is analogous to the solitary artist whose subjective vision subsumes social reality; he embodies, for instance, the Dadaist tendency to see destruction as a work of art.

With Darl in a solitary confinement reinforced by the form of the text, Cash is left primarily to weigh the consequences of the barn burning in its social context. As we have seen, Cash applies the logic of the established order, which ultimately renders Darl himself an abstraction. For those invested in private property, both materially and conceptually, the barn burning transforms Darl from an alienated misfit into a disturbing symbol of social upheaval. Though Darl insists on autonomy for his work of "art," he cannot negate the ties that bind it to social reality. Consequently, by performing an act of resistance with such profound social implications, Darl violates the terms of disengagement governing both the formalist aesthetic sensibility he exhibits and the social contract that works ideologically to validate private property. For both

offenses, Darl is offered as a sacrifice to the restoration and preservation of order. Although he is no activist for the class of poor farmers he occupies, we can see that Darl's role as harbinger of social upheaval nevertheless attracts a considerable amount of dominant-class anxiety and mobilizes powerful forces against him. What emerges from Faulkner's depiction of Darl, and indeed from *As I Lay Dying* as a whole, is an incisive social vision, revealing much about the ideological means of defining and maintaining the terms of social order favorable to the dominant class.

This feature of Darl's character is further illustrated by a comparison to Steinbeck's Tom Joad, a literary figure more explicitly representative of the grassroots dissidence that fueled agrarian social unrest and protest in the Depression. Darl Bundren and Tom Joad share in common a mystical quality, though Darl's stems mainly from individual contemplation and Tom's from a burgeoning class consciousness produced by encounters with explicit forms of social injustice. Both Darl and Tom function as Christ figures: Darl is the "lamb" sacrificed for the salvation of ownership and established order, while Tom is like the mythic Christ, as he accepts his cup and thus empowers his spirit to inspire the apostles of resistance to follow. As Darl moves closer to his sacrificial moment, he spirals further into social disengagement and abstraction in the course of *As I Lay Dying*. But Tom's vision in *The Grapes of Wrath* becomes more coherent as he develops deeper political convictions and an increasing commitment to social activism.

The departing words of the characters highlight this fundamental difference between them. Darl's description of his commitment reveals that he has become alienated even from himself: "Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train,

laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed" (*AILD* 253). Still emphasizing form, Darl observes the asylum officials with typical distancing effect: "Their necks were shaved to a hairline, as though the recent and simultaneous barbers had a chalk-line like Cash's" (*AILD* 253). This effect becomes even more pronounced when Darl articulates resistance to his forced internment, employing imagery that calls to mind abstract expressionism. For instance, Darl observes that "the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face" (*AILD* 254). Stream-of-consciousness then leads Darl to describe a nickel with "a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back," which then leads to a sexually explicit recollection of a "spy-glass" he used to look at during his tour of duty in France: "In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is" (*AILD* 254). Making a Molly Bloom-esque exit from the stage of the text, Darl simply mutters, "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes" (*AILD* 254). The opposite of Darl, Tom Joad moves from isolation and confinement—he has just been released from prison as the novel opens—toward communal identity expressed in Reverend Casey's belief that "a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one" (535). Tom's acceptance of this spiritual collectivism leads to the rather more simplistic epiphany that "a fella ain't no good alone" (535) and finally to a direct statement of social activism based in class consciousness:

I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. [. . .] An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the house they build—why, I'll be there. See? (537)

Here the form of *The Grapes of Wrath*, with its balance toward the clarity of social realism, paradoxically renders Tom's departure as an arrival, for it is apparent that in his

end as an individual character is his beginning as a reminder of the collective struggle of his class to overcome social injustice. By contrast, Darl leaves on far different terms, the force of his isolated act of resistance diminished in large measure by the progressively abstract form of his final statements and by the prevailing logic of the social order represented in the text.

The differences between Darl and Tom, and indeed between *As I Lay Dying* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, are directly related to the different perspectives that Faulkner and Steinbeck brought to bear on the issue of hardship and injustice in rural America. Certainly Faulkner's view of the Bundrens is nowhere near Steinbeck's reverential treatment of the Joads. For Faulkner, the catastrophes that befall the Bundrens—most of them worthy of the Book of Job—are often tinged with black comedy, as in the case of the circling buzzards or of Anse's economical notion to heal Cash's broken leg by "setting" it in concrete. Though the depiction of the Joads drew criticism from many who feared at the time that it bolstered the "Okie" stereotype, Steinbeck's sympathy for the plight of migrants is clear and leads him often to a reverence bordering on hagiography. Of course, the chronological distance between the novels is also a distinguishing factor. The publication of Faulkner's novel came in the first year of the Depression and thus anticipates many of its themes, while Steinbeck's novel appeared as the thirties drew to a close. Steinbeck's novel thus bears witness to the suffering *in medias res*, striving for a level of solidarity befitting his commitment to radical politics and to the cause of proletarian literature. Still, the social value of Faulkner's novel should not be diminished, for his depiction of Darl Bundren shares in common with

Steinbeck's depiction of Tom Joad a keen awareness of the impulse toward rural dissidence and the difficulty of challenging existing power structures.

Faulkner explores this condition further in one of the most class-conscious works he ever wrote. "Barn Burning" began in 1938 as a chapter of a novel-in-progress, was subsequently revised and published as a short story, and then later recalled for a cameo appearance in the opening section of *The Hamlet*. Whereas class conflict is one of many forces at work in *As I Lay Dying*, it functions as the central social and narrative conflict in "Barn Burning." The title of the story establishes this overriding theme by citing a practice of class warfare with historical resonance and renewed symbolic value in the context of mounting populism and social unrest in rural America. The story is told from the perspective of Colonel Sartoris ("Sarty") Snopes, a young boy whose coming-of-age unfolds against the backdrop of an intense political struggle shaped by the forces of a transformed socioeconomic order. The story makes clear that the marketplace has become the foundation of society, for we learn early on that the general store is where the Justice of the Peace presides. Initially, we discover Sarty seated on a keg of nails in the store. Displaying an intense desire for consumption, Sarty "knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read" (CS 3). Sarty would be the ideal consumer, if his place in the social hierarchy among the poverty-stricken and nomadic class of tenant farmers did not deny him the necessary purchasing power to access the market economy in general and these canned products he desires in particular. Sarty's very name makes him the embodiment of the opposing forces aligned for battle in this tale of class warfare. On the one hand, he is connected

to the legendary Colonel Sartoris, who has become a powerful symbol of dominant-class hegemony. On the other hand, he bears the Snopes name, and so must weigh the different version of "truth" offered by his father, Abner Snopes, who is an agent of social upheaval in the story. In this regard, "Barn Burning" is marked by an intensification of the dueling class sympathies that surface in *As I Lay Dying*, as the genre of the short story brings the issue of class conflict to the fore.

Through the course of "Barn Burning," Ab Snopes emerges as a representative of the dispossessed, speaking much more forthrightly and credibly than Anse Bundren about the plight of the small farmer in an exploitative socioeconomic system. This discrepancy when it comes to matters of social and economic justice is due in large measure to the fact that Anse owns a small tract of property and thus has at least some stake in the system, whereas Ab must rent land to make a crop and is thus subject to the inequities built contractually into the system of farm tenancy. For this reason, Ab feels even more powerless than Anse to exert any control over his future. Accused but not convicted of burning his landlord's barn, Ab is ordered by the court to leave the area so that he will no longer remain a threat to property and thus to order and stability. Arriving on the estate of Major De Spain, his new landlord, Ab says with bitterness, "I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months" (CS 9). Instead of words, Ab much prefers symbolic gestures designed to oppose the power of the established order. So, on this particular occasion, Ab arrives with a rather pungent calling card—one of his shoes intentionally smeared with "fresh droppings" (CS 10). Moving past the butler, a linen-clad old black man whose presence here calls to mind the historical alliance in the South between

blacks and the planter class against poor whites, Ab soils De Spain's imported pale rug with "the machinelike deliberation of the foot which seemed to bear (or transmit) twice the weight the body compassed" (CS 11). The added weight is symbolic, for Ab's gesture signals not only class resentment but also his disregard for the sanctity of De Spain's property. Naturally, the soiling of the rug elicits an angry response—first from the butler and then from Mrs. De Spain, who emerges from the kitchen, thus completing a symbolic intersection of race, class, and gender. Having resisted the social pact represented by the linen-clad butler in the service of De Spain, Ab now redirects his dissidence toward Mrs. De Spain as the embodiment of De Spain's estate. Ordered to leave, Ab turns abruptly on the rug, "leaving a final long and fading smear," which elicits from Mrs. De Spain a "hysteric and indistinguishable woman-wail" suggestive of a sexual violation (CS 12). Later, Major De Spain evokes the same association, engendering his property with the ideology of "pure" Southern womanhood. After issuing the terms of Ab's penalty for soiling the rug, the Major reasons that "maybe it will teach you to wipe your feet off before you enter her [Mrs. De Spain's] house again" (CS 16).

Clearly there is more at stake here than an expensive imported rug, which we presume the Major could easily replace. Major De Spain's urgency in responding to the incident reveals his recognition of the broader social significance of Ab's defiant gesture. The Major knows that Ab has, symbolically at least, staged a revolt and that he must be punished in the name of preserving the respect for private property that helps to maintain the established order. First, De Spain insists that Ab restore the rug to its former state; in this effort, the Snopeses become mechanistic devices in De Spain's

apparatus. Commanded by Ab to clean the rug, his daughters scrub furiously with little regard for its condition, for the outcome resembles the work of "a lilliputian mowing machine" (CS 14). When he returns the rug to De Spain, Ab stomps on the portico with "wooden and clocklike deliberation" (CS 15). Unsatisfied with the result, De Spain lashes out at Ab in a rejoinder that inscribes the rug as a marker of the economic disparity between landlord and tenant: "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will" (CS 16). With no hope of extracting cash from Ab, De Spain instead defers to the primary source of his control over the tenant—the contractual agreement—and imposes a penalty of twenty bushels as compensation for the rug. Here Ab succeeds in at least one respect: he forces the establishment of a more material relationship between De Spain's property and the fruits of tenant labor that enabled its acquisition. Surely knowing that his words and gestures alone will not be enough to tarnish his new landlord, the tenant seeks to employ the power of the court in order to resist De Spain and to expose the unjust material reality at the base of De Spain's wealth, power, and status.

The case of *Snopes v. De Spain* is the basis for the story's second trial scene. The defendant accused of barn burning in the first trial, Ab is now the plaintiff, boldly taking his landlord to court and testing the philosophical principle that justice is blind, especially in regard to the boundaries of social distinction, economic means, and political clout separating the two litigants. Rendered complacent by these distinctions, De Spain is shocked at Ab's public display of defiance to authority. Arriving at the courthouse on his horse, he wears an expression of "amazed unbelief" resulting from "the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants" (CS 18). As the

narrator makes clear, Sarty does not understand fully the nature of the trial; based on the limited legal precedence he knows, Sarty cries out, "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt . . ." (CS 18). In a formal sense, the allusion to barn burning is a nice bit of foreshadowing. But it also serves well to cast Ab's legal action in a similar light, as it were. After the first trial, we learn that Ab views fire as the great equalizer; the narrator explains that "the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of [Ab's] being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity" (CS 8). But in the second trial Ab turns to the scales of justice rather than the flames of fire to serve as an equalizer in responding to De Spain and furthering his cause to disrupt an established order that he brands unjust and oppressive.

Instead of creating in Ab a newfound trust in the system, this trial only reinforces his belief that justice is blind in the sense of not seeing the endemic inequities that favor the powerful over the powerless. Even though the verdict amounts to a reduction in the penalty, Ab's integrity suffers a blow as he is once again reminded of his inferior socioeconomic status—this time by the judge, who tells him in open court that "twenty bushels of corn seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to have to pay" (CS 18). The decision, then, upholds both the symbolic and material value of De Spain's property and in so doing further validates the socioeconomic system that enables him to exploit the labor of tenants like Ab as a means of producing his wealth. As the judge sends Ab away with the admonition that "you can stand a five-dollar loss you haven't earned yet" (CS 18), we sense that Ab is at loss in more ways than one. Convinced that the justice system is an accomplice in the power structure that bolsters the dominant class as it exploits the tenant class, Ab knows that he must take matters

into his own hands if he is to make any lasting impression on his enemy and the system that favors him. For Ab, burning De Spain's barn is the next logical step. After all, barn *razing* stands in direct contrast to barn *raising*—that longstanding agrarian tradition symbolizing communal goodwill and the hope of abundance—and so serves the dissident Ab Snopes well in this escalating class conflict with the formidable Major De Spain.

That Faulkner should turn to barn burning as the central focus of a story in the late thirties is no coincidence when we take into account relevant historical and cultural factors. Already we have noted the historical significance and symbolic value of barn burning as one form of social protest among those oppressed by the systematic inequities of sharecropping and farm tenancy. In the years immediately preceding "Barn Burning," general social protest was reaching its apex in rural America, particularly in the South where the activism of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU) resisted the established order in the name of greater social and economic justice. The STFU initially formed in opposition to the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which the organization perceived as scandalously favorable to large landowners, but eventually the organization took up the cause of tenants and sharecroppers on a much broader scale. As Jerold S. Auerbach explains of the STFU, "Borrowing some of the tactics of trade unions and the fervor of religious revivals, it quickly became the sharecroppers' advocate, teacher, preacher, and lobbyist" (59).⁶

Predictably, influential planters countered STFU dissidence by employing anti-union, strong-arm tactics, such as calling in political favors to have union members arrested. In an incident that typifies such action, STFU activist and Methodist minister

Ward Rodgers was arrested in 1935 for issuing a call to tenants and sharecroppers to stage a violent uprising against planters. Rodgers was subsequently tried and convicted by a "jury" of planters convened in an Arkansas general store. Although Faulkner probably did not have this particular trial in mind when he wrote "Barn Burning," he could have drawn the scenario from any number of similar incidents that occurred in the mid-thirties as the STFU mounted resistance and elicited rapid responses from the dominant planter class. More Americans started to pay attention to the STFU as a result of the Rodgers incident and the national media coverage that it attracted. The media were especially intrigued by the harsh tactics that local authorities employed to defuse the STFU, such as ordinances banning public speeches not receiving prior approval from officials. In part because of the heightened attention, the STFU had grown to a membership of 25,000 by the end of 1935.

By any measurement, the STFU reached its apex in 1936—a pivotal year in which the national spotlight focused even more brightly on the union. With a Congressional investigation of alleged planter infractions underway, the STFU felt confident enough to organize a major strike in response to the refusal of planters to accept union wage demands. Tensions came to a head when police broke through a line of STFU protesters blocking entrance to the Harahan bridge at Memphis. Strikers were arrested and subsequently indentured to planters in order to pay for their court costs. As a further response, the governor of Arkansas mobilized state rangers and the National Guard to break the strike. Despite this failure, the STFU could take solace in the considerable headway it had made by the end of 1936. Due in large measure to STFU activism, FDR made a campaign promise to address problems of farm tenancy, which

he fulfilled with the passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act of 1937. At the close of 1936, the STFU had 31,000 members in seven states, including local chapters in Faulkner's Mississippi. But, more importantly, the STFU had fanned the flames of social unrest and raised the specter of class warfare—a condition of society that concerned Faulkner to a noticeable degree, as "Barn Burning" most vividly illustrates.

Faulkner's "Barn Burning" represents this political struggle in the form of Sarty's coming-of-age, as the opposing forces represented by Ab and De Spain try to reduce Sarty's class consciousness to a lowest common denominator in order to claim his allegiance. But Sarty is incapable of accepting such reductive possibilities, given the complex familial and social forces influencing his progression to maturity.⁷ This fundamental tension in the story emerges in the first trial scene, which marks the beginning of Sarty's initiation and the ensuing struggle to define him in terms of class consciousness. We learn that Sarty has been summoned to testify in the barn-burning case against his father. Because the primary witness is not present, the landlord is reliant on testimony from Sarty to implicate Ab in the incident. "Get that boy up here. He knows," the landlord says in response to the Justice's assertion that he lacks the proof for conviction (CS 4). Taking the stand, Sarty is confronted with the opposing forces aligned in class conflict—first, the established order as represented by the Justice and citizen-spectators forming the gallery; second, opposition to that order embodied in Ab, who refuses eye contact to his son. That Sarty bears the Colonel's name lends him a note of authority in the eyes of the court, as the Justice makes clear: "I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?" (CS 4). Yet Sarty knows that his father has something different in mind: "*He*

aims for me to lie, he thought [. . .] And I will have to do hit" (CS 4). As it turns out, Sarty gets off the hook, thanks to the judge's appeal to the landlord not to force a young boy to implicate his father. In a relief-induced mania, Sarty hears "the voices coming up to him again through the smell of cheese and sealed meat, the fear and despair of the old grief of blood" (CS 5). The image here captures essential elements that exert influence on Sarty through the course of the story—the communal voice of established order, the marketplace, and blood as a determinant of social distinction.

While anticlimactic, this opening trial scene is effective in delineating the alternative points of view that contend for Sarty's acceptance and loyalty. Fundamentally, Sarty must decide whether to stand in opposition *with* his father or in opposition *to* him. Initially, Sarty draws on the class resentment instilled in him by Ab, referring to the landlord as "his father's enemy" and then as "*our enemy [. . .] ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!*" (CS 3). Later, in the midst of the trial, Sarty draws on the same sense of animosity for strength enough to lie, referring to the Justice as "*Enemy! Enemy!*" (CS 4). Despite these strong professions of loyalty to his father and opposition to the established order, this encounter with the justice system plants questions in Sarty's mind about his father and the dissidence that he advocates. This emerging conflict does not escape Ab's notice, as the heavy blow he delivers to Sarty after the trial confirms. Designed to knock some sense into his son, this incident instead prompts Sarty to weigh Ab's values against those expressed by the Justice of the Peace. In this larger context, Sarty begins to see his father as a creature of pragmatic will, a man of "wolflike independence" whose every association is formed on the principle that "his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his" (CS 7). Now

that Sarty has witnessed, in every sense of the word, the court's appeal to truth and justice as defining principles of common discipline and order, he can contrast these ideals to his father's deeds of defiance. Will Sarty accept the logic of the established order that hails him as a subject with appeals to these core principles? Or will he join his father in viewing them as tools of the powerful that must be resisted and revised by the downtrodden in the name of survival? From Ab's perspective, the answer lies in essentialism, as his exhortation to Sarty after the trial reveals:

You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you. Do you think either of them, any man there this morning would? Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat? Eh? (CS 8)

Ironically, Ab's call for solidarity relies on a key principle that upholds the power of the dominant planter class—that is, the ideological position equating blood and class in the determination of a "natural" order of social distinction. For Ab, then, coming of age involves maturing into class consciousness.

Facing such disparate interpretations of "truth," "justice," and "loyalty," Sarty must consider the same questions in relation to his father that Cash considers in relation to Darl. Is Ab's barn burning a case of vigilantism, or is it a justifiable act of resistance against oppressive forces that threaten his family's very survival? As a revolutionary figure, is Ab a brave hero fighting for the downtrodden, or is he a threat to the order and stability of a capitalist system that holds out the best hope for opportunity? These questions raised in the text suggest that "Barn Burning," like *As I Lay Dying*, internalizes key elements of the political struggle unfolding in rural America. And in much the same way that this political struggle disrupted the established order of rural

America, and in fact of the nation as a whole, it disrupts the aesthetic order of the text as evident in its conflicted and complex form.

Shaped by class divisions, the alternative perspectives rendered in "Barn Burning" contribute to a form that is best described as polyphonic. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony applies to texts that feature multiple voices interacting in relative discursive autonomy. Rather than a monologic authorial vision, dialogic exchange between the multiple voices constitutes the form of the polyphonic text. In such a setting, a character can declare independence from an author, taking advantage of the considerable freedom inherent in polyphony. With Dostoevsky as his model, Bakhtin explains that the author of the polyphonic text "creates not voiceless slaves but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of agreeing with him and even rebelling against him" (6). In my view, Ab Snopes emerges as just such a character. So, at the same time Ab's defiance of De Spain threatens to disrupt the established order of the dominant class, his struggle to gain an independent voice alters the form of the text by contributing to polyphony. Fittingly, Bakhtin elaborates on this concept in language that blends aesthetics and ideology to envision a textual politics. The polyphonic text is thus "a unification of highly heterogeneous and incompatible material [. . .] with the plurality of consciousness-centers not reduced to a single ideological common denominator" (17). Inherent in Bakhtin's paradigm is a fundamental tension between individual wills and "a unity of a higher order" (21), which makes for a compelling point of comparison between polyphony and democracy. In much the same way that established order in democracy seeks to prevent pluralism from becoming Balkanization, Bakhtinian unity seeks to prevent multiplicity from

becoming chaos in the order of the text. With these associations in mind, we can explore how "Barn Burning," in the words of Bakhtin, represents "not the rising or descending course of an individual personality, but the *condition of society*" (27). That is to say, as a polyphonic text, "Barn Burning" participates in the political process of negotiating and ordering alternative perspectives, making social reality an integral and organic component of its form.

Similarity between the polyphonic form of "Barn Burning" and the political process of democracy is evident in the struggle for power that elicits the narrator's involvement. At significant points in the story, the narrative voice reveals itself to be complicit with the dominant ideology. In the first trial scene, the Justice delivers his verdict to Ab: "Leave this country and don't come back to it" (CS 5). Subsequently, the narrator records Ab's response with a noticeable bias:

[Ab] spoke for the first time, his voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis: 'I aim to. I don't figure to stay in a country among people who . . .' he said something unprintable and vile, addressed to no one. (CS 5)

Why is Ab's statement unprintable? By what standards does the narrator justify this censorship? In this instance, the narrator's silencing of Ab—literally denying him a voice—is both an aesthetic maneuver and a political statement, for it shapes the form of the text and validates the logic of the dominant class as represented in the Justice's decision to remove Ab as a potential threat to established order. Though silenced in this instance, Ab does gain from his activist resolve enough independence in the story to speak his mind on the injustices that he perceives. Already we have witnessed Ab's talent for the defiant gesture, but he is also capable of articulating incisive statements that challenge the dominant ideology. When Ab and Sarty arrive at the De Spain estate,

the narrator interpellates Sarty from this ideological perspective. Faced with the vista of De Spain's mansion, Sarty supposedly feels *"the spell of this peace and dignity"* (CS 10). As Ab moves toward the front steps, the narrator has Sarty longing for his father to succumb to the spell: *"Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what he couldn't help but be"* (CS 11). However, in dialogic form, the dominant ideology repeatedly stands challenged by Ab. In this case, he resists the "spell" and instead penetrates the ideological façade of "peace and dignity" by pointing out the material history of the De Spain mansion: *"That's Nigger sweat, Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough to suit him. Maybe he wants some white sweat with it"* (CS 12). This statement is the verbal stain on the De Spain estate that prefigures the literal one Ab later smears on the rug with so much symbolic value. Ab's challenge to the dominant ideology also presents Sarty with opposing interpretations of how social order is maintained. Depending on the perspective, this society thrives either on a stable, productive, and dignified order fostered by a benevolent dominant class or on exploitation of the poor and disenfranchised. As a result, Sarty's dilemma, more explicitly even than Cash's, represents a fundamental aspect of the exacerbated class conflict in rural America during the Depression as citizens weighed the options of maintaining the established order or resisting authority in the name of social and political reform.

Ab's incisive social vision in general and his challenge to the authority of the dominant class in particular are the forces that mobilize the narrator and thus affect the form of the text. If Ab is representative of the active defiance of authority taking shape in rural America, then the narrator's response to him is in line with the effort to maintain

established order. One way that the narrator attempts to defuse Ab is to use omnipotent attribution as a means of assigning "definitive" interpretations to Ab's motivations. For instance, we are told that Sarty would one day come to understand that his father's penchant for barn burning (i.e., his disregard for property) was an extension of his service during the Civil War when, according to the narrator, Ab stole horses. Here we are to take the narrator's word that Sarty will one day come to view Ab from the same perspective as the narrator and, by extension, the dominant class. At the end of the story, when Sarty recalls Ab's military service and declares that "He was brave!", the narrator undermines this sentiment by noting that Ab

had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck himself did: for booty—it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy or booty of his own. (CS 24-25)

Here the intrusion of the narrator is meant to "clarify" Sarty's show of respect for his father and to render Ab an unscrupulous individualist rather than a representative of an exploited tenant class with cause to revolt against an oppressive system. The narrator's involvement represents an effort to contain Ab's dissidence at the level of form. Still, in a story that relies so heavily on judicial metaphor, the jury remains out on whether the effort to restore order to the text and to the society represented therein ultimately accomplishes a sufficient level of containment.

What are we to make in the end of Sarty's coming-of-age, particularly insofar as his emerging class consciousness represents disputed territory for the forces engaged so intensely in political struggle? Does Sarty finally accept the dominant ideology, or does he claim the mantle of resistance that his father insists is his legacy? The easy answer

would be that Sarty's warning to De Spain signals that the "spell" has worked its magic, thus leading the young boy to the mature realization that established order is preferable to the vigilantism that inspires Ab's barn burning and, in turn, signals social unrest. Following this line of interpretation to its logical conclusion, Ab's death at the hands of De Spain would represent the conclusive victory of order over upheaval and perhaps even suggest Faulkner's alignment with De Spain. But matters of interpretation are rarely so simple and conclusive in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha. Instead, "Barn Burning" offers further evidence of the complexity, contradiction, and even ambivalence that attends Faulkner's treatments of class conflict, particularly in the fiction of the Depression era. Consider, for example, Faulkner's judgment to displace the barn burning and Ab's death, as if to defer the matter of choosing sides. Rather than presenting this violent moment to us vividly, as Faulkner most certainly could have done, he filters the scene through Sarty's perception and thus creates the aesthetic effect of distance and ambiguity. This effect extends the polyphonic form of the text to its very conclusion. For, in the end, Sarty still apparently feels what the narrator earlier calls "the old fierce pull of blood" (CS 3), as suggested by Sarty's need to redeem his father as a brave soldier. Of course, Ab's legacy calls Sarty to the path of *most* resistance, even after he has sacrificed his father to the "justice" of the dominant planter class. Sarty's final response to the conflict between his father and De Spain and all that it represents is to leave and thus to claim no allegiance. And we are told, "He did not look back" (CS 25). Consequently, the alternative perspectives represented in the story by Ab and De Spain have a resonance magnified by irresolution. Perhaps, then, we can also view Sarty in light of Bakhtin's assertion that characters are capable of gaining

independence in the setting of the polyphonic text. But we would do well to remember also that polyphony tempts the author to restore order—a temptation that must have compelled Faulkner, unlike his young protagonist, to look back to the events of "Barn Burning" once again.

By the time Faulkner revised and incorporated "Barn Burning" into *The Hamlet*, the first installment of the Snopes trilogy, the Depression had entered its twilight. At the time Faulkner was working in earnest on the novel, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, coupled with Franco's victory in Spain, had tempered the political idealism of the left. The raging wave of dissidence that had advanced the Popular Front in the mid-thirties was now part of the orderly current of the New Deal. In rural America, populist fervor had subsided; in the South, STFU activism was on the wane. As the thirties gave way to the forties, rural Americans were less inclined to the revolutionary side of the equation, especially since the New Deal had come through not only with relief but also with measurable improvement in people's lives through ambitious initiatives such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Rural Electrification Association (REA). Now, with America on the road to recovery, attention turned from social protest and the specter of revolution to matters of social policy and political reform. In particular, the social contract implicit in the New Deal became a focal point of political debate. During the worst years of the Depression, warnings about the harmful effects of federal relief had largely fallen on deaf ears. But now there was mounting concern, primarily in the higher sectors of the dominant class, that the New Deal would become irrevocably entrenched not only in the federal government but in the American psyche. The renewed sense of confidence attending

economic recovery inspired appeals for Americans to recall the virtue of self-reliance and to resist the cycle of dependency cited as a by-product of federal relief. Faulkner's revision of "Barn Burning" for *The Hamlet* reveals a progression in concern that coincides remarkably with the general shift in contemporary political debate from issues of social protest to questions of social policy influenced as ever by ideological conceptions of individualism and collectivism.

In revising "Barn Burning" as the closing episode in the first section of *The Hamlet*, Faulkner preserved most of the details from the published short story. For example, Ab's symbolic gesture of soiling the expensive rug still signals his incendiary act of class warfare coming in the final stages of the story. More remarkable, though, are the variations that differentiate one incarnation of the story from the next. Such revision had by this time become a habitual pattern for Faulkner, as he quite frequently incorporated previously published stories—often written hastily for money—into the narrative frameworks of his novels. Richard C. Moreland identifies two tendencies in Faulkner's method of revision—either a Freudian compulsive repetition that resists new critical insight or what Moreland calls "revisionary repetition." In the case of the latter, Moreland explains, Faulkner

repeats some structured event, in order somehow to alter that structure and its continuing power, especially by opening a critical space for what the subject might *learn* about that structure in the different context of a changing present or a more distant or different past. (4)

This instance of revisionary repetition can be read as Faulkner's move from representing the complex nature of class warfare in "Barn Burning" toward a critical space for examining the prevailing remedy in *The Hamlet*. That remedy, historically speaking, was the use of federal relief to temper class conflict and resentment.⁸ Despite initial

wariness of relief as a sort of social anaesthetic, FDR and Congress were committed to this tactic by the latter half of the thirties. For instance, as unemployment continued to soar in 1938 after yet another substantial drop in the value of the stock market, FDR asked Congress for \$3 billion to bolster relief agencies such as the WPA; Congress responded with \$3.75 billion, and economic indicators rose within a few months (McElvaine 299). In my view, this condition of public policy informs the critical space opened up in the revision of "Barn Burning," suggesting Faulkner's concern over what many in the Depression era viewed as a relief-for-peace mentality in constructing social policy. Consequently, the complex and palpable tale of class warfare that is "Barn Burning" takes a variant form in *The Hamlet*, reading on one level as a cautionary tale about the willingness to keep the peace at the price of self-reliance.

A telling component of Faulkner's revision involves the immediately noticeable change in form. Instead of the polyphonic form of "Barn Burning," which is characterized by alternative class perspectives, the episode in *The Hamlet* is monologic and narrated exclusively from the standpoint of the established order. In the novel, the story of Ab Snopes and his penchant for burning barns is initiated by Tull and continued by V.K. Ratliff on the front porch of Will Varner's store, the institution governing commerce in Frenchman's Bend. Dueling class sympathies seem to have disappeared with Sarty, who bears no mention in the revision. Instead, Flem Snopes, Sarty's older brother, rises to phoenix-like prominence out of the ashes of the previous story. Foreshadowing Flem's inevitable rise from the hamlet to the mansion, Varner utters the common refrain, "Hell fire," at key moments in the recounting of Ab's barn burning. The more structured narrative framework resulting from the decision to filter the story

through Ratliff has the political consequence of diminishing the power of Ab's incisive social commentary. In a significant omission, Ratliff does not cite Ab's material history of the De Spain mansion, nor does he show any sympathy whatsoever for the systematic oppression that might inspire tenant farmers like Ab to revolt against authority. Rather than a vocal spokesman for his class, Ab is manipulated by the entrepreneurial Ratliff, who is noticeably aided by the form of the text, as the central figure in a parable for the dominant class about the dangers of social insurrection.

An ostensible purpose of the story is to issue a warning to Varner about entering into contractual negotiations with the likes of Flem Snopes. From the perspective of the late thirties, these negotiations take on added meaning, particularly if we consider the two characters as representatives of respective class positions in the same way that De Spain and Ab Snopes function in "Barn Burning." In the dealings between Varner and Flem Snopes, Faulkner captures the essence of an ongoing transition in class relations with the old order being replaced by a "new deal" under which Flem not only expects but implicitly demands action from Varner, whose manner of "governing" Frenchman's Bend as a father figures is reminiscent of FDR's leadership role. The text makes it clear that Varner's primary motivation in negotiating this new arrangement is to prevent Flem from employing his father's tactic of barn burning and thus initiating class warfare. Afraid that Flem might destroy his property and destabilize the established order, Varner frantically rationalizes, "Hell fire. Hell fire. I dont dare say Leave here, and I aint got nowhere to say Go there. I dont even dare have him arrested for barn-burning for fear he'll set my barn afire" (*H* 20). To prevent social upheaval, Varner essentially offers Flem work-relief—employment in the general store that enables Flem to fulfill

his desire to get out of farming and the cycle of poverty that tenants endure under the sharecropping system. Waving off Varner's offer of a cigar, a tenuous peace pipe at best, Flem insists that "I ain't never lit a match to one yet." "And I just hope to God you and nobody you know ever will," responds Varner with a cautious eye toward an uncertain future of negotiating with Flem Snopes and his kind (*H* 23). The tenuous condition of this arrangement suggests that offering assistance in response to the threat of property destruction and social instability creates an unstable prospect for ameliorating class conflict—a fictional scenario ideologically responsive to the social contract of the New Deal and the perceived rationale behind its offers of relief for continued order and stability.

As the nation moved from the devastation of the Depression toward war-induced economic recovery, indictments of surviving federal relief projects became even more pronounced in Faulkner's fiction. Without the urgency of the Depression, Faulkner reasoned, these projects lacked sufficient justification and served to perpetuate an underclass dependent on the dole and thus deprived of individual liberty. Consequently, "The Tall Men" (1941) issues an explicit warning against an intrusive federal government—referred to repeatedly in the story as "the Government"—intent on manipulating rural folk and folkways through social engineering. As in "Barn Burning," characters can be read, on one level, to embody certain contemporaneous ideological positions; thus the form of the story stages the political struggle between them. At the outset, "The Tall Men" opposes local and federal authorities, represented respectively by the Yoknapatawpha sheriff's marshal, who becomes a chronicler through the course of the story, and the federal investigator on hand to arrest the

McCallum twins for evading selective-service registration. The McCallums are drawn directly from the myth of the yeoman farmer—they are cast as a salt-of-the-earth farming family resistant to accepting federal relief or intervention, preferring instead to live by the credo spoken by Buddy McCallum to a federal farm subsidy agent: "We can make out" (CS 57).

The fiercely independent McCallums would have been well-suited to another work called "The Tall Men"—staunch Southern Agrarian Donald Davidson's epic poem of the 1920s which reads as a panegyric to the yeoman farmers and pioneers of Tennessee. Faulkner's short story shares more in common with Davidson's poem than a title; in fact, the story's primary theme of rugged individualism and determined resistance to what is perceived as monolithic federal authority seems to have been lifted from Southern Agrarianism. This similarity is surprising, given that Faulkner had mostly remained out of step with his regional counterparts who sought to advance the Southern Agrarian movement. After all, Faulkner was less prone than this Nashville set to romanticize the southern way of life at the expense of exposing its darker elements. Nevertheless, Faulkner's "The Tall Men" represents an affiliation with the brand of defiance that emerged in *I'll Take My Stand* and progressed through the thirties as an alternative to leftist programs of social and economic reform.

Southern Agrarianism opposed much of the agenda supported by the STFU, for example, but these two resistance movements did share a common enemy in industrialism, which both viewed as a threat to the rural way of life. In addition, both movements expressed a solid commitment to land reform and repeatedly opposed New Deal farm policy. What separated them, however, was a fundamental difference in

ideological perspective. As Jess Gilbert and Steve Brown explain, the Southern Agrarians "sought to *reestablish* a Jeffersonian society of individual, independent property owners, one comprised substantially of a single class," while the STFU "looked *forward* to transcending the private property system altogether, toward the cooperative commonwealth" (196-97). In Faulkner's "The Tall Men," the federal investigator's consciousness becomes the disputed territory, much like Sarty's in "Barn Burning," as the text internalizes this ideological conflict between individualism and collectivism and moves toward definitive resolution.

When the investigator first appears in the story, he reveals a prejudice against the hill farmers which apparently evolved during his previous work as a relief agent for the WPA. In a lengthy lament, the agent rails against "*These people who lie about and conceal the ownership of land and property in order to hold relief jobs*" (CS 46). Not inclined toward the myth of the yeoman farmer, the agent rather prefers the figure of the acquisitive charlatan out to manipulate the relief system for individual profit—the same interpretation, as we have seen, that the narrator of "Barn Burning" offers of Ab Snopes. The use of italics calls special attention to the prejudicial views of the investigator, who remains nameless in the story—a feature that upholds his bureaucratic anonymity and his belief in following the letter rather than the spirit of the law. The dominance of the investigator's point of view in the story, however, is short-lived, as he winds up a virtual straw man in relation to the marshal. Like Sarty, the investigator undergoes a process of initiation, although the effort to define the nature of this process is much less conflicted in "The Tall Men." The primary reason for this clarity is the dominant ideological position that the marshal achieves through the course of the story.

In an extended direction quotation, the marshal effectively assumes control of the narrative and in so doing claims the moral authority to offer the investigator an object lesson in transcending statistical data and bureaucratic procedure as a means of recognizing the inherent value of individuality. This formal decision precludes alternative points of view, thus rendering the text monologic. The empowered marshal attempts to sway the investigator as he chronicles the history of the McCallum family in an account noticeably influenced by the yeoman myth and tinged with ideological statements on individualism and the intrusiveness of federal authority in local matters. For example, the marshal pinpoints Buddy McCallum's decision to quit raising cotton by noting that "It was when the Government first begun to interfere with how a man farmed his own land, raised his cotton. Stabilizing the price, using up the surplus, they called it, giving a man advice and help, whether he wanted it or not" (CS 55). According to the marshal, the McCallums refused to participate in the federal stabilization program, because

they just couldn't believe that the Government aimed to help a man whether he wanted help or not, aimed to interfere with how much of anything he could make by hard work on his own land, making the crop and ginning it right here in their own gin, like they had always done [. . .] (CS 56)

Resonant with the rhetoric of self-reliance, this passage means to oppose the logical fallacy of the stabilization program to the common-sense values of the McCallums. From the marshal's standpoint, the refusal of the McCallums to participate in the federal program, resulting in the production of two cotton crops prevented from sale on the market, is an indicator of the vast distance between the abstraction of federal policy and the reality of farming. One consequence the marshal identifies is a work ethic

endangered by "a fine loud grabble and snatch of AAA [Agricultural Adjustment Act] and WPA and a dozen other three-letter reasons for a man not to work" (CS 58). But, on a more philosophical note, he expresses concern that federal intervention diminishes the value of the individual. The marshal thus admonishes the investigator:

The trouble is, we done got into the habit of confusing the situations with the folks. [. . .] You just went and got yourself all fogged up with rules and regulations. That's our trouble. We done invented so many alphabets and rules and recipes that we can't see anything else; if what we see can't be fitted to an alphabet or a rule, we are lost. (CS 59)

This passage calls to mind the critique offered in the Introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, as the writers warn of "super-engineers" intent on denying individual liberty in the name of collectivism (xli). The marshal's implicit plea for empiricism here is punctuated with the burial scene at the end of the story. Buddy McCallum's amputated leg is a visceral symbol of the considerable sacrifices he has made as a hardworking small farmer trying to provide for his family and as a veteran of World War I now faced with the prospect of losing his sons in the next major conflict taking shape. Burying this symbol of Buddy's sacrifice, the marshal exhorts:

Life has done got cheap, and life ain't cheap. Life's a pretty durn valuable thing. I don't mean just getting along from one WPA relief check to the next one, but honor and pride and discipline that make a man worth preserving, make him of any value. That's what we got to learn again. (CS 61)

Aside from the express ideological position, the tone of this passage is reminiscent of the most overtly political art produced by advocates of social realism and suggests apparent resolution, in a relatively brief span, of key conflicts represented in "Barn Burning."

When we view the two stories in juxtaposition, an immediate paradox emerges with respect to issues of representation. In "Barn Burning," the small farmer is a threat to established order; in "The Tall Men," the established order, exemplified by the New Deal, is a threat to the small farmer. Why the complete reversal? There is, of course, the argument that different stories call for different scenarios. But I submit that contextual forces are a significant contributing factor, especially when we take into account that both stories are essentially written from the perspective of the dominant class. For this reason, it is not surprising that "Barn Burning" is so conflicted, reflecting as it does the fear, turbulence, and ambivalence that emerged in response to rising social upheaval. However, once a sense of order had been restored and the farmer had uncocked his rifle, to revise V.F. Calverton's phrase, he could seem from the perspective of the dominant class more threatened than threatening. "The Tall Men" illustrates this point vividly in terms of form and tone. Renewed economic security and social stability offered Faulkner the luxury of extolling once again, with all the passion of a Southern Agrarian, the ideal of the yeoman farmer as a model of rugged individualism rather than a peasant with a pitchfork—or, more to the point, a torch. In keeping with its time, "The Tall Men" radiates with recovered self-assurance, upholding self-reliance as an inherent American virtue under threat of dilution by New Deal collectivism. The conflicted agrarian representations apparent in Cash's and Sarty's divided loyalties and tortured ambivalence seem thus resolved.

Sentiments expressed by the marshal in "The Tall Men" sound much like the Faulkner to come: the resurrected, post-*Portable* Faulkner of the forties and fifties who had emerged from the Great Depression as a vocal advocate of individualism. While

certainly good for the nation and for Faulkner's literary reputation, post-war recovery and resolution was less productive for his artistic vision. It is generally recognized that the latter half of Faulkner's literary career compares unfavorably to the period virtually coinciding with the Depression. Such a comparison begs the obvious question: How could it not? This division in Faulkner's career is most often explained in terms of inevitable diminishment: Faulkner simply could not sustain the level of artistic genius that had enabled him to write one tour de force after another in the thirties. Yet, as we have seen, history and culture have much to tell us about the nature of Faulkner's fiction. In many respects, William Faulkner was a writer who thrived on conflict and uncertainty, and so for him the Great Depression made fertile ground for literary production. With a remarkable talent for cultivating contradiction, Faulkner left us with a bountiful harvest of complex forms marked indelibly by their emergence in one of the most turbulent climates in American history.

End Notes

¹ The biographical information about Faulkner's forebears is extracted from the first volume of Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*. The information about Greenfield Farm comes from Blotner 2: 986-1049 and from John Faulkner, *My Brother Bill: An Affectionate Reminiscence* (176-201).

² For the extensive discussion of barn burning that follows, at least some attention to its historical and social significance is in order. In "'Southern Violence' Reconsidered: Arson as Protest in Black-Belt Georgia, 1865-1910," Albert C. Smith attempts to revise the understanding of violence in Southern culture, stressing incidence of property destruction as a means of calling into question longstanding emphasis on personal acts of violence such as rape and homicide. Noting significant cases of arson in Georgia, Smith asserts that "arson was violent, interracial protest, a form of revenge for racism and poverty that defined the region's race relations" (528). Though the racial component of Smith's argument is tangential to my examination, his secondary focus on intraracial acts of arson committed by those without property against those with substantial holdings is relevant to Faulkner's representations of barn burning. Of particular significance is Smith's finding that higher incidence of arson tended to

coincide with seasonal pressure points in agricultural production, such as planting and harvest, and with periods of economic depression (538). Moreover, Smith explains why perpetrators of arson tended to target barns, gins, and other institutions associated with agricultural production: "By consistent!y destroying such property, these arsonists were attacking the very symbols of power and status that differentiated the propertied from the propertyless and sustained and perpetuated that inequality" (543). Consequently, mounting social unrest in the Great Depression would have certainly rekindled fears in the dominant class of arson and other forms of property destruction so prevalent during the economic depressions and the rise in Populism that marked the last two decades of the nineteenth century. For other treatments of property destruction as social protest, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Community, Class, and Snopesian Crime: Local Justice in the Old South" and C. Van Woodward, *Origins of the New South* 415.

³ See Panthea Reid [Broughton], "The Cubist Novel: Toward Defining the Genre" and "Faulkner's Cubist Novels." Incidentally, the verse that Faulkner wrote early in his literary life has also been compared to modern painting in terms of aesthetics. See Ilse Duso Lind, "The Effect of Painting on Faulkner's Poetic Form" and Panthea Reid, "The Scene of Writing and the Shape of Language for Faulkner When 'Matisse and Picasso Yet Painted.'"

⁴ In the thirties, Benton abandoned the abstract style that he had adopted from the post-Impressionists and turned to what many called, in a pejorative sense, "regionalism." In retrospect, we can see that Benton retained elements of post-Impressionism—depictions of elongated human bodies and the movement of mundane objects to the foreground, for example—in his treatment of rural subjects and themes from a socially conscious point of view. Many of the FSA photographs display modernist influences in addition to the stark realism so valued in the thirties—for instance, the emphasis on mundane objects in the foreground often yields an abstract quality in the photograph much like the flattening effect of Cubism.

⁵ By "significant form," I mean specifically the concept introduced by Roger Fry that supports a theory of representation resistant to the reductive documentary style found in, say, the popular landscapes of nineteenth-century Britain. Instead of documenting a figure as it appears in reality, Fry argues, the artist should strive to represent the figure in a form that strives to convey the whole of perception, including the emotional response of the artist. For Darl, then, the figure of the "cubistic bug" is a significant form of Addie's coffin.

⁶ The historical data relevant to the STFU comes from Auerbach, "Southern Tenant Farmers: Socialist Critics of the New Deal." See also Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal*. I should note as well that scholars continue to debate the effectiveness of the STFU, with some stressing the failure of the organization to meet basic objectives and others pointing to its significance as a cultural force reflected not only in the lives of its members but also

in the anxieties of the planter class. Wary of a detailed historical argument, I generally agree with the latter school of thought and thus interpret the STFU as a significant social movement representative of the potential for social upheaval in rural America.

⁷ John T. Matthews similarly argues that the complexity of Sarty's dilemma "suggests that the simple plot of class consciousness and conflict fails to cover the multiplicity of exploitative forms in the South" ("Faulkner and Proletarian Literature" 172).

⁸ Moreland applies his concept of revisionary repetition to Faulkner's incorporation of "Barn Burning" into *The Hamlet*. He argues that these texts represent the culmination of "a series of repetitions and revisions of one particular structured social event in *Absalom, Absalom!*" (7): the scene in which a youthful Thomas Sutpen is turned away from the front door of the Tidewater planter's mansion by a house slave. In "Barn Burning," Moreland explains, Faulkner seeks "to open a critical space for reconceiving this oppressive primal scene" (8). The presence of Ab and his defiant gesture of soiling De Spain's rug thus lends voice to class animosity not expressed explicitly in the scene featuring the silenced young Sutpen. Moreland cites Sarty's initial ambivalence in response to the gesture, but argues nevertheless that Sarty repeats "his society's [. . .] violent condemnation and exclusion of Ab's social difference as so much social filth" (8). In *The Hamlet*, Moreland continues, Ratliff's retelling of the story "stresses and appreciates both the potential humor and the potential for economic criticism and change in Ab's acute understanding of his own social and economic relationships with the planter" (19). The historical point of reference that I establish compels me toward a different reading of the critical space opened up in the revision. As I see it, Ratliff diminishes Ab as a vocal representative of the tenant class so as to manipulate him in a form of social and political commentary rooted in the dominant ideology serving established order.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF TEXT ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AA</i>	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
<i>AILD</i>	<i>As I Lay Dying</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Collected Stories of William Faulkner</i>
<i>H</i>	<i>The Hamlet</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Light in August</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Mosquitoes</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>Sanctuary</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Sanctuary: The Original Text</i>
<i>SF</i>	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>

VITA

Theodore B. Atkinson III enrolled as a graduate student in English at Louisiana State University in 1997 and earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 2001. Atkinson completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Mississippi in 1990, receiving a bachelor of arts degree in journalism with a minor in English in 1990. After working in public relations and politics for several years, he decided to pursue a career in academics. In 1994, he enrolled as a graduate student at Mississippi College; he earned his master's degree in English in 1996. Atkinson originally hails from Yazoo City, Mississippi.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

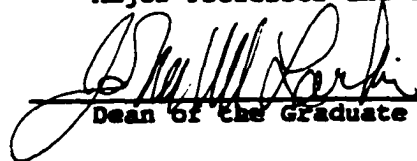
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Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and the Politics of Art


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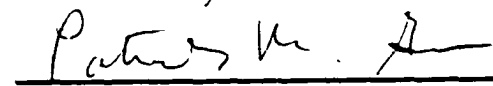

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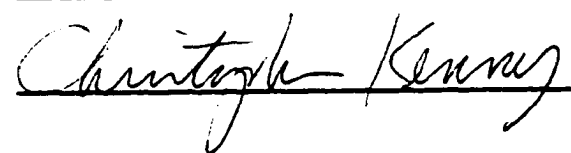

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Date of Examination:

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