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## CHAPTER 1

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# An Artist Never Quite at Home: Faulkner's Apprehension of Modern Life

The prevailing view of Faulkner emphasizes his preoccupation with the past. Faulkner comes across foremost as the descendant of a distinguished family with origins in the Old South's plantation society, creator of the master emblem of modern Southern nostalgia in the person of his character Quentin Compson, and a cantankerous skeptic about many newfangled notions – including, at various times, the onset of a culture of credit, consumption, and labor-saving convenience; the spread of new technologies for communication and commerce; the urgent pace of social change in the South, culminating in women's and black Americans' civil rights; and the relaxation of proper manners and the right to privacy that his class associated with the virtues of a civilized Southern way of life. Recently, some literary critics have even begun to complain that Faulkner's obsession with the Southern past – with its monumental achievements as well as its ruinous evils – stunted modern Southern writing for generations. Faulkner's indisputable greatness as a writer meant, according to this view, that in order to establish their own credentials as Southern writers in a Faulkner-haunted landscape, his successors had to take on Faulkner's subjects – history, race, regional identity, and the despair of one group of individuals (primarily white males of the owning class), who suffer guilt and shame over their past and who fail to create a future. Perhaps this is what Flannery O'Connor meant when she joked about Faulkner's influence on subsequent writers: as one herself, she said, she didn't want her mule and wagon on the tracks when the Dixie Limited roared through.

What I want to argue instead, by way of correcting this portrait of an imagination obsessed by the past, is that Faulkner also responded strongly to the opportunities for novelty presented by the modern age. It is true that perhaps the most famous line in all of Faulkner is a remark made by one of his characters, usually attributed to "Faulkner" himself, that "the past is never dead. It's not even past" (Gavin Stevens, *Requiem for a Nun*, p. 535). But if Quentin Compson feels as a twenty-year-old that his entire life is already over, crushed by the weight of his ancestors' deeds, his head a "commonwealth" of voices that have already said all there is to say, his mind intent on a suicide that feels redundant – for all that, his is not the only fate Faulkner can imagine. Despite the grotesques of passion, greed, indulgence, selfishness, crudeness, and ignorance that populate Faulkner's chronicle of a world becoming modern, he never turns his back on the wondrous capacity of humankind to invent new possibilities for itself. Even a monster of modernity like the rapacious, soulless businessman Flem Snopes impresses his creator with his ingenuity and determination. And Faulkner remarked famously in one of his few comments about his artistic philosophy that "life is motion," and that the aim of the artist was to arrest that motion so that readers years later could make it move again.<sup>1</sup> The changes in the world he knew powerfully affected the young writer Faulkner, and motivated his early efforts to capture change on the tip of his pen. There was something thrilling about what was happening to the world at his moment in time. Faulkner's art responds to the sensation of exhilaration as much as to a sense of horror at these transformations. He asks how individuals process the massive upheavals associated with modernity, and how their varying reactions tell us about their distinct characters, backgrounds, and futures.

In the remainder of this chapter I want to discuss a number of Faulkner's earlier works by considering two main issues we identified in "Artist at Home" and "There Was a Queen." We'll look at some short stories and novels that represent the shock of new forms of social and cultural behavior to the world into which Faulkner was born. The South of the 1920s, after World War I, experienced strong shifts toward modernity: the arrival of automobiles and the building of new roads; the electrification of towns and farms; plentiful consumer goods and the growth of national merchandising through catalogues; the attempt to secure greater personal liberties by black Americans who

had fought in Europe and realized that Jim Crow segregation was not universal; the extension of the ballot to women in 1920; a liberalization of sexual mores; the popularity of movies and a culture of celebrity; the power of national magazines and advertising; the modernization of education and public health; the development of local industries, the increase of wage labor, the decline in small farm ownership; and the inevitable rearrangements of wealth, social prestige, and power in communities of the Deep South. These works will help us to see that Faulkner *apprehended* modern life in several senses: he tried to comprehend it by imagining its effects on all sorts of different people; he tried to track down and "indict" what caused suffering in his society, as new evils evolved from past ones; but he was also made apprehensive by modernity even as he granted its ability to excite and liberate. We'll also keep in mind the question of modern cultural forms. What did it mean for Faulkner to think of himself as a modern artist? In what ways did modernist experimentation with literary form and style itself embody the idea of modern change? In what ways might it have resisted them? How did new developments like mass magazines and the movies change the economics of Faulkner's professional life, and how did they affect his subject matter, technique, and sense of audience?

Faulkner seriously committed himself to the vocation of writing during his early twenties. As a neophyte, Faulkner at first sought recognition from individual readers and authors whom he knew; they were critical in affirming his sense of himself as *a writer*. Even when he was in grade school, Billy Faulkner had once answered a teacher's question about what he wanted to be when he grew up by saying that he intended to be an author, like his "great-grandpappy." The Old Colonel, John Clark Falkner (as he spelled his name), had written romance novels about the old South. As Faulkner reached his high school years, he realized that some girls were impressed by artistic types, and he took to composing books of hand-lettered poems, the pages of which he meticulously sewed together and illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings. Faulkner crafted volumes like this for his eventual wife Estelle, as well as for a few other young women he became enamored with.<sup>2</sup> Faulkner also developed a close friendship with a young man from another prominent Oxford family, Phil Stone, who shared his enthusiasm for literature; together they discussed the latest modern verse, experimental fiction, and avant garde literary journals.

When Faulkner began writing himself, Phil Stone was the first audience whose approval he craved. (Maybe a readership of one was good preparation for the size of the audiences for his novels when they first appeared.) Periodically after leaving high school, Faulkner took courses as a non-degree student at the University of Mississippi, in his home town. He studied Shakespeare and French literature, and tried his hand at imitating symbolist poetry. As some of his poems began appearing in the campus magazine, he also latched on to a university theater troupe and started writing scripts for them. One that survives is called *The Marionettes*, after the group's name.<sup>3</sup>

During these years Oxford's townsfolk were puzzled by Faulkner's seeming idleness. A man already in his early twenties, he made money sporadically by painting houses, which left him plenty of time to play golf. He got a job as post-master of the US mail station on the university campus, but spent most of his time playing cards and reading his patrons' magazines. When an inspector finally showed up to fire him, after numerous customer complaints, Faulkner memorably remarked that though he expected to have to work the rest of his life, at least he wouldn't any longer have to be at the beck and call of any son of a bitch with two cents for a postage stamp. Meanwhile, Faulkner was stealing away for long days of reading (sometimes filling Phil Stone's automobile with books and heading to the countryside), and toiling away long nights on his poems and prose fiction. Faulkner's perseverance and Stone's confidence finally paid off in Faulkner's first major publication, a volume of poems entitled *The Marble Faun*. Stone put up money to subsidize its publication by a small Boston firm, and Faulkner saw his book in print in December 1924.

Another reinforcement of Faulkner's calling came when he stayed in New Orleans for six months beginning in January of 1925. In addition to palling around with the Sherwood Andersons, he strengthened his ties with a group of ambitious young intellectuals and artists who had begun publishing a Southern arts magazine. *The Double Dealer* printed work by a number of talented newcomers, including some who like Faulkner were to become major figures, such as Jean Toomer and Hart Crane. Faulkner had gotten to know some of the *Double Dealer* crowd during earlier visits to New Orleans. The editors provided opportunities that encouraged Faulkner's permanent turn from poetry to fiction. He began contributing prose pieces regularly, and also was assigned a few reviews of contemporary authors, including one of

Eugene O'Neill. Although Faulkner was to publish another volume of poetry, *A Green Bough*, in 1933, few of those poems were new; most dated from a decade earlier when he had been concentrating on poetry. In 1925 Faulkner's fresh material mainly involved prose sketches – including experiments in creating colorful first-person narratives.<sup>4</sup> These reflected Joyce's innovative stream-of-consciousness style and the interplay of voices in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *The Double Dealer's* climate of avant-garde experimentation must have been ideal for the primary project Faulkner was working on in New Orleans, a full-length novel he was calling "Mayday" (re-titled for publication as *Soldiers' Pay*).

Everything about Faulkner's first novel signals that he was making his bid to join a new generation of modern artists. Both in subject and style, the book captures emerging sensibilities that became hallmarks of modern literature in Europe and the US. One common element of classic modernist works was the conviction that fundamental changes were taking place in Western society in the first decades of the twentieth century. Besides some of the features of modernization I've already referred to as affecting the US South in the 1920s, earlier and even more basic upheavals followed from late nineteenth-century challenges to principal received truths. Darwin had permanently compromised views of human distinctiveness and the providence of nature; Freud had greatly complicated common sense models of human consciousness and motivation; Nietzsche questioned accepted ideals of morality and truth and urged personal authenticity as the proper measure of a life. New technologies of communication and economic production; the unprecedented geopolitics of colonial expansion and eventual global conflict; and the extension for the first time of full citizens' rights to women and immigrants – all powerfully reshaped Western society. Virginia Woolf remarked that human nature itself seemed to have changed by 1910. Literature of the years just before and after World War I engaged such transformations centrally. Think of William Butler Yeats's involvement in Irish nationalism as British imperial authority was challenged worldwide. Or Joyce's fascination with novelties like urban mass transit, advertising culture, and new sexual permissiveness in *Ulysses* (1922). Or Kafka's prophetic fables of spreading bureaucracy that would threaten the very idea of a private self. Then the war itself became a flashpoint for the way the promise of modernity turned so deadly perverse.

Many of the great works immediately following World War I created portraits of individual and cultural devastation. Readers could find the mood of despair perfectly captured in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. *The Waste Land* (1922) delineated a culture in fragmentary ruins, its myths shattered by modern ignorance, materialism, abandoned faith. Eliot organized his edgy, only partially coherent poem around the murky mythological figure of an ancient fertility god, whose sexually mutilated body symbolized the need for rejuvenation. The figure of a damaged survivor gets reworked in a number of subsequent novels, including *Soldiers' Pay*. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) we encounter the character Septimus Smith, who suffers from shell shock, and whose condition suggests the war's blows to the invincibility of the British Empire, the superiority of Western moral and cultural values, the purposes of civilized progress. Even a figure like Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) drifts through a world that has lost its way after the war; on the outskirts of New York City Nick drives through a desolate stretch of working-class Long Island that he dubs "the waste land."

The protagonist of Faulkner's first novel also is a casualty of the war, a young pilot from a small Southern town who returns severely wounded – blind, silent, motionless. Donald Mahon's terrible scar symbolizes the traumatic effects of mass violence, disillusionment, and denial that marked a generation. Like Jake Barnes in Hemingway's more famous *The Sun Also Rises*, which appeared the same year, Mahon lives on as a ghost of himself. Jake Barnes, who suffers a disabling sexual injury, has given "more than his life" (*The Sun Also Rises*, p. 39) according to the Italian officer who awards him a medal; Jake's wound blocks him from intimacy, from satisfaction, from creating a future – he's condemned to a posthumous existence. As for Mahon, a former sweetheart laments that the "Donald she had known was dead; this one was but a sorry substitute" (*Soldiers' Pay*, p. 216). Mahon succumbs altogether to his wounds, while those around him try to adjust to a transformed world. The woman who escorts him back to Georgia from the military hospital herself has lost a lover in the war, and another young cadet who tries to woo her observes that "times have changed since the war . . . the war makes you older than they used to" (p. 221).

"Mayday" is the emergency cry of pilots about to crash. A whole era of confidence and idealism went down in the aftermath of the war. Faulkner's narrator speaks with typical post-war cynicism when he

describes the neighbors who come to sympathize with the wreck that is Mahon: "solid business men interested in the Ku Klux Klan more than in war, and interested in war only as a matter of dollars and cents, while their wives chatted about clothes to each other across Mahon's scarred, oblivious brow" (p. 117). If the war in retrospect was revealed to have been urged on largely by the munitions makers and financiers who stood to profit from the death trade – a far cry from the patriotic idealism President Woodrow Wilson had appealed to, other traditional sources of meaning and solace hardly withstood post-war disillusionment either. Mahon's father, a rector, finds little refuge in his church. And the ideal of tight-knit Southern community vaporizes before the severity of Mahon's disfiguration; the generic town seems mainly to have devolved into a bad dream of superficial self-gratification. The occasional act of kindness or generosity stands out, but there's no secure ground for common ethics any more.

For Faulkner, as a young man recently returned from a failed attempt to get into combat, drunk with contempt for the small-town Southern pieties that smothered his genius for audacity, and eager to scandalize those who thought they knew him, this moment of post-war disenchantment must have been sublime. *Soldiers' Pay* proved to be the sort of book in which he could vent his scorn for the old-fashioned mores under which he chafed, scandalously indulge more liberal social and artistic views, sharpen his criticism of modern bourgeois conventionality, mock the frivolousness of an even younger generation that hadn't been scarred by the war, and begin to betray the bizarre, sensational tales his "closed society" tried to keep quiet. In all of these Faulkner found himself perfectly aligned with the latest national fashions in literature. What Faulkner had to say was what a new generation wanted to hear; the way he wanted to say it was what a literate audience thought art should be. Up to a certain point, his early success as a writer derived from the good fortune of this mutual reinforcement. In *Soldiers' Pay* we may appreciate how Faulkner wrote out of deep personal motives, even as he kept an eye on what might win publishers' attention and the rewards of acceptance.

Faulkner finished his manuscript in May of 1925, submitted it to Sherwood Anderson's publisher, Boni & Liveright, and saw his first novel appear the following February. Part of its legend involves Anderson's having agreed to recommend the manuscript on the condition that he not have to read it. Anderson was busy finishing a book of his



own, called *Dark Laughter*. The ambitious new publisher Horace Liveright had recently persuaded Anderson to leave his original firm by offering the author of *Winesburg, Ohio* the present-day equivalent of a million dollar advance. As part of his agreement, Anderson promised to be on the lookout for other up-and-coming talent; his conviction about Faulkner's genius evidently did not depend on the detail of actual words on the page. Liveright himself was doubtful about *Soldiers' Pay* after receiving mixed readers' reports, but he went forward on the basis of Anderson's confidence. Anderson never told Liveright that he had not read the manuscript.

Horace Liveright represented the most flamboyant of the so-called new New York publishers. Eager to capitalize on the resurgence of leisure pursuits by a class of prosperous culture consumers in post-war America, several upstart publishing firms aggressively set about developing new sectors of the literary marketplace. In contrast, older houses, even ones that relocated to New York City, tended to retain the aesthetic and business culture of their genteel roots in nineteenth-century New England. Scribner's was one of the few long-time publishers that did manage to keep up with the changing field. Founded in the early 1800s, they were publishers of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and many of the foremost British writers before World War I. The firm also spotted new talent like Fitzgerald and Hemingway after the war, and boasted the greatest editor of the period, Maxwell Perkins. Faulkner was mindful of Scribner's prestige. He had penciled the word "Scribners" at the bottom of the first manuscript sheet of "Mayday" (Karl, 1989, p. 227), and he later urged his wife Estelle to make the publisher her first choice for a manuscript of her own.

If firms like Scribner's could confer legitimacy on a writer by virtue of its time-proven taste and commitment to elite writing, newer publishers happily sought out more volatile sectors of the literary scene, where bolder writers were challenging all sorts of orthodoxies. New companies like Knopf and Harcourt, Brace joined Boni & Liveright in recruiting established writers like Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair, who were perceived as prime shapers of a more modern sensibility. Such firms also cultivated fresh writing by a variety of younger artists. The new publishers welcomed work that was experimental in form, and also encouraged the untapped subject matter found in writing by immigrants and African Americans. Though such publishing strategies aimed at expanding the market for





**FIGURE 1** Faulkner posing in the Royal Air Force uniform he purchased before returning to Oxford, Mississippi, after flight training in Toronto (July 1918). Cofield Collection, Southern Media Archive, University of Mississippi Special Collections (B1F38).

literature, these publishers also tended to be socially progressive by conviction.

Faulkner's placing of his book with Liveright signifies a connection with a site of cultural production where value accrued to iconoclasm, novelty, and daring. Liveright published the early Ezra Pound, to whom he was committed despite weak sales, Eugene O'Neill, D. H. Lawrence, H. D., Hart Crane, and many others. Whatever Liveright's misgivings about the strength of Faulkner's manuscript, and however much he failed to respond to Faulkner personally (calling him the sort of person he couldn't warm to), there's no question that *Soldiers' Pay* found a congenial place on Boni & Liveright's list. The publisher had defined its mission as wanting to shock bourgeois complacency, offend middle-class notions of propriety, disseminate serious ideas about the liberalization of social mores and economic affairs, and embrace "the modern" however broadly understood.

As a Boni & Liveright book, *Soldiers' Pay* would have been associated with the sexual avant-garde of American publishing. Writing against censorship in 1923, Liveright insisted that "[f]rankness in literature relating to sexual matters never corrupted or depraved anyone, adult or child" (Liveright, "The Absurdity of Censorship," quoted in Gilmer, 1970, p. 75). An early publisher of Freud, Liveright would have liked the boldness with which *Soldiers' Pay* represented sexual behavior. *Soldiers' Pay* and Faulkner's next novel, *Mosquitoes* (also published by Liveright), contain Faulkner's most explicit writing (and thinking) about sexual relations. In the 1920s, many young women took to displaying their bodies more openly and announcing their desires more directly. Recall that the femme fatale of *The Sun Also Rises* is once vividly described as showing off curves as sleek as a racing yacht's. Cicely Saunders in *Soldiers' Pay* parades in filmy gowns that leave little to the imagination. Virtually all of the younger characters offer and accept sexual intimacies openly. Cicely gets out of her engagement to Donald when she realizes how badly he's mutilated; unable to convince the families to release her from her commitment, she gives her virginity to another suitor, in a bid to destroy her worthiness (at least as determined by the standards she wants to defy). A strange character named Januarius Jones spends most of the novel trying to bed any young woman within reach. Faulkner signals that the World War has fundamentally altered the sexual landscape. Girls are "bad" and say what they want. The Southern belle has been consigned to Donald

Mahon's amnesiac oblivion, and the novel daringly entertains sexual attraction between women, between men, and even between races.<sup>5</sup>

These aspects of the novel would have reverberated with other books on Liveright's list, including Frances Newman's pitiless savaging of the Southern belle in *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (also 1926) and Anita Loos's wildly popular send-up of an empty-headed flapper who out-smarts one sexual predator after the next, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). One wonders if the publication of *Soldiers' Pay* on so progressive a list emboldened Faulkner to explore more frankly the sexual aspects of artistic life in *Mosquitoes*, a book whose original form made such explicit references to lesbianism and sexual matters generally that even Boni & Liveright asked for some taming down.

A second feature of *Soldiers' Pay* that conformed to the sensibility of the new American literature involved its condescending attitude toward small town life. In the wake of the success of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg* (1919), the younger writer assured their mutual publisher in 1927 that he was preparing "a collection of short stories of my townspeople" (*Selected Letters*, p. 34). This work became *These Thirteen*, a volume that constituted Faulkner's own attempt at diagnosing the psychopathology of everyday life in the provinces. In *Soldiers' Pay*, the narrator mocks the Southern town to which Mahon returns, its courthouse square peopled by

the city fathers, progenitors of solid laws and solid citizens who believed in Tom Watson and feared only God and drouth, in black string ties or the faded brushed gray and bronze meaningless medals of the Confederate States of America, no longer having to make any pretense toward labor, [and who] slept or whittled away the long drowsy days . . . (*Soldiers' Pay*, pp. 87–88)

Faulkner affects the kind of cosmopolitan superiority one can also hear in his letters to the worldly Liveright: "I am damned tired of our [F.]99[°] winters of this sunny south. I envy you England. England is 'ome to me, in a way" (*Selected Letters*, p. 34). (It's hard to know what that means. Faulkner visited England with a friend during a six-month Euro-trip, but found London so expensive they left after a few days.) Faulkner remarks in the novel that to "feel provincial" is to find "that a certain conventional state of behavior has become inexplicably obsolete over night" (*Soldiers' Pay*, p. 198). The super-sophisticated

bohemianism running through the novel signals Faulkner's own determination to escape that feeling of being a Southern provincial.

Faulkner's spirit of criticism toward his own South would have been braced institutionally by Boni & Liveright's record as publishers as well of politically radical literature. Liveright printed John Reed's widely read account of the Russian Revolution, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1918). He cultivated Greenwich Village radical intellectuals, and over the course of the 1920s published Max Eastman, Marsden Hartley, and Mary Heaton Vorse, along with Upton Sinclair. Boni & Liveright's credits include the most influential proletarian novel of the period, Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930). Though Faulkner's personal politics were mainly centrist (which made them more liberal than most Southerners'), his steady attention to the legacy of racial oppression, his sensitivity to class humiliation, and his disgust with the private ownership of the wilderness (not to mention of humans) would not have made him out of place among more extreme critics of American capitalism.

Liveright's profile as a publisher might have contributed to Faulkner's sense of the literary field in one further respect. In a study of the Harlem Renaissance, George Hutchinson has focused on the extent of the new publishers' commitment to writing by African Americans. No one led more prominently in this project than Horace Liveright. In 1923 Liveright published the earliest and arguably greatest of the New Negro renaissance works, Jean Toomer's *Cane*. Liveright also solicited poems from Countee Cullen, and was responsible for the publication in 1924 of Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion*. Liveright's commitment to representing African American life also indicated directions for white writers like Sherwood Anderson, whose *Dark Laughter* romanticizes the easy pleasure-taking and earthy speech of black folk. Liveright considered it a "great" book and advertised it heavily. *Soldiers' Pay* too includes some elementary black dialect writing by Faulkner, much of it in the minstrel vein, and ends with a reference to the "crooning submerged passion of the dark race" (*Soldiers' Pay*, p. 256) that floats from a nearby church service. But the more compelling aspect of Faulkner's representation of race in *Soldiers' Pay* involves a kind of confession about the incomprehensibility of black experience. Blacks appear as inscrutable, objects of an historical refusal by whites to comprehend the humanity of a group they have dehumanized: negroes march by like "a pagan catafalque . . . Rigid, as though carved in Egypt

ten thousand years ago" (p. 119). (Recall Elnora as a caryatid.) At one point, Donald Mahon's aged black nurse attempts to call him out of his stupor: "Donald, baby, look at me" (p. 135). But Mahon's belated response is only to ask "Who was that talking, Joe?" (p. 136). Faulkner scrupulously avoids taking the liberties with black speech and subjectivity that typify *Dark Laughter*. Yet the strong appetite for fiction about African Americans exhibited by his publisher could only have encouraged Faulkner's move toward confronting the South's racial slavery and segregation in the subsequent chronicle of Yoknapatawpha.

Faulkner had headed to New Orleans in January of 1925 intending to book passage to Europe; he planned to travel for six months with William Spratling, a painter he had met through *The Double Dealer* group. Delaying their departure until July, Faulkner and Spratling finally sailed for Italy, though they quickly moved on to Paris. They left only for brief excursions and spent nearly six months there. Faulkner continued to work hard on his writing, concentrating on a narrative set partly in Paris's Luxembourg Gardens. It involved the infatuation of a young man with his sister, and Faulkner was practically intoxicated with its beauty when he described, in a letter to his mother, the sensation of finishing it. (Yes, the tone of intoxication may have had a simpler explanation. It was Paris after all.) The sketch, "Elmer," later was revised, with a small part incorporated into the last scene of the novel *Sanctuary* (1931), and the pattern of a sensitive young man's obsession with his younger sister repeated in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Faulkner thought its conclusion was the best prose he had yet written – prose that was "all poetry" – and he was plainly inspired by being in a city associated with the highest achievements of culture. Not only did Faulkner love reading French literature – novelists like Balzac and Flaubert, and modern poets like Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire, all of whom he had translated and imitated in his college courses. He also spent hours at galleries and museums, particularly the Louvre, where in the 1920s he might have seen recent post-Impressionists like Cézanne hanging side-by-side with classic paintings from earlier periods.

Faulkner's second novel reflects the continuing effort of a young writer to establish himself as a modernist author. Boni & Liveright published *Mosquitoes* in 1927. Faulkner had worked on the manuscript in New Orleans, where he roomed with Spratling after they returned from Paris. The novel is made up almost entirely of conversations

about art and sex, expressing attitudes of bohemian avant-gardism toward both. What Faulkner is up to in this novel is less a sober consideration of various philosophies of art, than a flamboyant dramatization of the scandalous new ways art was being understood as the symptom of emotional and psychological disorders. In a way, *Mosquitoes* subjects art to the sting of demystification, suggesting that sexual frustration and "perverse" desires are the wellsprings of artistic creation. *Mosquitoes* concentrates on the way individual pathology may motivate creativity.

*Mosquitoes* depicts something like an arts-themed booze cruise. A wealthy patroness of New Orleans cultural life assembles a motley crew of artists – a couple of poets, a novelist, a sculptor; a few aging hangers on – a salesman, a publisher, a donor, a critic; and some attractive young people, for a week's sailing on her yacht around Lake Pontchartrain, just north of the city. What results must resemble features of day-to-day life among the *Double Dealer* circle. Conversations go on apparently for days; earnest discussants have far more opinions than listeners; the older you are the more you drink, the more you drink the more you talk; and various young couples manage to sneak off and hook up sexually to avoid blacking out under the fume of words. The novel mainly suggests the following: life is all about sex, and those who can, do; those who can't, think about it all the time, and some write about it instead. Or wish they could write about it. There's a jokey, spoofy side to *Mosquitoes* that actually tells us a lot about modern attitudes toward art, and Faulkner's willingness to have fun with them.

The dizzy dowager who hosts this expedition, Mrs. Maurier, happily obliges the sponging artists, who care only for the luxury she provides. Mrs. Maurier espouses a traditionally high-minded ideal of art. To the sculptor Gordon, a rude arrogant sort, she blithely extols the ability of the artist to ignore all the "unhappiness" in the world and to "go through life, keeping yourself from becoming involved in it, to gather inspiration for your Work" (*Mosquitoes*, p. 377). Everyone else on board, however, seems to possess more modern worldly views of art. What their naturalistic explanations share is the conviction that the pleasure of making art compensates for other kinds of frustrated desire. Such an attitude reflects Freud's then revolutionary speculation that art is the sublimation of unfulfilled sexual wishes. In *Mosquitoes*, the novelist Dawson Fairchild (generally held to be modeled on Sherwood

Anderson), puts the relation of art to sex concisely: "[I]t's a substitute" (p. 443), he replies, when his friend Julius Wiseman points out that for older people "[n]ot only are most of our sins vicarious, but most of our pleasures are too" (*idem*).

Even a non-artist like the character William Talliaferro, who suffers a disabling terror of intimacy with women, "labors under the illusion that Art is just a valid camouflage for rutting" (p. 312). In his envy of male artists' commerce with naked female models and women admirers, he understands art as a route to, rather than a transformation of, sexual desire. Especially through the art-talk of New Orleans, Faulkner absorbed Freud – who greatly excited the generation of moderns, and notions from his psychology show up in Faulkner's writing throughout his career. In *Mosquitoes*, for good measure, Faulkner tosses in other Freudian hypotheses about artistic production. One is that the pleasure of making art derives from the anal stage of sexual development and is associated with the gratification of making waste. So, the character Mark Frost is ridiculed as "a poet who produced an occasional cerebral and obscure poem in four or seven lines reminding one somehow of the function of evacuation excruciatingly and incompletely performed" (p. 298). Or consider how twins, a brother and sister, exhibit unusual sexual familiarities, which are both expressed and sublimated by artistic activities: as the boy Josh whittles a pipe stem, his sister leans on him, "extending her hand toward the object on his lap. It was a cylinder of wood larger than a silver dollar and about three inches long" (p. 291). Josh finally gets rid of her, annoyed by her open lack of sexual restraint. That art might be motivated by the effort to re-channel bodily drives accords with Freud's premise that the price of civilization itself is the renunciation of natural, unbounded longings, beginning with those conventionalized as incestuous.

Our novelist laughs at himself, too. The nubile Jenny recalls running into an odd little sunburned man on the beach who blurts out that "if the straps of my dress was to break I'd devastate the country" (p. 371). This horny "liar by profession" turns out to be a fellow named "Faulkner." There's a general atmosphere of determined irreverence toward art in *Mosquitoes*; it's as if Faulkner needs to take part in one general goal of modernism, which involved separating art from its earlier exalted purposes as revealing transcendent truth, representing the essence of reality, or expressing the noblest thoughts of humankind. Instead, art for the moderns exposed the relativity of truth,



struggled with the elusiveness of reality, and was bound by the egocentrism of all representation.

Reading *Mosquitoes* as a comic revue inspired by the ways artists sublimate carnal urges may be true to the Freudian spirit of the novel. From this standpoint, art functions as one of a series of sliding substitutes for unavailable objects of desire. But the novel sometimes conveys an intensity of individual dissatisfaction that issues from some more profound black hole of discontentment. In such moments Faulkner's developing sense of desire as unappeasable comes into view. You might say that ordinary desire involves identifying attainable gratifications in place of unattainable ones. But imagine an earlier, fundamental, traumatic event in which every child suffers separation from total love, attention, care, the gratification of every need. With the child's emerging self-sufficiency comes as well this loss of perfect at-one-ness with the mother's body and the material sphere that envelops it. The evidence that, paradoxically, identity is founded on this lack – a rupture that enables selfhood – would appear in adulthood as a sort of causeless, nameless sense of loss. No everyday gratification could possibly address the abyss around which every self forms. This model of how mature individuals harbor the ghost of unappeasable want derives from the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who extended Freud's theories of psychological development. This phenomenon as it appears in *Mosquitoes* adds an important new dimension to Faulkner's view of human nature. It suggests how the feelings we experience as so uniquely our own, are always functions of the processes that socialize us, and how those processes produce selves scarred by the wound of accepting a socially sanctioned identity.

We need these more complex ideas about desire to explain some of the characters' incurable sadness and rage in *Mosquitoes*. For example, the silly Mrs. Maurier, as it turns out, has been the victim of disappointed love early in life. Romanced by a dashing but penniless young man, she is nonetheless forced by her family to wed an older plantation magnate. Mrs. Maurier bears her sorrow behind a mask-like demeanor. Although we infer that Mrs. Maurier was in love with her young "Lochinvar," in fact we learn nothing about her state of mind. Something else, perhaps, having to do with the helplessness of women, under the authority of men, to control their own bodies seems even more deeply to be the issue. Mrs. Maurier's lack of affect suggests powers of suppression required by the most fundamental pain of social

life. When Fairchild speculates that her sexless marriage has been responsible for her current flirtatiousness, he describes her body as “no longer remember[ing] that it missed anything . . . the ghost of a need to rectify something the lack of which her body has long since forgotten about” (p. 522). It’s that kind of ghostliness, with its memory of the absence of sexual intimacy as the trace of a need addressing a “lack,” that hints at the desperate underside to some of Mrs. Maurier’s frivolous behavior. Her theory that artists are blessed because they can ignore the world proves more poignant once we appreciate the depth out of which a person’s desires may never catch up to her want.

Likewise, even an apparently trivial fool like the lingerie wholesaler Talliaferro, who moons over young women and whines for advice about how to seduce them, manifests scars of a more basic trauma. The opening pages of the novel associate Talliaferro with a strange object: milk bottles – a dirty one that he totes around, which he exchanges for a full one, to be delivered to his friend Gordon, the sculptor. Faulkner makes the image as frankly Freudian as Josh’s phallic pipe; here the bottle represents a vestige of pre-sexual maternal well-being. It shows up precisely as Talliaferro suffers extreme sexual agitation over Mrs. Maurier’s niece, whom he has just met. As he “covertly” watches the eighteen-year-old’s arousingly “sexless” limbs, Talliaferro sits anxiously “nursing his bottle” (p. 270). Talliaferro’s arrested development marks a refusal to abandon the female body as pre-sexual nursing mother. In this sense, Talliaferro will never grow up, because sexual fulfillment requires more than just nerving yourself up; it requires accepting the only partial gratification of desire represented by “normative” genital heterosexuality.

Perhaps the clearest version of Faulkner’s intuitions about the bedrock of dissatisfaction is Gordon. Often taken as Faulkner’s projection of his own artistic sensibility, and perhaps also modeled on his painter friend Spratling, Gordon obsesses over a female figure he’s making, a “virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless armless legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed yet passionate still for escape” (p. 263). This piece of work freaks out everyone who sees it, yet the obviously tortured Gordon insists it constitutes his “feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me” (p. 275). The rage, revenge, and perverse idealization that combine in this object point to motives for Gordon’s art that cannot

be explained by mere sublimation of erotic desire. As Fairchild points out, a woman "may be only the symbol of a desire" (p. 460). At some nearly inarticulate level, Gordon embodies a fuel for art that flows from unknowable unappeasable sorrow: "Only an idiot has no grief, and only a fool would forget it. What else is there in this world sharp enough to stick to your guts?" (p. 524). The narrator concludes that Gordon's sculpture captures "the equivocal derisive darkness of the world. Nothing to trouble your youth or lack of it: rather something to trouble the very fibrous integrity of your being" (p. 263). To grasp art as thrusting back to those conditions under which the very integrity of being forms as the result of a painful separation – this is a moment when the mature Faulkner may be glimpsed, an artist who abandons himself to the anguish of writing about the human heart in conflict with itself, whose greatest works fail to find consolation even in the ecstasy of their own making.

Breaking taboos was a popular sport among the generation that came of age in the post-war years. To feel yourself completely modern you wanted to scandalize your elders, wanted to embrace "the magic of change," as Faulkner puts it in *Soldiers' Pay* – even if that "new world" (*Soldiers' Pay*, p. 15) was the result of lost confidence in everything you'd thought was true. Young people enjoyed new social freedoms in modern America as they defied proprieties of sexual, racial, and class behavior. Young artists experimented with new imaginative forms in their own spirit of rebelliousness. As we have seen in most of Faulkner's youthful fiction, unconventional sexuality, frankly presented, becomes both the embodiment and the emblem of a modern sensibility. There are good reasons for this. By the end of the nineteenth century, critics of the growing dominance of Western industrial capitalism had begun to grasp the connection between economic advantage and other forms of social oppression. Marx had observed that the profit made by successful factory owners arose from the gap between what they paid their laborers and the prices they charged for their products. Marx considered actual slavery only the most extreme version of the way capitalists steal from laborers the "surplus" value that constitutes profit. The power of owners over workers reflected a more fundamental injustice in the division of goods and labor according to Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels. In his study of the origins of the family, Engels proposed that the modern father-dominated household replicated, at the level of domestic organization, the foun-

dation of Western society upon male control of resources and the exploitation of women's labor. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an American suffragist writing in the 1880s, went so far as to call marriage itself a form of prostitution. In this context, rebellion by modern women against restraints on their sexual inclinations carried an economic as well as erotic charge. To defy the law of the Fathers regarding proper romantic behavior was not only to insist on the right to do what you liked with your own body sexually. It was also to have seen through a general ideology of paternalist (or masculinist) organization responsible for maintaining social inequities. Faulkner imagines a variety of areas in which young people acted out their challenge to paternal dictate through sexual rebelliousness.<sup>6</sup>

The modern young woman as sexual renegade preoccupies Faulkner's imagination. We have already encountered instances such as Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, Cicely Saunders, and the libidinous teenagers of *Mosquitoes*, Patricia and Jenny, but a particularly desperate version of the type appears as the protagonist of the short story "Elly." We might think of Elly's predicament as a variation on Mrs. Maurier's marital calamity: Elly has accepted a marriage proposal from the town bank's staid assistant cashier, a "grave, sober young man of impeccable character and habits," who courts her with "a kind of placid formality" (*Collected Stories*, p. 213). Looking at a future made up of "the monotonous round of her days," she contemplates life as a zombie: "At least I can live out the rest of my dead life as quietly as if I were already dead" (*idem*). So awful yet common a fate seals the heartbreaking self-denial required of many women; this story imagines how one victim-in-waiting stages a last ditch act of refusal.

Dreading her ordained lot as a Stepford Wife, Elly does everything she can to scandalize her family's expectations. Elly's defiance of Southern small town propriety begins with her appetite for making out, all but indiscriminately – "youths and young men of the town at first, but later with almost anyone, any transient" (p. 208). Realizing the futility of such petty acting out, though, Elly advances to the gates of the South's ultimate taboo: she takes up with a suave visitor from New Orleans, Paul de Montigny, whose allure to Elly is enhanced by the rumor of his "having nigger blood" (p. 209). Elly relishes what effect that piece of information would have on her straitlaced grandmother: "A nigger. A nigger. I wonder what she would say if she knew

about that" (p. 210). Elly's grandmother occupies the place of conventional social authority in the story. When Elly comes home bruised by her petting sessions, it is her grandmother whose disapproving eye she must meet in the morning. When Elly allows Paul nearly to have his way with her in the shrubbery outside her house, it is her grandmother Elly imagines outraging – "I wish she were here to see!" – then a moment later Elly realizes that the old woman is in fact spying on them, her face materializing above them, Elly's indecisive surrender of virginity interrupted. It is the grandmother, tellingly, who enforces paternalistic authority. The old woman is described as "sitting bolt upright, sitting bolt and implacably chaste in that secret place, peopled with ghosts" (*idem*). "Bolt," repeated, conveys the imprisoning rigidity and fixedness of woman's place under Southern patriarchy; her status as "implacably chaste" hints both at the impossibility of the standard of purity exacted of women, as well, perhaps, as the frustration it causes its adherents; ghosts show up here as kindred spirits to the traces of unfulfilled desires haunting Mrs. Maurier.

In the sexual bliss Elly approaches with Paul, she gets a foretaste of what so extreme a flouting of conventional morality might mean: "for that instant Elly was lost, her blood aloud with desperation and exultation and vindication too" (p. 211). For a white girl to lose her virginity to a black man, one who moreover makes it clear he has no interest in marrying her (presumably by passing for white), is to violate every canon of behavior Elly's people espouse. Doing so creates a sense of "exultation," the thrill of being "lost" to accepted mores and the "vindication" of one's own will. Elly's grandmother suffers from deafness, a condition that requires Elly to shout and pantomime her subversive intentions. The old woman represents Elly's future as the past, in which women become proxies for the very powers that bolt them to their chairs. The grandmother reproves Elly's violation of racial protocol – "bring[ing] a Negro into my son's house as a guest" (p. 217), as she has earlier cast a condemning eye on her grand-daughter's sexual escapades. For reasons associated with the history of relations between the sexes and races under slavery and later segregation, racial identity and sexual behavior could never be disentangled in the South.

Faulkner himself contributes one of the greatest meditations on the double helix of race and sex in his novel *Light in August* (1932; composed after "Elly," but actually published two years before the short

story appeared). What matters to Faulkner's brief study here is the way that miscegenation (sexual relations between members of different races), still outlawed in Faulkner's 1930s South, becomes a badge of modern rebellion. Elly's girlfriend informs her of Paul's rumored mixed "blood" by observing that her infatuated friend must have "queer taste" ("Elly," p. 209). In 1934 "queer" hadn't yet become synonymous with "homosexual," though it was beginning to be used that way; rather, the force of Elly's taking up with Paul involves doing something that will "queer" normal knowledge, make the familiar strange, make the fixed transient. Trying to talk Paul into marrying her after all, Elly exclaims, "If it's that story about nigger blood, I don't believe it. I don't care" (p. 222). Not to believe that Paul is black is one thing; not to care is something else altogether, something once impossible for a young white woman in the South to say about her lover – despite the hypocrisy of a regional past in which white slave masters populated their plantations with children of mixed race by their slave concubines. Talk about the "uncountable and unnamable" ghosts that people grandmother's "place" (p. 210)! In violating norms of sexual chastity and racial "purity," Elly aims a blow at Southern white paternalism's nerve.

For all her brazen defiance, though, Elly cannot think her way out of the dead end her life heads toward. She gets some measure of revenge by recruiting her hapless fiancé to drive her to a rendezvous with her lover, but when it comes to figuring out what she really wants, Elly is stuck trying to inveigle Paul into marriage, albeit of a sort rarely seen. Elly is reduced to old tricks to try to get her way: offering herself in "voluptuous promise" (p. 221), threatening pregnancy. One could argue as well that Elly's fetishizing of Paul's "nigger blood" ends up reinforcing racist thinking, even as she uses it to scandalize racists. Elly's capacity to envision a genuinely different future comes up short: "She seemed to feel her eyeballs turning completely and blankly back into her skull with the effort to see" (p. 219). As a consequence, Elly's last act turns hopelessly destructive. Driving home with Paul and her grandmother, Elly finds herself trapped between an uncompromising past and an unimaginable future. Suddenly, she lunges across the old woman's body and throws herself at the steering wheel, the car hurtling into a ravine, where Elly finds herself the only apparent survivor of a wreck. Sitting among the shards of glass, and bemoaning her invisibility to the passing traffic above,

Elly has at least vented the schizoid rage that drives modern woman's will to kill the past.

Faulkner's sympathy for the figure of the female renegade no doubt owed something to the willful young woman he fell in love with growing up in Oxford. Estelle Oldham made a name for herself as an attractive, flirtatious, headstrong young woman. That she wanted to marry Billy Faulkner, though, proved too much for her parents, especially Judge Oldham, who appreciated Faulkner's pedigree but doubted this pup would ever hunt. He forbade their marriage when they were high school sweethearts, and disapproved of the idea again when as adults they finally wed, the year Estelle divorced her solid lawyer husband Cornell Franklin. What's intriguing about the possibility of her reflection in Elly is that the story was actually first composed by Estelle, not Bill. Estelle had been a writer of women's romances for English language newspapers in the Orient, where Cornell's business interests had taken their family for extended stays. At Bill's urging, Estelle drafted a short story based on the idea of "Elly" soon after they were married. When the piece was rejected by *Scribner's Magazine*, Estelle gave up on the whole prospect of further submissions and possible revision; Faulkner offered to take over, and he remade the story. Nothing survives of the earlier version, so it is impossible to say how much of Estelle's original composition Faulkner used. But the several passages of free indirect discourse in which Elly's thoughts are imagined ring with authenticity – authenticity that might have been earned by someone who knocked heads with her family because she found a sullen rude artist-type far cooler than the three-piece-business-suit her father had in mind.

Faulkner's most fully rendered versions of the rebellious young woman prove to be two of his most memorable characters, Caddy Compson and Temple Drake. Each makes herself a modern girl to escape the smothering constraints of Southern Victorian mores. Caddy's flight contrasts with the rigor mortis of her family; Temple's bad trip exposes the dark side of modernity. Caddy (dis)appears in Faulkner's masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), which surveys the ruins of one of Yoknapatawpha's leading ancestral families. The Compsons descend from the planter elite, of a kind with founding clans like the Sartorises, whom Faulkner began writing about in earnest after *Mosquitoes*. Such families resembled Faulkner's own in many ways, and a major part of his novelistic project was dedicated to portraying



their rise, fall, and eventual oblivion. At the moment Faulkner began writing, he realized that these dominant lines were reaching their end; that was in part what made the transformations of modern life so personally urgent to his imagination. One set of interlocking novels and stories in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha fiction chronicles the demise of the slaveholding plantation classes. They include works from his early years like *Sartoris* (1929) and *The Sound and the Fury*, which begin to search out the flaws in the South's design and the nation's encompassing destiny: the atrocities of human enslavement, the genocide of indigenous people, and the national disavowal that wrought the doom of Civil War and the century of racial warfare that followed. Novels as late as *Go Down, Moses* (1942) continue Faulkner's probing into the South's past. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the prevailing stance of this fiction is a shamed repudiation of the sins of the fathers, accompanied by a keen resistance to the shifts of modernity. By contrast, fast young women like Caddy Compson rush out of that obsolete world, leaving the old guard at a standstill.

Temple Drake, our other modern girl, also the daughter of a prestigious family, similarly tunes out the wagging tongues of the old fogies, and hops a train to where the action is. But she suffers a horrific initiation into a new world that turns out to be mostly a bad dream of the old one. If the morose Quentin Compson loses sight of his sister Caddy because he's looking backward when she's way out ahead, the local elite searching for Temple Drake can't find her because they don't think to look down. Temple falls into an underworld that apes what's cool – racy pop culture, frivolous youth culture, mesmerizing movies, city seductions. When in 1929 Faulkner first tried to write a book that would appeal to mass audiences, he had little direct experience with popular taste. Yet somehow, even before he began designing stories for mass circulation magazines in 1930, and before his first scriptwriting job in Hollywood in 1932, Faulkner had fathomed modern mass culture. In Temple Drake Faulkner not only creates a character who exemplifies how young people were being conditioned by the new pop culture, but also shows how the worst versions of that culture reduced the female body to the status of screened image, onto which men could project economic, emotional, and sexual fantasies. In *Sanctuary*, Faulkner suggests that some of the new forms of social and cultural expression promising liberation actually end up reinforcing powers of patriarchal, commercial exploitation. Temple finds there is no

sanctuary from the commodifying, dehumanizing, misogynistic violence of a money- and sex-driven society. In this bleak view, women fall in love with their own debasement, men with their power to abuse.

Temple takes advantage of the 1920s new sexual freedom to experience power once reserved for men. Young women flaunted their bodies in the era's more revealing fashions, began to speak more openly about sex, and asserted a newfound sense of command over their erotic lives. Temple is repeatedly described with an eye toward her "long legs blonde with running" (*Sanctuary*, p. 28); the flash of flesh vaporizes any leftover Victorian decorum about proper ladies hiding their ankles, while her running accents a headlong rush toward the modern. There's a touch of masculine self-possession in Temple's look: "cool, predatory and discreet" (p. 29). The co-ed recalls the star power one of her dorm sisters attains when she swears she's actually had intercourse. Even as Temple is falling into sexual danger she won't be able to handle, at an abandoned house where she and her boyfriend accidentally discover a coven of Memphis bootleggers, she still thinks her campus-style boldness will do the trick. She challenges the nastiest of the gangsters "with a grimace of taut, toothed coquetry" (p. 48), as if she can tame him with mock sexual power.

Faulkner has Temple represent the modern emancipated young woman, in the vein of Cicely and Elly. But the novelistic scale of *Sanctuary* allows him to explore whole regions of cultural change that behavior like Temple's derives from and reinforces. Throughout *Sanctuary* girls like Temple are associated with new forms of consumption and entertainment. Temple's face displays "two spots of rouge like paper discs pasted on her cheek bones, her mouth painted into a savage and perfect bow, also like something both symbolical and cryptic but carefully from purple paper and pasted there" (p. 284). This was the age of Clara Bow, the "It Girl," whose flirty appeal captured both the seductiveness of the day's bold young women as well as the new media in which they appeared. If Temple's face is a cheap magazine cover, it is also a starlet's screen image. Knowing that one of the thugs is outside spying on her as she prepares for bed in the house where she and her date have taken refuge, Temple nonetheless begins to disrobe. Though she can't see her audience in the dark, Temple seems to follow "the passage of someone beyond the wall" (p. 69) while looking "directly" but unseeingly at her voyeur. Such a scenario

brilliantly dramatizes the relations structuring cinema. The actress looks out from the screen as if at a viewer, her body offering visual gratification; the audience member projects his desire onto the screened image, consuming vicariously what is and is not meant for him. Temple derives a strange power from this self-display, in a way that might evoke the spell cast by a new phenomenon – the female screen star – in Hollywood's emerging film industry.<sup>7</sup>

Temple's grasp of formerly masculine power corresponds to the endangerment of all sorts of traditional authority in *Sanctuary*. Just before she endures a monstrous sexual assault by the gangster Popeye, Temple fantasizes a strange self-defense: "Then I thought about being a man, and as soon as I thought it, it happened" (p. 220). Delirious with fear, Temple pictures herself dressed as a bride lying on a coffin; when the bad man begins to fondle her, she convinces herself that her vagina has turned into a penis – "it made a kind of plopping sound, like blowing a little rubber tube wrong-side outward" (*idem*). Turning a vulnerable cavity into a menacing protrusion, Temple's fantasy captures the desperate will of women to invert the terror of male domination. But it also suggests the transformative possibilities of Temple's (and Faulkner's) historical moment. In an important respect, Temple's fantasies of empowerment point to a wide array of attempts by subordinated people to switch places. In *Sanctuary* the most obnoxious example may be Clarence Snopes, a country boy turned small-time politician who thinks he's entitled to easy familiarity with the lawyer Horace Benbow, a First-Family-of-Oxford sort repulsed by everything smacking of the lower classes. But other hierarchies are in the process of dissolving under the flow of modern change as well. The narrator sneers at the country folk who make their way to town as first-time wage earners, consumers, even pop culture producers:

The sunny air was filled with competitive radios and phonographs in the doors of drug- and music-stores. Before these doors a throng stood all day, listening. The pieces which moved them were ballads simple in melody and theme, of bereavement and retribution and repentance metallically sung, blurred, emphasised by static or needle – disembodied voices blaring from imitation wood cabinets or pebble-grain horn-mouths above the rapt faces, the gnarled slow hands long shaped to the imperious earth, lugubrious, harsh, and sad. (p. 112)

There's a kind of begrudging sympathy here, but the prevailing tone underscores how artificial and ugly the product is, how stupefied the consumer. Even at this early stage in Faulkner's commerce with mass culture, he bemoans its capitulation to formula, surface effect, simplicity. He extends the critique by describing a jazz recording as sounding "[o]bscene, facile," the two saxophones "quarreling with one another like two dexterous monkeys in a cage" (p. 202). Nor is it an accident that the embodiment of pure evil in the novel plays his part as if he's acting in a faddish film noir: "Tommy watched [Popeye's] face flare out between his hands, his cheeks sucking; he followed with his eyes the small comet of the match into the woods" (p. 68).

The comparison of a jazz duet to monkeys quarreling plainly has a racist tinge. That blacks were leaving their accustomed places also contributes to the convulsions wracking *Sanctuary*. In a comic sub-plot, two of Clarence Snopes's nephews show up in Memphis, looking for a cheap hotel, but unknowingly taking a room in a brothel. Clarence mentors the boys by pointing out that when they do decide to indulge, there's a better bargain at a nearby establishment employing negro prostitutes. Clarence casually declares that cash itself is "color-blind," and so presumably are the sexual favors it can buy in Memphis. At any rate: country folk in the city; blacks and whites enjoying sexual commerce; women acting like men; two-bit thugs building commercial empires – things in the modern South have been set flowing. In fact, that sense of fluidity infiltrates the imagery of the novel by becoming the hallmark of Temple's condition. Her hair "spills," her voice wails, her bladder leaks, but most of all her body bleeds and bleeds. She's in a perpetual state of hemorrhage, somehow both the agent and victim of violated intactness.

Like any popular sex symbol, from Greta Garbo to Marilyn Monroe to Madonna, Temple Drake tries to make the trap itself the key to freedom. But it's a risky path to liberation that lies through more extreme sexual captivity. To enjoy the only kind of power Temple can imagine, she requires male menace. There would be no "cool, predatory" air without an audience of gaping boys, "like a row of hated and muffled busts cut from black tin and nailed to the window-sills" (p. 29). The film theorist Laura Mulvey describes how the power relations of gender replay themselves in the typical cinematic dynamic of desired female screen object and desiring male viewer.<sup>8</sup> Probably the

most horrific feature of Temple's obsessively described face is her eyes, said to look like holes (pp. 69, 92). These are hollows made by the penetrating male gaze. Temple suffers an unspeakable physical assault, one that, as we shall see in a later work, permanently traumatizes her. But what all of her mistreatment by men has in common is its root in voyeurism. No character in fiction is as compulsively *watched* as Temple Drake. "He was watching me!" (p. 90) might be exclaimed on any page. Leering guys from campus and town, lusty thugs at the Frenchman's Place, the rheumy-eyed Pap looking at her blankly, the whinnying Popeye ogling her, and Red in the brothel, Horace wide-eyed as Temple narrates her violation, her father and brothers fixing her in their protective oversight at the trial – all this watching throws Temple onto the screen of male voyeuristic fantasy. Even Popeye's assault – performed with a corn cob, because he is impotent – must essentially be an act of visual gratification to him, something he does to watch, since there is no sensation to be had otherwise. Temple's status is so purely a product of being looked at, that even she relates to her own body visually: "For an instant she stood and watched herself run out of her body, out of one slipper. She watched her legs twinkle against the sand" (p. 91). It's as if she cannot escape the pornographic movie her life has become.

Popeye is Faulkner's grotesque portrait of the moviegoer. Fredric Jameson has remarked that the essence of movies is pornography, since their pleasure depends upon penetrating the visible and staging vicarious gratification. That Temple's eyes cannot return the male gaze, that they're just holes, captures the violence done to female subjectivity in much mass culture. Temple is a wound, a morselized body of delectable parts, a blur of teeth and legs and hips and loins, never a full human being. She and Popeye each represent half of the mechanism of mass culture that Faulkner caricatures in *Sanctuary*: the object of desire, the voyeuristic consumer. The cultural critic Guy Debord coined the term "society of spectacle" to describe the way modern life under late capitalism began to prefer spectatorship to actual participation in social activities. Images are consumed for themselves, rather than what they stand for; vicarious gratification must satisfy those many who lack the means to actually acquire a vast new array of luxuries; and media like the movies condense present experience as well as history into a series of simplified frames.

In *Sanctuary* Faulkner not only gives us a fable that illustrates the forces at work in modern mass culture – the fetishization of the young female body and its prurient exploitation by a paternalistic culture industry. He also shows us how such fantasies are *used* by certain audiences to embody and work through their own relation to shifting conditions. Faulkner does this by rooting the origins of Temple's story as much in the fantasy-life of one of its spectators as in objective reality. What happens to Temple is a kind of fictional projection of what Horace Benbow fears may happen to his own step-daughter, another sexual adventurer. Faulkner devises Temple's story as a revved-up version of several genres of popular fiction: the gangster story, the sex shocker, the cult-of-cruelty tale – with flashes of film noir. Such formulations of dread and debasement reflected the nightmarish sense among some contemporary readers that their familiar, comfortable way of life was becoming endangered. In the case of *Sanctuary*, Faulkner portrays the middle-class lawyer and family man Benbow as hysterical over the wickedness and vulgarity of the new age. Horace uses Temple's story as a surrogate to project his own desires, anxieties, and rage at modernity.

Horace goes into shock when he realizes how much things have changed from the apparently innocent world he knew growing up in a small Southern town. Ostensibly, Horace gets hung up on his teenage step-daughter's sexual boldness. Like Temple, she's far more public about her sex life than Horace is used to (think how he obsesses over Temple's name being penciled on bathroom walls around Oxford). Little Belle once talks to her parents by phone while her boyfriend audibly paws her in the background, and when Horace looks closely at her photograph, he sees the "travesty of the painted mouth" that typifies "a face older in sin than he would ever be" (p. 167). Horace reacts with "horror and despair," partly because he's beginning to respond erotically to the image himself, "the delicate and urgent mammalian whisper of that curious small flesh" (p. 166). Here Benbow as step-father doubles Popeye's violation of female innocence – "Give it to me . . . Daddy" (p. 236), Temple once blurts out to Popeye in the depths of her depraved captivity. The trappings of paternal incest in the battle for Temple – from Popeye's brutal invasion, to Horace's projective empathy, to Judge Drake's eventual reassertion of fatherly command – indicate the symbolic connections between the various forms of modern paternalism. In a novel of about the same time, *Tender*

*Is the Night* (1934), F. Scott Fitzgerald similarly uses paternal incest – in this case, the literal act – to symbolize the persistence of men's power over women. Fitzgerald explores how influential new cultural institutions like the movies, the medical establishment of psychoanalysis, and a culture of consumption all provide fresh opportunities for men to capitalize on feminized objects of desire.

Although Horace gets all swoony over the bare arms, swinging hips, and suggestive talk of modern college girls, his real anxieties run to more fundamental threats to the privileges he and his kind have enjoyed for generations. Faulkner characterizes Horace's longing to recapture a lost innocence, to arrest time before "purity" was "corrupted," with a contrasting mode of incest, this between brother and sister. As we shall see, Horace's veneration of his sister replicates Faulkner's most famous exploration of the refusal to accept modernity: Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. In both cases, young men project the fantasy of eternal innocence and self-preservation onto their virginal sisters. Horace recalls how in childhood "he and Narcissa paddled and splashed with tucked-up garments and muddy bottoms" in the unimproved street outside the family house: "He could remember when, innocent of concrete, the street was bordered on either side by paths of red brick tediously and unevenly laid and worn in rich, random maroon mosaic into the black earth" (p. 122). Horace's nostalgia (a word that literally means homesickness) expresses grief at a broader social loss, not just yearning for individual childhood. The sexual assertiveness of young women represents the upheaval of an entire social regime. Horace's family, part of a professional class that formed around the plantation elite in the Deep South, faces its historical demise. Horace feels himself to be rushing toward an unfathomable future. Driven onto the darkened grounds of his ancestral home at one point, he has the sensation of speeding into an "unpruned tunnel as though into the most profound blackness of the sea" (p. 125). Later this feeling gets crystallized in an uncanny identification with Temple's initiation into an unmanageable, horrific new world. Recalling the account of her assault, Horace suddenly *becomes* Temple:

But he had not time to find [the light] and he gave over and plunged forward and struck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs . . . She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel, the blackness streaming . . . (p. 223)



Temple's hallucination of acquired manhood corresponds to Horace's assumption of female victimization. The sensation of hurtling into a black future is Horace's response to the array of terrifying things that together have bound him on the train to modernity.

Horace's "ruined house" stands for a whole way of Southern living that involved cultivating the land a certain way, conceiving of black people a certain way, controlling white women, making money, defining what it meant to be a man, all in certain ways. Yet if Temple and Popeye play out the abuses of a new era, Horace's own passage through a modern underworld prompts an even more jolting conclusion: that modern methods of exploitation descend from standing lines of power. Horace's initiation into modernity leads him to see traditional ways in a new light. Faced with the filth of contemporary sexual depravity, rapacious greed, and brutal violence, Horace realizes that the South's most cherished values and beliefs cloaked equivalent practices of dominating women, the land, the poor, and the weak. The "innocence" he so values simply amounts to the obliviousness of affluent white male privilege. *Sanctuary* reveals the tendency of modern social and cultural change to strengthen the very sources of authority it challenges.

Horace at first believes himself to be above the wantonness of modern culture. When he stumbles across the Frenchman's Place one afternoon, Popeye accosts him and forces him to wait until dark before leading him to the house. The bootlegger suspects the trespasser of carrying a gun: "What's that in your pocket?" Horace is actually packing poetry; it's a book in his pocket, he explains, the "kind that people read. Some people do" (p. 5). Horace doubts low-lives like Popeye read books, and that confidence in his superiority carries over into Horace's moral beliefs as well. He prides himself on his idealism: he represents without payment the man falsely accused of assaulting Temple, looks after Lee Goodwin's penniless wife and infant, defies mere respectability, tries to protect Temple from the humiliation of testifying, acts the good father to his step-daughter and the good husband to his manipulative wife, and most of all champions the sanctity of "the law, justice, civilization" (p. 132). What makes *Sanctuary* so unnerving a book, however, is that it offers no assurance that the worst practices of modern Southern society are new, only that they are newly visible.

In other words, *Sanctuary* is not a fable about how modernity violates the virtuous South. That has been one standard way of interpret-

ing the rape of Temple as historical allegory. Think of Popeye described as ultra-modern: a "modernist lampstand" (p. 7), his silhouette like "stamped tin," his eyes like rubber – a city fellow scared to death of country creatures, yet all too willing to victimize them. But Horace's transit through Temple's story shakes any confidence in the traditional South as a sanctuary from modernity. Instead, Horace begins to realize that even during the South's heyday of leisure, innocence, and refinement, the grossest sorts of violation were taking place out of sight. For example, Horace envisions his sister Narcissa as "living a life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field" (p. 107), a description that connects agricultural possession of the land to command of the female body. One of Popeye's crew wonders whether Temple's boyfriend has "laid any crop" by her yet (p. 41), a figure of speech for impregnating her, but one that also reinforces the link between male domination of agricultural and human reproduction. That Temple is raped by a corncob, in a barn, on a former plantation, deepens Faulkner's probing into what the relation is exactly between the beneficiaries of the South's plantation regime, who live in "sheltered gardens," and those out in the "field." When, at the moment of greatest danger, Temple tries to imagine the impregnability of her family's security, she pictures her father the judge "sitting on the porch at home, his feet on the rail, watching a negro mow the lawn" (p. 51). Safety and leisure are the products of others' labor, the South's virtues never far from its vices. What I'm arguing is that *Sanctuary* does not tell the story of the invasion of alien modern ways, so much as lifts the scales of self-deception that exalted the South as an exception to the story of national exploitation.

There was Southern idolatry in the air in the 1930s. A group of Southern intellectuals had decided that the ridicule of the South's backwardness and shameful history had gone on long enough – it culminated in H. L. Mencken's mockery of Southern ignorance during the so-called Scopes Monkey trial in 1925 – so they organized a defense of Southern values as antidotes to the excesses of both northern industrial capitalism, on the one hand, and communist state collectivism, on the other. The Agrarians, as they called themselves, included some prominent writers: Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren. They published the movement's manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, in 1930. A novel like *Sanctuary* as much opposes the Agrarians' deification of the traditional South, as it condones their

complaints about the evils of modernity. Faulkner's relentless "indicting" of the land he loved produces the deepest kind of insight into the willful blindness that accompanied the development of regional and national greatness. We might take Temple's ravaged face, "sullen and discontented and sad" (p. 317) upon return to her father's custody, as a badge of such denial. The closing scene, set in the Luxembourg Gardens of Paris, exudes the restoration of privilege, paternal control, indifference. Families like the Drakes seem to have righted themselves yet again. But perhaps not everything is back to normal; around the forlorn couple "the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused" (*idem*), indications of unwanted knowledge perhaps, particularly musings on women's stained deaths and all they might represent.

Horace sustains his final shock when, against all odds, and all truth, his client Lee is found guilty. Goodwin is summarily lynched by an aroused mob, although they immediately undercut the ideal of defending female chastity by implicating themselves in the logic of violation:

"Who was she?"

"College girl. Good looking. Didn't you see her?"

"I saw her. She was some baby. Jeez. I wouldn't have used no cob."

(p. 294)

Horace staggers home, having given up on the cause of justice. Nonetheless, the novel leaves us with a residue of unsettling insight. For one thing, though Goodwin is white, his murder evokes the practice of lynching blacks, an atrocity that was generating more and more outrage and political activism during the 1920s and 1930s. This racial blot against the South's image as "sheltered garden" is related to the fundamental misogyny beneath it too: not only were white women objectified as female victims by the insistence of Southern white men after emancipation that they had to be protected from the "black beast rapist" (Williamson, *Rage for Order*, p. 82); such women had earlier been commandeered by the planter elite before the Civil War to produce male heirs to property and fortune. The high value placed on virginity and chastity fundamentally guarded the economic privileges of fathers and husbands. The obsessive watching of women may be related to their fetishized value in the social reproduction of the master class. Planter wives were to safeguard the purity of blood and lineage;

maintain domestic order; cover up the master's own transgressions of blood and rank with his slave concubines; transform brute wealth into elegance by acquiring the right things; embody all virtue and refinement. Such women were regarded as icons of beauty and innocence, but they were also watched carefully to ensure compliance. It's as if Popeye still repeats such habits of fetish and surveillance without understanding where they come from. A name like "Little Belle" may underscore the capacity of new forms of social exploitation to take over from past ones, as *Sanctuary* further suggests that the shock of the modern discredits the "innocence" that enabled past injustice.

The course of legal justice promises to rejuvenate the power of men. The judge in Goodwin's trial encourages Temple to "speak out": "Let these good men, these fathers and husbands, hear what you have to say and right your wrong for you" (p. 285). Temple does so speak out, but only to tell a lie that protects her family. She leaves the courtroom in the company of her father and brothers, who close ranks around her in reassertion of their rights over a "father's only daughter" (*idem*). Faulkner sees through the particularities of Southern planter culture to grasp a larger phenomenon here: patriarchal and paternalistic societies of all sorts are predicated on the control by men of women's bodies and sexual reproduction. This "traffic in women" establishes the foundation of wealth, power, and the division of labor in the differentiation of gender. In a way, Western societies require the illusion that such social differences are natural and inevitable; that's the purpose of ideology – to provide ideas, images, narratives that make human customs seem like eternal laws.

In Faulkner's modern South a whole set of traditional values and ways of living collide with new realities. But even as new institutions like the culture industry reconfigure masculine power, its subjects aren't entirely overwhelmed. The fetishized object of female beauty and innocence, represented by Temple's hole-like eyes, momentarily comes to life. At the trial, Temple does something that never gets explained. As she testifies, she appears to be "gazing at something in the back of the room" (p. 284). She moves her head when her sightline is obstructed, but we never learn what she's looking at. It could be her father, of course, whose presence may remind her to lie about Goodwin, to keep the case simple and not involve the fugitive Popeye. But as Judge Drake walks down the aisle to retrieve his daughter from the witness box, she continues to look at the back of the room.

Interestingly, her behavior has been prefigured by an effect Horace notices when he is looking at Little Belle's photograph: the face looks like it is "contemplating something beyond his shoulder" (p. 167). That Temple (and Little Belle) can *look back* suggests a powerful reversal. After a life in which she has been the object of others' gaze, here Temple gets to originate one. Moreover, the face that actually occupies the position she and Belle are looking toward is *ours*, the readers', just over the narrator's shoulder. To what extent does Faulkner's highly self-conscious use of pop culture method and material include a reminder that the gratified consumer of this very novel stands implicated in Temple's exploitation?

Edith Wharton once called Temple Drake Faulkner's "cinema girl." After a few years of actually writing for the Hollywood film industry, Faulkner had a lot more to say about the world of movies. Faulkner's short story "Golden Land" focuses on the mid-life worries of a Beverly Hills real estate mogul, a heavy-drinking deal-maker plagued by a shrewish wife, an addled mother, fiendish foreign house servants, and a pair of already debauched young adult children. The story is practically a cartoon of Hollywood vices. It describes all the repellent behavior that amuses satirists like Nathaniel West in *Day of the Locust* and F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Last Tycoon*, though Faulkner prefers a sort of furious disgust to their tone of savage mockery. Ira Ewing's bad day begins with newspaper headlines summarizing the latest developments in a trial involving his daughter, an aspiring screen star: "APRIL LALEAR BARES ORGY SECRETS" (*Collected Stories*, p. 705). This cinema girl is a professional, though, not a mere fan like Temple. April changes her name when she enters the business, and determines that she will be one of those girls who, as her father puts it, "will do anything to get into the pictures" (p. 714). That includes cavorting naked in a hotel room with another woman and a casting director, the result either of "just having a good time" or, as the director contends, "trying to blackmail him into giving them parts in a picture" (p. 713). "Extra parts," Ewing sneers, unwittingly accenting the industrial process that requires an endless belt of starlets to keep up with the production of commercial culture. In any event, LA sleaze has begun to ooze.

April Lalear's new name reminds us how cinema girls are just things to leer at (you do have to wonder about the story's prophetic powers when you think of a name like Heather Locklear). The prostitution of his daughter to the movie industry corresponds to another kind of



**FIGURE 2** Faulkner in Hollywood (December 1942) by Alfred Eriss/Stringer/2870705/Getty Images.

corruption that enrages Ewing, the effeminacy of his son. The aptly named Voyd taunts his father with a “veiled insolence that was almost feminine” (p. 709). His characterization owes something to the 1920s stereotype of the “fairy” – Voyd parades all but naked in a pair of straw-colored shorts, “his body brown with sun and scented faintly by the depilatory which he used” (p. 707). But if Voyd prefigures Hollywood caricatures of gayness, it is not simply his homosexuality or even gender ambiguity that troubles the story. It’s more the vacancy



of Voyd's life, a symptom of the decadent hedonism of the whole LA scene. Ira's wife blames her husband's drunken oblivion for the way both children have turned out, but every member of the family acts hopelessly lost. Mrs. Ewing herself rattles around in a trophy villa with nothing but her husband's infidelities to think about; Ira's mother lives in Hollywood like the simple Nebraska plains woman she is, miserably befuddled by the California lifestyle. Even the Asian maids and gardeners seem mainly to be busy reading scandal tabloids.

There's something fundamentally perverse, Faulkner suggests, about this unreal city, a place of golden dreams where not a single thing feels authentic. Of course, that LA is artificial and full of greedy soulless people is a pretty banal insight. There's a good deal of rage about his own bondage to the Babylon of Hollywood that Faulkner vents in writing a story so outrageous yet predictable in its complaints. But you can sense that the artist is worried more broadly about what he sees coming in commercial mass culture. The Coen brothers capture the threat perfectly in their brilliant movie *Barton Fink*, which is based on Faulkner's experiences in Hollywood. The idea that a production company could actually *own* the contents of a writer's head, and that the industrial manufacture of movies by the studio system – as opposed to the artistic ambitions of the earlier cinema – appealed to lower and lower tastes troubles the playwright-turned-scriptwriter Fink. As it did Faulkner. Whenever he felt forced to take Hollywood's outlandish money (sometimes \$1,000 a week), Faulkner complained in his letters about having to “whore” himself. Beyond jeopardy to art, “Golden Land” also points to profound shifts associated with the movies' celebrity and youth culture: “young people . . . precursors of a new race not yet seen on the earth: of men and women without age, beautiful as gods and goddesses, and with the minds of infants” (p. 721).

The last monstrous act of the story sparks the connection between the two commercial enterprises that create golden land's prosperity: the movies and real estate. Since all publicity is good publicity, Ewing pays for a legitimate newspaper to print a special edition, to be sent to his client mailing list. The front page will have a photograph of himself, identified as both the father of April Lalear and the president of the Ewing Realty Company. Ewing figures the notoriety will be good for business. In effect, Ewing prostitutes his own daughter to a money-making scheme. The act echoes the suggestions of incest in *Sanctuary*, and deepens Faulkner's suspicion that new forms of financial and



cultural power perpetuated longstanding patterns of domination. As it turns out, Ewing's father had been something of a small town Nebraska success story, and his mother points out that making money is just too easy for Ewing men. Faulkner proposes a continuum between the pioneering force that conquered the country's land, and the entrepreneurial drive now creating film and realty empires. This savage little story wonders whether there are any limits to the capitalization of human relations and the debasement of imagination.

For all the loathing in *Sanctuary* and "Golden Land" of industrial pop culture, and the whole transformation of contemporary life for which it stands, we should keep in mind that the modern age disgusts those who are losing advantages rather than those who've been closed out in the past. Even when the disapproval of modernity seems to come in Faulkner's own voice, we need to read the stories carefully for a wider array of responses to the possibilities of the new age. It is true, for example, that Faulkner wrote introductions to *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary* in which he bemoaned some of the changes overtaking the South. He complains that the contemporary New South is no South at all, but "a land of Immigrants who are rebuilding the towns and cities into replicas of towns and cities in Kansas and Iowa and Illinois, with skyscrapers and striped canvas awnings instead of wooden balconies" (*The Sound and the Fury*, p. 229). Economic nomadism, urban life, homogeneous replication: these are regional symptoms of the modern ills portrayed in "Golden Land." Similarly, Faulkner confesses his own implication in commercial culture, saying he conceived *Sanctuary* for a mass audience – "a cheap idea" that would perhaps lure 10,000 of "them" into buying it. Faulkner sounds like Horace Benbow, or, as we shall see, Quentin Compson: skeptics regarding the new order, but helpless defenders of a way of life that has not only been historically eclipsed, but seriously discredited in the process.

Yet, for all his mooning over modern life's tawdry excesses, a good measure of Faulkner's empathy runs toward characters who, by playing fast and loose, attempt to get out from under the weight of the past's monumental decrepitude. The rebellious young woman constitutes the type; the Estelle he'd fallen in love with had been one herself. I think the Faulkner who scandalized his townsmen with his drinking and joblessness; who was so determined to fly that he invented a British identity and headed to flight school in Canada during World War I; and who fled to New Orleans, New Haven, and New York to

find the new art – that Faulkner kept looking for the freeing possibilities of the modern age.

If we recall, then, the more exuberant attitude toward change that some of Faulkner's characters display, we can appreciate what Faulkner is doing in much of the fiction lying outside the Yoknapatawpha sagas of historical decline. The notion of modernity as a high-spirited adventure inspires one of Faulkner's early short stories from the 1930s. In "Turnabout," written just before he went to Hollywood for the first time, Faulkner has some fun with the disruptiveness of World War I. Americans flocked to the Great War in Europe because travel and danger seemed so exciting to a generation raised in prim Victorian households, many in sleepy provincial towns. The war let you *move*. You could see Europe; sexual mores relaxed under the realities of fleeting romances and ever-present death; African Americans got out of the Southern countryside or Northern cities and were amazed at the freedoms they could enjoy abroad. Emblematically, the world mobilized. We know about Hemingway and other soon-to-be-celebrity writers like John Dos Passos who tried to get to the action even before the US had joined the hostilities. Gertrude Stein learned to drive an automobile so she could visit troops on the front lines in France. And a short twenty-year-old tried to mask his Mississippi drawl behind a fake English accent, added a "u" to the spelling of his last name to make it look more British, and got himself into pilot training for the Royal Air Force in Toronto.

"Turnabout" pivots on a little rivalry that develops between a young British boat crew and a pair of American aviators. The Americans find their English counterparts lacking in professionalism; the boatmen seem to do nothing but zip playfully around the harbor by day, then sleep on the streets like hobos when their vessels are stored under docks at night. To impress their new chums with real danger and bravery, the pilot Bogard invites the sailor Claude to accompany him on a bombing mission. Claude shows nerve beyond his years on the flight, impressing the pilots, and then completely unnerves his US mates when he compliments them on having landed with an unreleased shell dangling from one wing. That Claude is so calm about the mishap – he could see what was happening, they couldn't, but he coolly says nothing – weak-knees Bogard, who then accepts an invitation to see what the boat crews do. The story's "turnabout" involves the American's realization that the boatmen's tasks require blood-

curdling courage; the tiny vessel hurtles toward a German tanker, veering off at the last minute, under gunfire, and releasing a torpedo. Often the torpedoes jam, requiring them to be winched back into the firing mechanism, the suicidal launch process to begin again.

Faulkner's story grasps the war as a spike in modernity's contradictory development. On the one hand, the war effort prompted greater consolidation of state and industrial powers, leading to wider regimentation of individuals. On the other, the might of modern social and economic institutions hardly turned out to be total; there were opportunities to play turnabout with it. One threat posed by the demands of modern "world" warfare in 1914 involved the emergence of a military-industrial complex serving manufacturing and financial interests. World War I enriched munitions makers, bankers, and numerous other suppliers of war material; they pushed for American intervention in the European conflict, which came in 1917. We may recall comments in *Soldiers' Pay* suggesting that the war was motivated more by economics than politics. In his novel *A Fable*, written in the early 1950s, at the outset of the Cold War, Faulkner returns to the circumstances under which the US became the century's dominant commercial, political, and military power as a result of World War I. In "Turnabout" he senses the gathering force of state authority and industrial technology, but shows how it provokes resistance too.

"Turnabout" culminates with an act of fury at military order. Having learned that Claude and his crew are missing in action, Bogard rages at war's senselessness as he wings toward his present target. Closing down on a German headquarters, the pilot risks self-destruction as he gets close enough for a direct hit on the chateau, regretting only that he couldn't have wiped out the warmongers on both sides: "all the generals, the admirals, the presidents and the kings – theirs, ours – all of them" (*Collected Stories*, p. 509). Ironically, Bogard receives a medal for his bravery on the mission, though he'd have been court-martialed for his recklessness had it failed. Faulkner suggests how non-compliance gets muffled within the rigid enforcements of state authority, the protest of duty perversely turning into its very performance. Likewise, though failures of modern combat technology draw attention to the limits of advanced industrialism, as in the torpedo device that repeatedly jams, the sailors ingeniously figure out how to make it work rather than junking it and reverting to more primitive means. Another tantalizing thread of unorthodoxy in the story involves the

kind of sexual crossovers we've seen elsewhere. In this case, erotic attraction springs up among the rank and file. Claude in particular appears as "girlish" (p. 476), "with a pink-and-white face and blue eyes, and a mouth like a girl's" (p. 475). There's a note of soldierly homoeroticism here, men with men, as war must have it. But Claude's girlishness also indicates the hybrid elements of one's sexuality that are more openly released around the war's upheaval and the immediate aftermath of modern adventure. Faulkner sees the war as a moment of crisis for absolutes of all kinds, including those of gender – freeing people to greater experimentation, variety of experience, questioning of restraints. Yet he also understands the war as an event that strengthens the hand of the modern capitalist state to regulate desire and enforce assignments of gender and class.

The growing power of modern agencies of social conformity – the military, the culture industry, national state-regulated production and consumption, international finance – continues to concern Faulkner in a series of novels and stories he writes during the 1930s. "Turnabout" advanced Faulkner's intimacy with these developments by initiating his direct relations with Hollywood. A literary agent had come across Faulkner's story in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1932, and recommended its author as an upcoming talent to his brother, Howard Hawks, the ambitious head of MGM Studios. Hawks was always on the lookout for promising new writers, and he offered Faulkner his first scriptwriting contract. Desperate for money, his father having recently died, his family responsibilities acute, and his novel-writing far from profitable, Faulkner headed west.

Unsurprisingly, Hawks asked him to begin his duties by adapting "Turnabout" itself for the screen. Faulkner had already encoded the filmic potential of his story in its language; for instance, sometimes its imagery borrows from movie effects: as the boat crew circles close under the looming steamer Bogard feels that "[h]igh above them the freighter seemed to be spinning on her heel like a trick picture in the movies" (p. 504). Stylizing war as already a kind of movie also shows Faulkner making a connection between two major modern enterprises. Moviemaking does resemble warfare in a certain way – with its logistical co-ordination of theaters, units, teams, supplies, campaigns. Both depend on intricate chains of command to direct complex operations and deal with vast numbers of people. Moreover, as early critics of industrial culture pointed out, popular mass movies were devised

as working-class diversion, gently disciplining an army of laborers to forget their troubles. At the same time, Faulkner's coding of his war story as already a movie points to the dangerous capacity film possessed for representing combat as thrilling and glorious. It's not just that war movies of this early era downplayed violence and death, but also that the very novelty of moving screen-images so captivates and excites, that whatever is represented borrows the magic of the medium itself. D. W. Griffith invented the movie "spectacular" by appreciating the enthralling effect of being able to experience swirling armies and charging cavalry in your theater seat. The pleasure of watching a war movie has something to do with the visceral pleasure of watching lots of powerful things move fast. War movies became a Hollywood staple partly because the maximal visual and aural effects of the medium could be shown off in techniques developed to capture aerial maneuvers, fields of sweeping infantry, underwater action, and exploding planes, ships, bridges, brains. That war movies end up making war itself seem less real suggests there are also ideological consequences to be reckoned with.

Faulkner's experience transforming "Turnabout" into an MGM movie – it was released under the title *Today We Live* in 1933 – triggered a career-long conviction that Hollywood mutilated literary art. Faulkner worked on the adaptation through a few versions; he was reassigned toward the end of the process, but not until he'd had to deal with MGM's surprising insistence that a female part be added in order to fulfill an obligation to Joan Crawford, who was under contract for a set number of pictures per year. Faulkner's droll response to the news – "I don't seem to remember a girl in the story" – didn't prevent him from thinking up a way to use the new character to exploit the opportunities of the new medium. For one thing, Crawford's character, Ann, introduces an awkward third between Claude and Ronnie, the boat captain, whose sister she becomes; the result is to defuse the homoerotic charge of the story's wartime fraternization and to relocate it in Ann's aggressive sexuality. Ann behaves like many of Faulkner's young women, making a bid to control her own erotic life and challenging patriarchal authority. In the film script Faulkner worked on, Ann hooks up with Claude while making it clear she doesn't love him. Ultimately, though, the movie tames the subversiveness it has entertained. Bogard ends up marrying Ann, and instead of firing off his anti-war sentiments directly to the reader, he murmurs them encircled

in Ann's protective embrace. The movie domesticates, literally, the political insubordination of the short story, as it also pulls Ann's wayward sexual independence back under marital authority.

Faulkner's involvement in the Hollywood film industry influenced his fiction in several long-lasting ways, as we shall see. We've already noticed how Faulkner used the movies to symbolize key shifts associated with modernity. Over the course of the next two decades, Faulkner not only continues to write intermittently for the studios, he also creates his greatest novels. His fiction conducts an ongoing dialogue with the forces of modernization, and Hollywood gave him direct access to the latest leading features of modern culture. In a number of stories, as well as in two subsequent novels, *Pylon* (1935) and *The Wild Palms* (1939), Faulkner draws on a sense of the seismic shifts in social and sexual mores, cultural forms, mass behavior, and economic relations that his life in the Hollywood film colony cued him to.

One of Faulkner's strangest novels, *Pylon*, tries to capture the dizzying sensations of a modern age in the making. The novel focuses on the unconventional lives of a new breed of entertainer, barnstorming aviators who traveled the country staging races. Their line of work – a civilian version of the breath-taking aerial combat waged by celebrity "aces" during the war – seems like nothing their audiences have ever seen. A newspaper reporter, a timid observer of life who tends to romanticize the barnstormers' freedom, exclaims that they "aint human": "No ties; no place where you were born and have to go back to it now and then even if it's just only to hate the damn place good and comfortable for a day or two" (*Pylon*, p. 805). Faulkner himself emphasized the novelty of the pilots' existence: "To me they were a fantastic and bizarre phenomenon on the face of a contemporary scene" (Gwynn and Blotner, p. 36). The nomads defy norms thrillingly. Their daring flying stunts theatricalize their disregard for social, especially sexual, customs. Faulkner emphatically associates them with modernity, as if they are a fleeting avant-garde of future society.

The idea that the barnstormers never stop anywhere for long, that, in effect, they actually live in the air, might make them especially intriguing to a writer who felt inescapable ties to the place where he had been born. In fact, Faulkner turned to the flyers' tale when he got stuck writing his most ambitious and challenging novel about the South, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and decided he had "to get away from it for a while" (*idem*). *Absalom*, as we shall see, relentlessly traces the origins

of the contemporary South back to its earliest roots in European colonialism. Faulkner had to discipline his powers of moral concentration heroically to excavate the South's awful story; what emerged was a complex set of partial and conflicting narratives, each conditioned by the way its teller understood the demonic origins of the plantation South. *Absalom* suggests how every inch of Southern soil is saturated with centuries of bloody history, every individual tied oppressively to all that precedes him or her. Faulkner thought "to get away" from this condition by turning to the "contemporary scene" he explores in *Pylon*. If *Absalom* proves to be about the sins of the father, lines of descent, a society's decline, and the burden of the Southern past, *Pylon* takes up the irrelevance of sin (not to mention fathers), lines of ascent, a society's transformation, and a weightless future.

The aerialists are futuristic. The reporter marvels that their cold precision makes them as much machines as the planes they fly: cut one and it won't be blood but cylinder oil that leaks out (*Pylon*, p. 804). One of the hallmarks of modernity involves the body's extension by technology. As photography came to preserve the human image, and phonographs the human voice, modern technology begins to dream of supplementing the biological organism. *Pylon* signals this evolution in the constant intrusions of the air announcer's amplified voice, which transcends the limits of the human organ, but does so as eerily "disembodied." Technology, Faulkner foresees, will extend human presence, but only as it deconstructs it too. In the moment of fantasizing the liberating effects of technology in *Pylon*, there's something mesmerizing even about such disembodiment, whatever the menace, as if this, too, is a way to break the ties of a single body, to a single place. The utopian note comes through in the early description of the airport as "a mammoth terminal for some species of machine of a yet unvisioned tomorrow, to which air earth and water will be as one" (p. 786).

A few years earlier, Faulkner had written about a desperately stuck rural family, the Bundrens, who manage to get moving from their failing farm only when the mother dies and they must honor her request to be buried in town. As we shall see, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is very curious about the expansion of human consciousness represented by technology. One of the Bundren brothers fancies a new-fangled graphophone, which he figures would comfort him fine at the end of a long work day. Other characters similarly have picked out



mechanical devices that might ease their lots: a toy train for the deprived tot, an abortifacient for the tricked teenage daughter, new false teeth for the worn-down father, and so on. When the dead mother Addie actually begins speaking as one section's narrator, we have the equivalent of Cash's talking box – the novel as mechanical reproduction of voice, as phono-graph. I draw in this feature of *As I Lay Dying* here because it does suggest Faulkner's fascination – even if it's sometimes skeptical – with the way modern technology might create new structures of human feeling, new relations to one's own body and place, and new possibilities for human imagination. Faulkner became an amateur pilot, and eventually bought his own flying machine. The sensation of lifting off from the Old Colonel's postage stamp of native soil must have been exhilarating.

Faulkner codes the pilots' sexual behavior as futuristically machine-like too: "It aint adultery; you can't anymore imagine two of them making love than you can two of them aeroplanes back in the corner of the hangar, coupled" (*Pylon*, p. 933).<sup>9</sup> The plot of *Pylon* involves the encounter of a reporter for a New Orleans newspaper with one team of performers who participate in an air show celebrating the opening of the "modernistic" new Feinman International Airport. The reporter falls for the whole exotic ménage: the pilot Roger Shumann, his wife Laverne and their child, the parachutist Jack Holmes, and their mechanic Jiggs. Laverne's open sexuality knocks the repressed reporter off his pins, and he moons around after them, lending them money and fantasizing himself amid their mysterious intimacies. Laverne represents the furthestmost evolution of the sexually defiant young woman in Faulkner's fiction. In fact, she's way over the top. Shumann recalls how Laverne learns to perform aerial stunts when she first takes up with him. Her gimmick is to climb out of the cockpit once the bi-plane is airborne, walk along the wing, then parachute onto the field. The two deliberately capitalize on Laverne's femaleness by having her perform in a skirt. But just before she is to make her first jump, Laverne startles Shumann by climbing into the cockpit first, and having "wild and frenzied" sex with him as they maneuver around the joystick. Though that might have been sufficient to making the point about Laverne's revolutionary attitude toward sexuality, Faulkner goes on to have her catapult from the plane, naked under her skirt, and float to earth like a heavenly vision to the spectators below. Her generosity doesn't prevent her from being apprehended for public

lewdness. What's typical about this bizarre incident is the brazenness of Laverne's defiance: she's scared at first of jumping, but that changes into "a wild and now mindless repudiation of bereavement" (p. 908). The mid-air ecstasy, in other words, is a spectacular metaphor for the impulse to be caught up above the ties to earth, a place, the past, and to repudiate them in an act of defiant, willful self-gratification.

It's a little hard coming down to earth after all that, but the barnstormers remain true to their refusal to be bound by convention wherever they wander. The reporter can't figure out the family relations in the group at first, and his confusion turns out to be well-founded. He learns that Laverne has settled her child's paternity with a cast of the dice, literally; at the infant's birth, both Shumann and the parachutist Holmes are summoned, and when the pilot rolls high he gets the honor of marrying her and "becoming" the boy's father. Laverne herself turns the uncertainty of her son's fatherhood into a joke by teasing him, "Who's your old man?" Laverne flouts the law of the fathers by exposing how male control over women's bodies is a matter of chance, vulnerable to female sabotage. The open mechanics of sexuality here dispel the ideological mystification that usually veils it in Southern culture. Sex as practiced in *Pylon* has no greater point than physical pleasure, unlike the elaborate labyrinth of social significance enclosing it in the plantation world of *Absalom, Absalom!*

There's a carnivalesque atmosphere loosed in *Pylon*. The novel takes place during Mardi Gras, as had the actual events Faulkner modeled his novel upon. Faulkner put aside *Absalom* to travel to New Orleans early in 1934, partly because he'd gotten to know some of the pilots who were to perform at the dedication ceremonies; he'd also met a newspaperman named Herman Deutsch, upon whom he modeled the anonymous reporter of the novel. Faulkner lost himself in the festivities, as he wanted, but I think his preoccupation with *Absalom* ended up affecting *Pylon* in unanticipated ways. Despite the bald challenge to conventional morality and economics in the novel, the barnstormers hardly lead free lives. The reporter romanticizes the pilots' disregard for money, preferring to believe they risk their lives for thrill and fame. But the aerialists themselves – for all their non-conformism – are desperately grounded in the economic circumstances of the 1930s. That is, though the reporter embodies Faulkner's wish to imagine individuals exempt from ties to place, their predicament suggests that the future is planted firmly in the past.

The fundamental condition afflicting the barnstormers is their poverty. They work under extreme danger – Schumann is the second pilot to die in a crash during the races – and are paid little. The novel shows the pilots staging a strike to get prize money restored when the sponsors try to deduct unexpected expenses from the competitors' pot. The barnstormers are constantly looking for financial help, and insinuations are drawn about Laverne's willingness to trade on her body for necessities. The aviators become emblems of Depression-era workers – forced into nomadism, reduced to bare-bones existence, too often disorganized and disadvantaged to challenge their employers, and treated as deprived by those better off. Jiggs is spellbound by all the consumer goods to be had in New Orleans; he sidles up to a display window "like a boy's approaching for the first time the aerial wheels and stars and serpents of a nighttime carnival" (*Pylon*, p. 779). There are serious matters of economic deprivation underlying the spectacular entertainments of "aerial wheels" and "carnival" over the course of the novel. Faulkner's sense of the barnstormers as pure "ephemera," "no place for them in the culture, in the economy" (Gwynn and Blotner, p. 36), doesn't fully jibe with the novel's presentation of them as products of a long-standing history of economic exploitation. *Pylon* seethes with class resentment. The investors who build the airport, headed by the "sewage board Jew" (*Pylon*, p. 924) Feinman, provoke working-class hatred. Jiggs literally offers his back as a desk to a wealthy patron in order to get a credit agreement signed that will enable Shumann to buy a used plane and earn the group's living again.

Behind the novel's setting in "New Valois" stands the New Orleans of Huey Long's heyday. The actual city's new Shushan Airport was named for one of the "Kingfish's" chief lieutenants, his director of public works. Long, governor of Louisiana and later US Senator, vaulted to power on a "share the wealth" platform. He memorably declared "Every man a King" as he electrified 1930s crowds with his radical populism. Long's ability to mesmerize audiences frightened his opponents. In *Pylon* the announcer's disembodied, authoritarian voice hints at the scary potential of new technologies like amplification and radio to bring mass audiences under the sway of a single speaker. Long's actual legacy is complex. Doubtless a demagogue, he also understood that working-class suffering during the Depression had been caused by greed on Wall Street and fecklessness in the White

House. The rise of German nationalist socialism expressed similar kinds of resentment in Europe, and if Faulkner was reading the newspapers in New Orleans during his visit, he would have found reports about the rise of Hitler and German Nazism bordering columns about the local air show. Though matters of finance and labor in the plantation South of *Absalom, Absalom!* are left behind when Faulkner interrupts himself to start a new novel, *Pylon* ends up confronting other class conflicts troubling the Depression-era nation. Faulkner sees fascism as a modern threat arising from ongoing exploitation of the working poor. The barnstormers' lawlessness reflects unrest on several fronts during the decades following World War I – unrest stirred by promises of political, economic, and social enfranchisement for white women, blue-collar workers, and African Americans.

Faulkner's goal in *Pylon* is hardly political commentary, though. If he's interested in exploring the contradictions of modernity, as I've argued, he does so in a typically creative way. Neither the plight of the working class nor the abuses of modern captains of finance and culture tempt Faulkner to polemics. Instead, he uses the filter of the enthusiastic but befuddled reporter to focus on the difficulty of comprehending modernity-in-the-making. We might think of this character as a funky alternative to Horace Benbow or Quentin Compson, who snobbishly turn their backs on change. Perhaps he's something like a more determined version of Ernest Talliaferro in *Mosquitoes*. For the author who believed that "life is motion," refusal to imagine the future amounted to a death sentence. At the same time, willing but ill-equipped moderns like Talliaferro and the reporter embarrass themselves comically by failing to appreciate just how unsuited they may be to modern life. As another kind of writer who reckons awkwardly but hopefully with modern ways, the reporter serves as Faulkner's proxy.

The way Faulkner tries to identify with a futuristic world is as an artist, writing in an unmistakably "modernistic" style. *Pylon* signals its allegiance to an exuberant modernism. In some modernist works, the abandonment of straightforward narrative and the shattering of individual consciousness and voice denote despair, as in *The Waste Land*, or *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway*, or even *The Sound and the Fury*. Instead, *Pylon's* modernist mood more resembles Joyce's, or Hart Crane's, or Dos Passos's – engineered to catch modern life's startling transfigurations, and committed to their synthetic and creative

possibilities. (One chapter of *Pylon* is entitled "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which here seems to be a joke on the reporter's desperate efforts to join his new mermaid Laverne, and maybe a snicker at Eliot's cosmic futility.) *Pylon* pops with Joycean puns and manufactured new words: "the garbement which was the city . . ."; the "clatterfalque [for catafalque, a coffin stand] Nilebarge"; "the hydrantgouts gutterplaited with the trodden tinseldung of stars" (*Pylon*, p. 918). Faulkner wants to amplify the innovativeness of an emergent era of the machine, mass production, mass culture, and consumption by linking it to a conspicuously innovative way of writing.

Notice how the following lines evoke classical painting in a neologism ("Rembrandtgloom") that suggests how new sensations require an innovative lingo. A store is illuminated by a single kerosene lamp

out of whose brown Rembrandtgloom the hushed bellies of ranked cans gleamed behind a counter massed with an unbelievable quantity of indistinguishable objects which the proprietor must vend by feel alone to distinguish not only object from object but object from chiaroscuro (p. 901).

Emergent human sensibilities are on display here – like the ability to distinguish by feel between identical mass-produced objects; the anthropomorphic cans take on human aura ("bellies"); and to tell the difference between object and chiaroscuro underscores the distance between Rembrandt's world and this one, even as it suggests a continuum between art and modern mass production. *Pylon's* style emphasizes modernity's capacity to surprise, delight, liberate, and lift. Faulkner is certainly not naïve about such transformations, and he exposes their disappointments plainly, as we have seen. There's plenty of suffering for *Pylon's* band of avant-garde mavericks, and it's a misery that comes directly from the new deadliness of the machine age. But there's also that ecstasy of soaring beyond earthbound limits.

As the Great Depression deepened during the 1930s, depictions of its suffering became more urgent, and remedies for its ills more extreme. Those with leftist leanings were convinced the present crisis in capitalism signaled its imminent demise; inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, which had established a communist government in 1917, they believed the US working class would likewise challenge the inequities of capitalism. A world-wide proletarian uprising would

be underway. The marginal existence of the barnstormers in *Pylon* may be taken as an emblem of the misery forced on working classes all over the country, from farmers to factory workers: nomadism, families devastated by illness and death, abject poverty. After three years in which the Republican President Hoover hoped for a natural economic "correction," the Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to address the crisis more aggressively. FDR soon organized federal agencies to distribute aid to the poor, set up government employment programs, and developed measures for restoring the nation's financial health. Leftists welcomed the relief, but also understood FDR's interventions as intended to save capitalism from itself. Those on the right criticized the unprecedented growth of the federal government, and worried about its damage to their ideal of "rugged individualism."

Though the effects of the Depression were widespread, it took a while for Americans generally to appreciate how many regions and groups of people were going under. Numerous artists, some of them eventually supported by government programs, spread out to portray the suffering of the poor in photographs, films, painting, audio recordings, and literature. Working-class individuals were themselves encouraged to document their experiences. This effort became a kind of aesthetic movement of its own: proletarian (or working-class) art. Autobiographical novels written by blue-collar workers began to appear, but "the proletarian novel" also encompassed works about class conflict and economic conditions more generally. Proletarian fiction typically sympathized with socialist solutions to the problem of poverty; often they encouraged and dramatized the formation of class consciousness (the awareness that the disadvantages of the working class are the result of the way the system of capitalism creates profits for owners by paying the lowest wages possible to workers), and frequently described the growth to political activism of their protagonists. Examples include Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930) and Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933). A related project involved exposing the decadence of the bourgeoisie (or middle class) – their complacency, materialism, spiritual hollowness, and indifference to the poor. Novels like *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night* would be good examples, although Fitzgerald, unlike many other writers of the time, such as Hemingway and Dos Passos, never affiliated with leftist political organizations.

At the end of the decade, Faulkner wrote a novel that shows the influence of proletarian fiction as it reflects on the catastrophic effects of the Great Depression.<sup>10</sup> He conceived an unusual form for *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*<sup>11</sup> (1939): a double narrative that counterpoints stories of working-class suffering and middle-class decadence. The result is a distinctively modernist take on the way several key features of modern life in the 1930s now may be seen to intersect: class conflict, an economy of waged labor and mass consumption, sexual freedom, and the influence of popular culture.

*The Wild Palms* sets Faulkner's familiar theme of sexual rebellion in fresh circumstances. Here the domestic lives of married couples interest Faulkner more than the wild adolescents of his earlier fiction and the alien sex-forms of *Pylon*. The prison in *The Wild Palms* isn't the cult of female purity and male procreation stemming from plantation patriarchy; instead, it is the numbing emptiness of modern middle-class existence that cries out for a revolt of the passions. Faulkner introduces the problem starkly at the outset of the novel: a middle-aged physician makes a cameo appearance that allows Faulkner to establish the sterility of a settled life. The doctor lives in his home town, has married "the wife his father had picked out for him and within four years owned the house which his father had built and assumed the practice which his father had created" (*If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, p. 496). Two decades of marriage produce no children. Proprietor of summer beach cottages as well, this burgher physician has been summoned by a young couple renting one of the units. Charlotte has fallen ill, the result of a furtive abortion botched by her lover, Harry, also a doctor. The episode takes place at the end of their affair; the novel loops back to recount its course. Faulkner frames the couple's romance by contrasting it to the loveless marriage of the older married pair, a fate Charlotte and Harry have desperately sought to avoid.

Harry Wilbourne's youth has disappeared into the years of self-denial his medical training has cost him. Frugality and self-discipline have gotten him through school and into an internship, but he realizes in his late twenties that gone are "the years for wild oats and for daring, for the passionate tragic ephemeral loves of adolescence" (p. 517). In fact, he contemplates a life even more seriously deprived than his older double's at the cottage; he is resigned to "that peace with which a middleaged eunuch might look back upon the dead time before his



alteration" (*idem*). Harry's hopelessness derives in part from his conviction that without money (he's a lowly paid staff member at an urban hospital), he'll have no shot at love. But his gloom at being excluded from even modest bourgeois happiness gets rocked by a woman he meets at an artists' party. Charlotte Rittenmeyer has reached a comparable dead end; an amateur sculptor, she has settled in to predictable wifery to a wealthy husband, an apartment in an "irreproachable neighborhood," two children, a maid.

Faulkner brings his lovers together through their passion for art – Harry amazed by the leisure and self-indulgence represented by every painting, Charlotte aroused by the pleasure of creating something real, "something you can touch" (p. 521). Although Faulkner qualifies their romance by noting its immaturity – the pseudo-sophistication of the artists' colony that brings the lovers together, the juvenile sauciness of Charlotte's saying she really would have preferred to marry her brother – the author nonetheless treats the extravagant escapade with respect. Charlotte sacrifices her children to run off with Harry, and the pair throw over everything they've worked for to take flight with each other. Faulkner empowers their love with both a strong charge of anti-bourgeois non-conformity (they never marry, and Harry performs illegal abortions on both Charlotte and another young woman traveling with her lover), and the passionate intensity of artistic creativity. It's love-making and art-making that drive the two to the wilderness, and permit them ecstatic touches of the Real:

you are one single abnegant affirmation, one single fluxive Yes out of the terror in which you surrender volition, hope, all – the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude, the shock, the death, the moment when, stopped physically by the ponderable clay, you yet feel all your life rush out of you into the pervading immemorial blind receptive matrix, the hot fluid blind foundation – grave-womb or womb-grave, it's all one. (p. 589)

Harry's talking about sex, but the words also encompass Charlotte's rapture at making something real in her art of clay.

If Charlotte and Harry stage a jail-break from bourgeois proprieties, their story is shadowed by a second narrative of literal imprisonment and escape. The "under"-story to the main romance recounts the adventures of two convicts from Mississippi's Parchman Penitentiary,

members of a prison work crew released temporarily to aid in rescue efforts during the Great Flood of the Mississippi River in 1927. Set ten years earlier than the love story (which is roughly contemporaneous with Faulkner's present), the convicts' tale touches on another quest for freedom during the intervening decade: working-class liberation from economic bondage. Parchman operated as a profit-making state-owned plantation. Prisoners farmed cotton fields under armed guard, their lot also symbolizing the permutations of coerced labor throughout the history of Southern agriculture – from African slaves to post-Emancipation debt-peons, tenants, and actual leased convict labor.

While he's out, one of the convicts gets a tantalizing taste of American freedom. At one point he takes up with a Cajun alligator hunter; they become partners, and the convict savors "*how good it is to work*" (p. 673). Real work involves labor you're not alienated from – represented here by grappling with a primitive beast and taking its life yourself. It also means getting paid and keeping the money. In contrast, labor at Parchman – whether the plantation is an image of state collectivism or state capitalism – is nothing but "*toil*" (*idem*) because neither the profit, nor the land, nor the labor belongs to the worker. Once adrift, the escapee travels back to a primeval scene in which men and women do for themselves. Separated from his work detail in the chaos, the Tall Convict encounters a pregnant woman stranded in a tree. They fend for survival, subsist by the efforts of their own hands, and perform the most natural of labor together, bringing the woman's child into the world. Experiences of this sort have a utopian tinge, even if utopia never materializes.<sup>12</sup>

Actually bringing about the kinds of emancipation figured in the lovers' rebellion or the convicts' release proves very difficult to accomplish. The convict recoils from the immensity of the upheaval engulfing him – a future freedom embodied by the deluge-born infant: "it was not the woman at all but rather a separate demanding threatening inert yet living mass of which both he and she were equally victims" (p. 599). If the emerging child constitutes an "inert yet living mass," it may signify several kinds of mass formations of the period: women amassing for political enfranchisement; workers for greater rights; communists to overthrow capitalism; and so forth. Yet there is something finally "inert" about both plots of rebellion in *The Wild Palms*. In the labor narrative, the Tall Convict never quite develops the will to

challenge the authority that deprives him of his freedom. Faulkner sympathizes with the unfair conditions that have made the criminals victims themselves. The short convict, whose crime no one in the novel ever learns, has been sentenced to one hundred and ninety-nine years, a term so "savage" that the narrator concludes it "certainly abrogated justice and possibly even law" (p. 511). Moreover, the convict himself has been forced to decide between Parchman and a conventional penitentiary, making his incarceration a mockery of "free choice and will." The Tall Convict, a lean man with a "sun-burned face and Indian-black hair" (p. 509), runs afoul of the law because he takes the dime Westerns he's been reading literally. He tries to hold up a train but gets arrested almost immediately.

You can see Faulkner establishing the symbolic import of the convicts: a weakly educated slave of popular culture, a descendant of decimated peoples; a helpless target of an elite class's "blind" "outrage and vengeance" (p. 511). The Tall Convict rails at the simple inaccuracy of pulp fiction, as if he's been issued a bad instruction manual, but Faulkner wants to suggest more fundamentally how pop industrial culture puts false dreams of agency and success before the minds of the working class. And it's not just "the impossible pulp-printed fables" that have infected the Tall Convict's imagination, it's the movies, too: "who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle" (p. 596). Stuffed with such fantasies, the Tall Convict can't be expected to think through the conditions that trap him. Or so Faulkner suggests at the end of a sour decade writing filmscripts, commercial short stories, and even the odd detective tale to make money. The Tall Convict is repeatedly described as lacking self-awareness, and he remains so persistently duty-bound through the flood that his behavior continues to be more perverse literal-mindedness than authentic honorableness. It's no wonder he passively accepts the truly perverse imposition of an additional ten-year sentence (on bogus charges) so that he won't walk free, as a technicality turns out to make possible. Having been launched into freedom, the convict decides he wants no part of it: he's happy to "return to that monastic existence of shotguns and shackles where he would be secure" (p. 599), and where "the plow handles felt right to his palms again" (p. 723).

Temporarily freed prisoners still bound to do the state's bidding may suggest the fate of the proletariat during the 1930s. Though the

Depression engulfs the US in a disorienting flood of destruction, suffering, and loss, working-class self-determination turns out to be just an interlude; as with the convicts, there's eventually a retreat to a familiar state of confinement. Laboring America only briefly surfaces in the public's notice: surveying the sheet of water covering the oldest plantations bordering the Mississippi, one convict thinks of "the generations of laborious sweat, somewhere beneath him" (p. 592). The most popular metaphor in documentary accounts of the Great Depression was the flood. Writing at the end of the decade, Faulkner watches the water recede and the prison doors swing shut again, to leave a US still firmly in the hands of modern industrial, commercial, and financial complexes.

By no means was Faulkner writing from the standpoint of a committed proletarian novelist, but he does take up both principal strands of the sub-genre – working-class exploitation and bourgeois decadence – to describe what was happening in the 1930s. The lovers' voyage of liberation also fails to locate a sanctuary where passion may be purified of modern decadence. Disgusted by the separate ways they've been corrupted by money – Harry indebted to his sister for bankrolling his education, Charlotte entrapped by her husband "Rat"'s riches – the rebels make a cult of self-subsistence. They turn their backs on money culture just as they defy sexual mores. When Harry and Charlotte first run off, they set up a love nest that soon degenerates into a mere replication of the "bourgeois standard" of marriage. Harry concludes that it is "what we call the prime virtues – thrift, industry, independence – that breeds all the vices – fanaticism, smugness, meddling, fear, and worst of all, respectability" (p. 585). Fleeing their new little jobs – Charlotte as department store window decorator, Harry as writer of pulp fiction for girls – the lovers head for the woods, where they can for a time abandon themselves to "Nature the unmathematical, the overfecund, the prime disorderly and illogical and patternless spendthrift" (p. 572). Like proto-hippies on the way to Walden II, the lovers luxuriate on a lake in northern Wisconsin, swimming naked, drawing pictures, making love.

Idyllic as this interlude is, though, Faulkner dooms it to the interference of economic necessity. Just as the danger of bourgeois routine periodically menaces them (Charlotte makes a little figure she calls the Bad Smell to keep them on the alert), so the need for money compromises the purity of their renunciation. Indeed, Faulkner suggests that

the lark of middle-class bohemianism is itself a kind of luxury made possible by affluence. When Charlotte cheerfully declares on the way to the woods that "We've lost our jobs!," she doesn't show much awareness of what unemployment meant to real working folks. In this novel, a private sexual utopia for two seems more a lucky indulgence than a blow struck against oppression. The selfishness of bourgeois habits of mind clouds even imagined alternatives. That Charlotte ends up having been infected by contaminated surgical instruments symbolizes the difficulty of getting cured with dirty tools.

Faulkner guides the lovers' comparatively self-centered repudiation of modern decadence toward a recognition of working-class desperation. The counter-pointed plots come close to intersecting when Harry and Charlotte find themselves serving as the medical staff for a mountain mining colony in the West. They soon realize that the laborers, European immigrants who can't speak English and "don't understand dishonesty" (p. 622), are being exploited by the absentee owners, who have stopped sending payroll. Past mistreatment has stirred mild protest, but this version of the proletariat settles for a few handouts from the commissary rather than a real revolution in their labor relations. "They're like kids. They will believe anything," the manager observes sympathetically (p. 623). It's up to Harry and Charlotte to enlighten them about the futility of their situation. Charlotte literally sketches out their predicament on a pad – a kind of ersatz proletarian art – to incite them to raid the commissary a last time and flee the camp before the fatal snows set in. Harry and Charlotte hardly become fomenters of revolution here, but we do feel Faulkner strengthening an identity between the beset working class and the bothered bourgeoisie. The lovers' predicament becomes graver, more desperate, while the comic effects shift over to the plot of the convicts' senseless but welcomed return to incarceration.

Harry Willbourne ends up in the same Parchman that houses the convicts, so the final scene of imprisonment does at last let the plots intersect. Harry comes off as a self-pitying sort, and for all his sorrow over losing Charlotte, he spurns her ex-husband's offer to help him commit suicide, resolving to stick out his life sentence – famously: "*Between grief and nothing I will take grief*" (p. 715). (Faulkner once amended this for another occasion: "*Between whiskey and nothing I will take whiskey.*" Which may be a better deal.) Harry's ruminations conclude a career in which he has had his own run at a more authentic

lifestyle, and gotten a taste of the conditions blocking both proletarian and bourgeois revolt. He's had a surprisingly crucial role to play symbolically in the collapse of both romances of freedom. To pitch in to the lovers' finances, the ex-doctor once takes up romance writing. Harry has nothing but contempt for the "moron's pap" he comes up with, tawdry "sexual gumdrop[s]" that subject their readers to "the anesthesia of his monotonous inventing" (p. 578). It's this job that convinces Harry he has himself fallen into the mass of mere wage workers, "thinking of nothing, . . . thinking only of the money" as he sits in front of his typewriter (pp. 580–581). When he announces to Charlotte that they must leave Chicago to flee respectability, Harry makes it clear that it is their status as alienated commercial artists that he finds intolerable: his pulp, but also Charlotte's shop window figurines, turned out like conveyor-belt objects for Saturday's payday. At the end of the 1930s, that is, Faulkner notices that cultural workers themselves had become members of a subset of the proletariat. Like Barton Fink, in the Coen brothers' film about Faulkner in Hollywood, they've sold the contents of their heads, the "moronic fable[s]" (p. 578) stupefying both their creators and consumers.

The double romance of *The Wild Palms* suggests that there are no commodity-free zones in modern American society. Even the primeval Cajun alligator hunter runs afoul of state officials who want to regulate his catch and take a percentage of his profit. In effect, these particular visions of both unalienated labor and unfettered sexuality themselves prove to be cheesy romances, products of the cultural fantasy factories that pander to working-class resentment and middle-class ennui. *The Wild Palms* comes out of Faulkner's own discomfort at his complicity with the engines of industrial culture. The novel bristles with references to the movies, perhaps beginning with the title's evocation of the golden land's emblematic palm tree. The mayhem in the mining camp strikes Harry as "a scene like something out of an Eisenstein Dante" (p. 621). The mention of the Russian filmmaker is suggestive since Eisenstein fashioned a method of cinematic montage in which scenes from separate narratives were inter-cut to suggest thematic connections. But unlike Eisenstein's confidence that montage would contribute to his audience's class consciousness and inspire a progressive politics, Faulkner's reference seems to indicate that montage has become just a special effect, a kind of extra theatricality.

Hollywood Bill's self-incrimination no doubt involved a personal dimension as well. In December of 1935 he had returned to Twentieth-Century-Fox at Howard Hawks's invitation. During this stay he met a young woman employed as a script clerk by the studio. Meta Carpenter was also from Mississippi, and she and Faulkner soon began a passionate affair. Their romance continued on and off for nearly two decades, through Bill's absences, Meta's frustration at his refusal to divorce Estelle, and even Meta's eventual marriage. The novel's annoyance with bourgeois respectability must reflect Faulkner's own disenchantment with his marriage, and his regret at the duties to Estelle and, most of all, to their daughter Jill that he felt bound to honor. Faulkner and Meta permitted themselves a flagrantly defiant relationship (Faulkner once went so far as to invite Meta and a decoy date to dinner at his house while Estelle was visiting, a stunt his wife saw through immediately). Their affair evidently created unprecedented ardor and intimacy for both of them, but Faulkner's novel, at least, implies that merely insulting respectability is a pretty small gesture of rebellion. Meta Carpenter's account of their affair, *A Loving Gentleman*, published after Faulkner's death, exalts their doomed relationship with heart-breaking dignity and sadness.<sup>13</sup> Yet it uncomfortably reads like an innocent teenage romance itself. In a certain respect, Meta was Faulkner's Hollywood – young, seductive, modern, emancipated, and even Southern. He loved her, but he couldn't bring himself to give up his past love (or love of the past?) for her.

In this first chapter we have explored Faulkner's efforts to envision the massive transformation of his world – and the Western world at large – by the event of modernity. We've seen a side of Faulkner that welcomed the freeing new social life-forms offered by modernization to a place like post-plantation Mississippi, once called "the closed society" by James Silver, a prominent historian of Faulkner's era. At the same time, the seductiveness of sexual, racial, and economic revolutions also alarmed the writer, because he saw in them the outline of renewed powers of exploitation, aggrandizement, and disregard for individual worth. As we might expect of a creative sensibility so deeply committed to telling the whole story of everything he writes about, Faulkner's reflections on the most encompassing crisis of his age – the set of changes that constitute twentieth-century modernity – probe numerous aspects of these new conditions, scrutinizing them passionately, skeptically, ambivalently. When Faulkner spoke of the artist's



calling as writing about the human heart in conflict with itself, he meant to emphasize the enduring human values of courage, honor, shame, love. But of course those virtues generate conflict only when they encounter the messy, ambiguous circumstances of lived life. As Faulkner imagined those circumstances, he more and more realized he was chronicling nothing less than the passing of one world and the emergence of another.