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Faulkner's Sexualized City: Modernism, Commerce, and the (Textual) Body

PETER LURIE

"Oh, my *Lolita*, I have only words to play with!"

—Humbert Humbert, *Lolita*¹

In a deleted passage from the middle of Faulkner's second novel, *Mosquitoes*, a young girl named Jenny is corrected in her kissing style by another girl. Jenny's partner in a barely illicit scene of what the other characters in the book call "petting," an eighteen-year-old on her way to Yale, breaks off the kiss with distaste when she tells Jenny that her way of kissing is not "refined." After some brief discussion, Jenny agrees to be tutored in a supposedly more elegant approach to the arts of love. The lesson apparently works. For, returning to her boyfriend later in the scene, a working-class tough named Pete, Jenny instructs him in turn. Initially resisting the more stylish smooching, Pete eventually defers, declaring "I guess I can stand being refined for a day or two."²

I open with this admittedly obscure detail for several reasons. Briefly, I will mention that the kissing scene was deleted from *Mosquitoes* initially not through Faulkner's decision, but one made by his publisher, a slightly more cautious Horace Liveright with whom, at a still early stage in his career, Faulkner felt compelled to comply.³

Despite appearances, in *Mosquitoes* and elsewhere, refinement counts for a good bit in Faulkner. Some of his most memorable characters or narrators speak in a heightened or "refined" idiom, often one that appears out of step with the more rustic world they inhabit or beyond their expected verbal capacity. (I have in mind Darl Bundren, the narrator of *The Hamlet*, or even Benjy Compson, whose native poeticism is part of his narration's beauty.) What is interesting for our purposes are the ways in which in *Mosquitoes* and, at a quite early point of his career, Faulkner linked such stylistic refinement—often a category for aesthetic considerations—to the erotic. We might note in passing that

a diminutive form of the French word for language, *langue*, is the same as their word for tongue.⁴ It might be interesting to speculate in this light about the manner of kissing practiced in *Mosquitoes* by the sculptor Gordon. Whereas we are asked to appreciate his natural (and therefore, unrefined) sexual appeal (Talliferro speculates about what appeals more to women: his own tailored sleeve or Gordon's ripped T-shirt),⁵ Gordon produces an artwork that suggests its own refined formalism: a headless, limbless statue of a female nude that appears neoclassical in its simplicity and directness.

Such classicism is the aesthetic opposite of what Faulkner demonstrates at moments in *Mosquitoes* and that would go on to become his famously *baroque* style. In the discussion that follows, I will be asking a number of questions about that development, among them the following: What is the role in Faulkner of a baroque, highly refined language, especially when Faulkner uses it to convey sexuality? And what connections (or disconnections) might that style have to Faulkner's use of the setting of the city, as in *Mosquitoes*, or elsewhere of the rural countryside? As we will see, changes in these locations occurred during the period of Faulkner's modernity that caused their differences to become obscured. As a consequence he fashions a third, textual space or "location" for his more fully realized version of sexuality.

In an earlier and very different approach to Faulkner's verbal flourishes, another critic once wrote, "Faulkner's style loves to perform."⁶ Readers familiar with Faulkner will recognize the aptness of such a statement, particularly when we consider some of the sections of novels I will take up here, including some of Faulkner's most celebrated passages. Nowhere else is such flourish evident as it is in Rosa Coldfield's narrated chapter of *Absalom, Absalom!* and, in a departure from his approach to narrating *The Hamlet* generally, in Faulkner's rapturous descriptions of Ike Snopes and Jack Houston's cow. The critic cited above, John T. Matthews, seeks to answer what lies behind that language's "performance"—in Faulkner's modernism generally as well as in these two novels. What motivates it, or, as Matthews suggests in a number of ways, for what does it compensate or seek to make up? His answer is that such stylistic "play" points up a recurring theme in both Faulkner's stories and in the French poststructuralist theory on which Matthews draws: a narrative in both cases of lack, longing, and desire. Faulkner makes this connection explicit when, in his "Introduction" to *The Sound and the Fury*, he relates the act of writing, or "marring" the unmarked page, with sexual despoilment.⁷ Yet it is significant that the kind of writing Faulkner produced in *The Sound and the Fury* is what we have come to associate with Faulkner's

signature methods and his discovery of them in this, his first major novel. Throughout his mature work, but including early novels like *Mosquitoes*, as we will see, Faulkner's writing was always "refined," if by refined we mean something beyond a straightforward or transparent narrative technique or style. And as the earlier passage from *Mosquitoes* suggests, such refinement was already associated for Faulkner with sexuality.

Yet other ideas about modernism and writing like Faulkner's may allow us to see his refined style differently. At certain moments and in relation to particular contexts, that style owes something, not to the lack inherent in writing (or in desire, as Matthews and others point out), but to what we may recognize as writing's fullness—even its own "body." Understood as a response to what Faulkner saw as the deadening effects on sexuality of the city and the role in the modern metropolis of an abstract, impersonal market economy, Faulkner's use of an increasingly heightened prose style moves his fiction closer to an expression of physicality and eroticism.

In order to illustrate this, I trace a move forward from one of Faulkner's earliest novels, set mainly in New Orleans and its outskirts, through other city stories and scenes in *Sanctuary* and the anomalous *Pylon*, to Faulkner's later, mature works such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Hamlet* that appear to offer an alternative to his earlier depictions of urban anomie. Closer consideration of these last works, however, will suggest that during the modern period of Faulkner's life and writing, the (Southern) countryside too acquired a quality of displacement, such that natural feelings of attraction and desire find few "natural" outlets or means of expression.

That is the bad news. The good news is that these very works furnish what we might call a saving grace for Faulknerian sexuality. And they do so by way of a "geography" that is neither urban nor rural. Rosa Coldfield's chapter in *Absalom*, like *The Hamlet's* infamous episodes involving Ike Snopes and the cow, show Faulkner pursuing a strategy of fulfillment, not through characters who seek contact with an absent paramour (for example, Rosa with Charles Bon) or even through a genuine human relationship (in the case of Ike), but through his own highly figurative, erotic use of language. In light of ongoing critical debates about the role in literary studies of form as well as beauty, we might say that these examples make a claim on being erotic *because* they are figurative. This is so especially when we view them as examples of Faulknerian writing at its most ingenuous. Sexuality may be purely imaginative (in Rosa's case) or whimsically perverse (in Ike's). But, Faulkner presents it in a style that is itself deeply, provocatively pleasurable—because of its baroque and attendant difficulties, not in spite of them—and in so doing he accomplishes one of his truest expressions of the erotic.

Sex and the City

Marjorie Levinson has written recently about the return to formalist literary approaches, considerations of the inherent pleasures of reading, and of the role in such considerations of *affect*.⁸ Levinson offers her remarks in response to a preponderance of historical and political approaches to literature that, until recently, have dominated critical discussion such as Cultural Studies and the New Historicism, both of which sought to downplay emphases on literature's beauty or form. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton labels such emphases as a sign of an ideology that equated aesthetic appreciation with capitalist systems. Eagleton makes hard claims against the aesthetic, specifically what he sees as its role securing a privileged space, mentally and economically, in which a particular class subjectivity finds occasion to identify itself. Yet at the same time, he acknowledges its more progressive potential.⁹ Where I agree most specifically with Eagleton and others like Christopher Beach is in their account of the aesthetic as a "politics of the body."¹⁰ The view here is that genuine aesthetic experience, of the sort that revels in verbal or visual or tactile sensuousness, can bring the subject back to contact with his or her material reality—in all its social or political configurations. Beach draws on the Frankfurt School critic Theodor Adorno and the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to connect a certain kind of aesthetic encounter to bodily and, hence, to political awareness and identity. For such critics, the key to such (aesthetic) experiences was their connection to noninstrumental or irrational modes of thought that avoided coopting by economic or ideological systems. Adorno is particularly useful here for what he offers about the potential resistance of modernist language to such coopting by modern economic structures, including and above all the culture industry.¹¹

Characters in *Mosquitoes* are concerned with the aesthetic; they talk about it, pronounce their sensitivity to it, and claim to be devoted to it. Yet where they fail in their several artistic pursuits, the novel itself offers a uniquely Faulknerian example of formalist (aesthetic) writing, a quality that is in part at least owed to its setting. For, in addition to introducing Faulkner to certain issues about eroticism and language, *Mosquitoes* plays a specific role in his career in terms of his depictions in it of the city. The novel offers two examples of Faulkner's vision of New Orleans, each of which illustrates one of the two poles of my analysis: the modernist-aesthetic, and the commercial.

At the start of *Mosquitoes* appear several telling descriptions of setting. These include the self-consciously aesthetic, almost surreal depictions of the New Orleans cityscape, images that, as Cleanth Brooks has suggested, show the young writer "who was already conscious of his own

real mastery of [words]."¹² Leaving Gordon's building, Talliaferro confronts a scene as ravishing and genuinely beautiful as anything the artist has produced in his studio:

The violet dusk held in soft suspension lights slow as bellstrokes, Jackson square was now a green and quiet lake in which abode lights round as jellyfish, feathering with silver mimosa and pomegranate and hibiscus beneath which lantana and cannas bled and bled. Pontalba and cathedral were cut from black paper and pasted flat on a green sky; above them taller palms were fixed in black and soundless explosions. (14)

The passage is striking, immediately, for its visual evocativeness and aural pleasure: the alliterations and assonance; the aqueous green light that seems a faint extension of New Orleans's very real connections (like those of Venice) to its maritime culture and location; the hints at the overripe, decadent atmosphere that links Faulkner's imaginary city to a fin-de-siècle European scene. Yet, unlike other passages in *Mosquitoes* that, as Brooks indicates, show Faulkner's style as more derivative—such as the novel's very first description of place, to which Brooks traces several high-literary "borrowings" by a Faulkner who is looking back rather than forward—the paragraph quoted above hints at several stylistic flourishes that Faulkner continues to use in his later fiction. The synesthesia of lights that appear, or sound, "slow as bellstrokes," the imagery of pasting and collage, the oxymoron of the palm trees' "soundless explosions"—all of these techniques appear in later Faulkner and, as here, operate to dazzlingly original effect. This is an example of what Faulkner could "do" with language; it shows already in his second novel the kind of aesthetic, if not also erotic, pleasures, as I will claim.¹³

Elsewhere in *Mosquitoes*, the city appears in a rather different light and toward rather different ends. The night before the boating trip, Gordon pauses during his meaningless wandering and lingers around the dock. Above him, we're told,

The warehouse . . . was a formal rectangle without perspective. Flat as cardboard, and projecting at faint motionless angles above it, against a lighter spaciousness and a sky not quite so imminent and weary, masts of a freighter lying against the dock. . . . Beneath it, within the somber gloom of the warehouse where men had sweated and labored, across the empty floor lately thunderous with trucks, amid the rich overripe odors of the ends of the earth—coffee and resin and tow and fruit—he walked, surrounded by ghosts, passing on. (47)

Earlier we are told of other "ghosts" that linger around Gordon and his studio: the "shades" of slaves who had once resided there (11). Through

these references to (slave) labor and to New Orleans's once-rich history of trade, Faulkner makes clear the economic base on which the city's vitality depended and that also supported its rise as a center of creative life. Particularly as mediated by the artist figure, Gordon, and the rest of the boat's retinue, *Mosquitoes* highlights the connection between New Orleans as a locus for aesthetic life and as a center of commerce.¹⁴

Although no one in *Mosquitoes* owns slaves, and few members of the boating outing seem to actually work, the novel nevertheless implies that the activity of retailing extends to realms outside of commerce—including both the community's artistic circle and their failed sexual adventures. Dawson Fairchild, we are told several times, is a successful novelist, but his most creative work seems to be opining. More importantly, his views are part of an ongoing intellectual exchange that passes for profundity and that holds the ship's male company in thrall. The book's putative protagonist, Talliaferro, especially, seems convinced that the true end of being an artist means being able to seduce women (for him, another form of exchange). Yet Talliaferro's own ambitions in either arena are pathetically unrealized. Related to this is the fact that nothing very much happens in *Mosquitoes*, least of all the aims of seduction that on one level the trip is meant to facilitate. Mosquitoes buzz about and bother everyone. The opportunities for sexual liaison and for other productive, purely pleasurable acts of artistic creation are thus everywhere thwarted by both the insects themselves and the vehicle for which they act as a metaphorical tenor: the thickened, clouded atmosphere of the city, even beyond the confines of New Orleans. This idea of the city as the site of a failed or, at best, sublimated sexuality is evident from the novel's opening sentence. "The sex instinct," Talliaferro declares (and repeats, the narrator tells us), "is quite strong in me" (9). Clearly harkening back to Eliot's Prufrock, and despite his tentative overtures to Jenny later on the boat, Talliaferro shows that he is far too timid to possess an active sex drive—let alone act on it. Like everyone else in the book, he is too interested in talking—in what passes for urbane sophistication—than in any full-blooded action, sexual or otherwise.

Despite its story's various misfirings, *Mosquitoes* is largely comic in tone; its depiction of urban sexuality mostly seemed to give Faulkner a chance to poke fun at certain contemporaries in his own extended social circle and to play with words. A slightly later novel also set in an urban environment, *Pylon* has both a different tone and wordplay from *Mosquitoes*. The importance of *Pylon* is two-fold: it is set in the city and, related to that setting, it depicts a barren, seemingly loveless coupling. The pilot Roger Shumann and Laverne may very well love each other; more than any other pairing in the book they seem to possess a genuine, if unspoken

affection. Yet their exchanges are also marked throughout by a terse friction over their winnings and troubled cash flow.¹⁵ And in a true rarity for Faulkner, a memory of their affair provides a fairly graphic love scene.

I use the term "love scene" deliberately here, and with an eye toward its familiar cinematic version. For, like the airplane race itself, the scene of Roger and Laverne's in-air lovemaking is both offered and consumed as an entertainment spectacle. The extended air meet is attended by an anonymous and, it turns out, bloodthirsty crowd. For, while the onlookers' interest in the event is based in part on their curiosity about the planes and the pilots' skill in maneuvering them, the novel's story and, in a crucial scene, the newspaper editor Hagood make clear that they are also interested in the very real danger the air race poses. Rather than encourage the kind of human-interest approach *Pylon's* nameless reporter wants to write, Hagood is utterly clear about what kind of story he thinks will interest his papers' readers and, by clear implication, the racing meet's paying viewers:

"You listen to me a minute. If one of [those pilots] takes his airplane or his parachute and murders [Laverne] and the child in front of the grandstand, then it will be news. But until they do, what I'm paying you to bring back here is not what you think about somebody out there nor what you heard . . . nor even what you saw: I expect you to come in here tomorrow night with an accurate account of everything that occurs out there tomorrow that creates any reaction excitement or irritation on any human retina."¹⁶

Hagood's emphasis on vision—the irritation "on any human retina"—is key. For it points up the way in which, in the context of *Pylon*, what determines human interest and what makes for news stories as well as popular entertainments that will sell is sensationalistic spectacle. This imperative runs through the novel, evident in the bold-faced headlines in the newspaper about the air show and its fatalities, which Faulkner reproduces typographically in his text.¹⁷

This visual scheme extends, crucially, to the erotic scene late in the novel when the narrator describes an event from Roger and Laverne's earlier life together. The flashback relates the episode when, in the midst of performing a mid-air stunt of Laverne "wing walking," she and Shumann end up having sex in his cockpit. But however tender their lovemaking may be, it turns out to be part of the air show "performance." Flying above a small Kansas town and far from New Valois, the site of the novel's events and the spectacle of the racing meet, Roger and Laverne's coupling is "viewed" not only by the reader, but by a crowd of what turns out to be overappreciative men. Following Laverne's postcoital parachute

from the plane, she lands in a field naked from the waist down and is greeted by a group of eager spectators, one of whom, in particular, seeks to turn what he takes to be the pornographic display into a more participatory venture. And in another Faulkner rarity, he uses a profanity (and a notably unrefined language) in offering to pay for his pleasure. "I'll pay you,' the man screamed [to Shumann]. 'I'll pay her! I'll pay either of you! Name it! Let me fuck her once and you can cut me if you want!'" (912).

I offer this summary not for its prurience. What is of note about this section of *Pylon* is the way that it extends qualities of the urban, New Orleans scene to the depiction of events far beyond it. That is to say: the uses to which sexuality end up being put in the book (here, Roger and Laverne's lovemaking during the air show) ultimately serve the same imperative as the novel's other example of a mass cultural "entertainment," the newspaper. As with Hagood's exhortation that the reporter supply copy that can perform visually or act "on any human retina," so the novel's graphic depiction of sexuality shows that it too can be readily coopted for a sensationalist, voyeuristic pleasure. My suggestion here is that Roger and Laverne are unwittingly complicit in a commercial system that exploits human sexuality. Though they are not performing their lovemaking for the crowd, it grows out of and is an extension of an activity that is offered specifically for spectators (the air show). Compelled by circumstances to perform the in-air stunt of walking across the airplane wing, Laverne's act of climbing into the cockpit with Shumann seems both a desperate attempt to assert some fleeting autonomy from the economic pressures she and Shumann face, as well as evidence of the erotic frisson that arises from them. In either case, and as events after their lovemaking reveal, the pleasure they find together seems connected to the more impersonal workings of commercialism. Like the urban crowd that demands risk and that the newspaper means to serve, Laverne and Roger's audience demonstrates a type of pleasure—or the longing for it—that seeks to satisfy itself violently (with Laverne's rape by the agitated, insane onlooker). Sexuality in *Pylon*, like in *Mosquitoes*, is thus marked by the influence of the city, as well as by urban, mass-cultural organs like the newspaper. Moreover, and as part of the purely pecuniary motives of the paper, that pleasure becomes coopted by forces that control and channel such examples of human sexual appetite as we see, managing and controlling them for profit, like other consumer pleasures.

In *Pylon*, as well as in the earlier *Sanctuary*, Faulkner shows that sexual debasements follow from the economic and abstract ways in which he understood human relations were experienced in the city. Such abstractions were further facilitated by Faulkner's awareness of the role played in urban experience by vision—again, and as in *Pylon*, the voyeuristic

and objectifying habits of primarily male characters that act as substitutions for genuine erotic life. Such objectifying serves well the workings of a modern, abstract money economy. At the start of the twentieth century, the German cultural critic Georg Simmel describes this process in a seminal essay from 1903, "The Metropolis and Mental Life."¹⁸ Simmel refers to the shifting visual patterns in the city such as the constant flow of traffic and trolley cars, the appearance and disappearance of faces and bodies in one's view, and the ubiquitous presence of advertising. Simmel also claims that the constant encounters with strangers on city streets and in urban transit, combined with the increasing estrangement of a market economy, causes urban dwellers to become more introverted and remote from one another—a phenomenon that would have obvious consequences for sexuality.

Alan Trachtenberg examines this development in American cities in a series of observations that resonate with Faulkner's impersonal, commercial, and thus nonsexualized city. In *The Incorporation of America*, Trachtenberg refers to the metropolis's increasing dependence on the market as well as how it came to organize visual stimulus and spectacle: "As the domestic making of goods receded [in the late nineteenth century], city dwellers became more and more enmeshed in the market, more and more dependent on buying and selling, selling their labor in order to buy their sustenance; the network of personal relations, of family, friends, neighbors, comes to count for less in the maintenance of life than the impersonal transactions and abstract structures of the marketplace."¹⁹ Elsewhere Trachtenberg claims that urban experience—of the sort we find in *Mosquitoes*, *Pylon*, and, as we will see, in *Sanctuary*—as well as new media technologies and forms of mass entertainment "began to erode direct physical experience of the world" (122)—and hence, of other people and their bodies. "Viewing and looking at representations, words, and images, city people found themselves addressed more often as passive spectators than as active participants, consumers of images and sensations produced by others" (122). This includes the viewing, not only of the city itself, but of massive urban spectacles such as spectator sports, amusement parks, and, of course, the cinema.²⁰

This perspective offers a useful frame for the connections *Sanctuary* shows between an abstracting, depersonalizing market and an increasing cultural emphasis on vision. There is no mass-cultural, city-based entertainment in *Sanctuary*, such as *Pylon*'s homologous air show and newspaper. There are, however, any number of examples in the book of characters' acts of viewing. Several moments leap to mind, such as Tommy spying on Temple through the peephole while she undresses; Popeye watching her in bed with Red at Miss Reba's—and Clarence

Snopes watching him watching through the keyhole; Horace's low-level sexual contemplation of his stepdaughter's image in her photograph. The most persistent of these examples, of course, is Popeye, a character notable for his (urban) scopic drive and attendant remoteness. For despite all his menace and quite real violence, Popeye is also an oddly passive figure. He rapes Temple with a prosthetic, and, as we learn, he does so in part because of his sexual impotence. As we also learn about Popeye early in the book, he is a thoroughly mechanical man. He appears to Horace as though he is "stamped [from] tin" and has "rubber" eyes and "doll-like hands."²¹ He is notably out of his element and fearful in the forest pathways near Lee Goodwin's, and when Popeye hears a bird singing, Horace is right when he points out that the only names of birds Popeye knows are those he would buy in a restaurant meal. Popeye is, in other words, a consumer. As a result, and like many other examples of modern, urban consumers, Popeye is decidedly alien—cut off from not only other people but from any capacity for potency or genuine human desire. Defined by his affinity with the visual, Popeye suggests a modern and urban malaise.

What is also clear in *Sanctuary*—and related to this role of looking—is the way the city operates as a marketplace for human flesh. Of particular interest to us is a brief episode in the book that exposes not only the facts of prostitution or the effects on Temple of Popeye's rape and abduction, but the singular power of abstraction around sexuality that obtains in Memphis. I have in mind the only chapter in which the characters Virgil Snopes and Fonzo Winbush appear. Two young men in the city for the first time, they find themselves staying as guests at Miss Reba's because they can't afford a regular hotel. One evening after having been led by an acquaintance to another brothel, the boys encounter their cousin, Clarence Snopes, back at Miss Reba's. When they complain about the prices of the prostitutes where they've been, Clarence leads them to another section of the city—a "negro" district, where they look into another building with "red shades in the lighted windows" (316). "Through an open door," the narrator tells us, the boys and Clarence "saw a room filled with coffee-colored women in bright dresses, with ornate hair and golden smiles."

"Them's niggers," Virgil said.

"Course they're niggers," Clarence said. "But see this?" he waved a bank-note in his cousin's face. "This stuff is color-blind." (316)

In the context of an essay about the dulling of affect in the city, Clarence's comment makes a certain kind of historical sense. In the modern

American city (as in the European modernity that Simmel describes) individuals become indifferent to qualitative differences; they judge and consider products only on the basis of cost. This scene is central in *Sanctuary*, for in it we find a supremely shorthand version of the enormously abstracting power of money. In a market economy, where everything, including and perhaps especially human relations, is mediated through an impersonal cash nexus, qualitative distinctions melt away into a color-blind exchange of capital for goods. The fact that these "commodities" are also human beings is entirely to the point. We find a similar case of African American prostitutes in *Absalom, Absalom!*, when Charles Bon reveals to Henry "a row of faces like a bazaar of flowers—the supreme apotheosis of chattelry."²² There, however, the courtesans are part of a nineteenth-century New Orleans economy, draped in the rhetoric of Charles Bon's ideas about nobleness and honor. Here in *Sanctuary*, their condition reveals much more about the circumstances of the modern city—and not only for the women who sell their sexual labor. As Popeye's mechanical, voyeuristic relations with Temple make clear, *Sanctuary's* color-blind world operates according to an imperative in which sexuality becomes reduced to a cash value. Urban sexuality in *Sanctuary's* Memphis—as it had been in *Pylon's* New Valois or in the New Orleans environs in *Mosquitoes*—is part of a market system. Faulkner's city novels all reveal how in modernity, individual sensibility became hollowly indifferent to qualitative, substantive variations, judging and considering "products" only on the basis of quantitative measures like cost.

"Rural" Sexuality

It would seem that there would be many occasions in Faulkner to find events and human relations with emotional, economic, or interpersonal bases that are both rural and real. Indeed, two of Faulkner's most well-known and canonical works, *Absalom, Absalom!* and the first Snopes novel, *The Hamlet*, seem a deliberate return on his part to the Yoknapatawpha countryside. Following the excursions into urban sexuality respectively, first in *Pylon* (1935) and then in the "Wild Palms" section of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939), and written after the city novels I have been discussing, both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Hamlet* go back to earlier periods in the county's history, when its inhabitants might have been less affected by urban commercialism, market forces, or a compromised, abstract-impersonal sexuality. Although urban sexuality in Faulkner can be bleak, there is hope for erotic life in his fiction outside of the metropolis. Such eroticism, though, in fact obtains in a quite different

"geography," having contact with neither the city nor with what, we learn, is an increasingly urbanized countryside.

It is tempting to see Faulkner's portrayal of Frenchman's Bend in *The Hamlet* as an admittedly nostalgic return (well after novels like *Pylon*, *Sanctuary*, or *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*) to a way of life that relied on exchanges of goods, not cash; to a community defined by close social and family connections; and to a world in which human relations and indeed physical as well as emotional experiences were genuine. Yet as the novel shows in several ways, such is not the case. Or it is the case—but the terms of these connections and physical identity have been meaningfully qualified. As events from *The Hamlet* make clear and in the period its events depict, the urban and mercantile world has already begun to infiltrate supposedly remote regions like Frenchman's Bend. Flem Snopes's ascension to a position of prominence, above all, reveals the extent to which the countryside is not immune from modern, abstract forms of economic domination and exchange.

Several critics have referred to this split, including Richard Moreland, who perhaps as much as any critic has shown the ways in which the economy and culture of Frenchman's Bend had already become urbanized before the novel opens.²³ One clear example of this development appears early in the chapter "The Long Summer" when the narrator describes Mink's reversed days and nights after he's hidden Houston's body. Watching the coming of night, Mink "would sit there for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes longer, as the holder of the annual commuter's ticket sits on his accustomed bench and continues to read his paper after the train has already whistled for the stop."²⁴ There is no train near Mink's hideout—commuter rail or otherwise. Yet as Faulkner's simile reveals, the urban (or suburban) life of commuters and white-collar labor exists, if only as a trace,²⁵ in Yoknapatawpha.

Another example from *The Hamlet* brings us back to the city and visual pleasure, as well as to the associations between such pleasure, sexuality, and commodification. Oddly, this story about a small Southern village includes a scenario involving Ike Snopes at Mrs. Littlejohn's stall that resembles the kind of urban, mass-cultural spectacle that is suggested in Faulkner's city novels. I will turn to Ike's encounters with Houston's cow in the river bottom shortly. For they will provide a welcome—indeed, necessary—rejoinder to Faulkner's emphasis on the isolating lack of eroticism and intimacy in the city. For now, I would like to examine how the "hamlet" of Frenchman's Bend includes a space that operates quite like an urban cinema. The scene at Mrs. Littlejohn's stall includes paying viewers, "customers" whom Lump charges a price of admission for their acts of viewing Ike there with the cow. As Ratliff asks when he finds the

men looking through the pried-off plank in the stable wall, "Does he [Lump] . . . make you pay again each time, or is it a general club ticket good for every performance?" (913). Although the immediate context of the story here is provincial and rural, but like the visual spectacle(s) in *Pylon* or the voyeurism in *Sanctuary*, the economic structure and management of viewing at the stall resembles the urban phenomenon of passive spectating at a peepshow.

With these hints of a connection between the city and rural space or of a burgeoning market economy, *The Hamlet* includes a commensurate threat to human intimacy. Flem Snopes is obviously a cold, indifferent man; his (urban) abstractness, like Popeye's in *Sanctuary*, also connects to his sexual impotence, which we learn about in the later Snopes novel *The Town*. Faulkner underscores this fact with irony when he has Flem marry Will Varner's daughter Eula, a character whose overwhelming sexual vitality appears irresistible to nearly every man she encounters. As readers have long recognized, Flem and Snopesism suggest Southern history's inexorable move to an impersonal business model for human agency and human relations. We will remember Flem's calculating mind, his machine-made shirts, and his abstract fixation on the bottom line. In the realm of a debased, commercialized sexuality and a reminder of events in Memphis in *Sanctuary*, we should also recall the young African American girl lying on the floor behind the counter asking Flem what he asks for a can of sardines (882).

Faulkner's Textualized Erotic

If we find in *The Hamlet* a rapidly changing rural scene and a decline in human relations typified by the metropolis, Faulkner's modernism nevertheless offers the possibility of genuine and physical love. Yet, it does so indirectly and apart from a particular location or geography: in his language. At the risk of asking too much interpretive sway from perhaps too little text, I move in the last section of my discussion to two highly suggestive examples of what I mean by Faulkner's eroticized style, what I call his poetics of Eros.

To trace this elusive erotic life, we need to turn to *Absalom, Absalom!* and to its infamous spinster, Rosa Coldfield. It may seem unlikely to consider Rosa sexually. By "consider," however, I mean to recognize the ways in which her language, as much as or more than any prose Faulkner wrote, conveys a quality of embodied fullness, a nearly physical presence that is the foil to the more fully racinated, abstract, and disembodied (and thus, asexual) perspective of so many Faulkner characters—particularly

male characters. This includes overly cerebral types such as Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson, Gail Hightower, or the reporter in *Pylon*. Paradoxically, sexuality in Rosa's chapter has something to do with her lonely story, her memory of what she calls her "barren youth" (119). Despite denying her claim to "leaf" or bloom and thus to a commensurate eroticism, what Rosa refers to as the "warped bitter pale and crimped half-fledging intimidate of any claim to green which might have drawn to it the tender mayfly childhood sweetheart games or given pause to the male predacious wasps and bees of later lust" (119), Rosa is, indeed, a sexual being—as the imagery in this passage suggests. And that imagery corresponds with the way that Rosa's section operates generally. What emerges in Rosa's chapter is not merely her memory of a libidinally charged teenage summer. What is noteworthy, in this argument, is the dense, bodily, rhapsodic prose that Faulkner fashions in depicting that memory verbally. As Rosa tells us, "There is no such thing as memory, the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for" (118). True to that assertion, Faulkner shows us a language with Rosa that is itself "groping."²⁶

Readers too have to "grop" with Rosa's *langue*, her language or her tongue. We have, that is, to try to hold it firm, to engage with its materiality, its body or its "thingness." The abstruse, dense prose of Rosa's chapter, far from being too abstract or conceptual for many readers, I suggest, is on the contrary too *physical*. Consider Rosa's characterization of herself as "all polymath love's androgynous advocate" (121) or her assertion (again describing herself), "who shall say what gnarled forgotten root might not bloom yet with some globed concentrate more globed and concentrate and heady-perfect because the neglected root was planted warped and lay not dead but merely slept forgot?" (119). Surely the length of the clause here, the fact that Faulkner stretches syntax to such a degree, makes demands on the reader's attention, our mental impressions of the sentence's metonymic, forward-moving motion. Such passages demand that we encounter them physically, as objects, before or perhaps even apart from their semantic meanings. Such a verbal physicality is helped by the fact that Rosa is so mightily engaged in her own bodily sensory memory of her "summer of wistaria," a "pervading everywhere of wistara" that blended with and was animated by the "summer of a virgin's itching discontent" (119–20). Such longing climaxes for Rosa (again, paradoxically) when she was fourteen, "four years younger than Judith, [and] four years later than Judith's moment which only virgins know: when the entire delicate spirit's bent is one anonymous climaxless epicine and unravished nuptial" (120). What other nonravishment has ever been described so ravishingly? Even passages in Rosa's chapter that are not "about" the body rhetorically or semantically, such as this,

are of the body, in the manner that metered verse acts on the reader bodily. Referring to an overheard conversation between Bon and Judith in the Sutpen garden during one of his visits, Rosa asks in a prose that mimics Elizabethan rhythms, and one we might even scan thus, "*What suspiration of the twinning souls[/] have the murmurous myriad ears [/] of this secluded vine or shrub listened to?[/] what vow, what promise, this heavy rose's[/] dissolution, crowned[. . .]?*" (122). Rendered by Faulkner as prose, such phrases nevertheless have the cadence of verse, the accented-syllabic patterns of a scheme like pentameter, as well as aural properties such as consonance that allow Rosa's voice to register for readers as something felt or experienced bodily.²⁷

These examples from Rosa are striking. But the most unequivocally lush language about love that Faulkner wrote appears in a later novel and in a different register. That the love in *The Hamlet* is that of an "idiot" for a cow is both to the point and completely immaterial. It does not matter—in a "normative" sense—that Ike's love is outside the realm of ordinary sexual behavior. The fact that such language attends the relationship between a human being and an animal is important, however, to the Utopian dimension of Faulkner's treatment of sexuality—namely, that the occasions in which we find the highest state of erotic life in his corpus are those that operate in the realm of the potential.

Returning to *The Hamlet*, we may note that as Faulkner narrates the beginning of Ike's sensual encounter, he sets it off from the scene we have noted of the men watching Ike in Mrs. Littlejohn's stall. And as he does at other points in his work, Faulkner offsets two related but quite different perspectives on one event: the fact of Ike and the cow's encounter. Significantly, he does so through the use of decidedly different prose. The urban-seeming scenario of Lump charging "admission" to the stall spectacle is written in the matter-of-fact voice with which the narrator opens *The Hamlet* and relates its events generally. The language describing the scenes of Ike anticipating his object of desire in the creek in the spring morning could not be more stylized and hence, more different.

Then he would hear her, coming down the creekside in the mist. It would not be after one hour, two hours, three; the dawn would be empty, the moment and she would not be, then he would hear her and he would lie drenched in the wet grass, serene and one and invisible in joy, listening to her approach. He would smell her; the whole mist reeked with her; the same malleate hands of mist which drew along his prone drenched flanks palped her pearled barrel too and shaped them both somewhere in immediate time, already married. He would not move. He would lie amid the waking instant of earth's teeming life, the motionless fronds of water-heavy grasses stopping into the mist before his

face in black, fixed curves, along each parabola of which the marching drops held in minute magnification the dawn's rosy miniatures, smelling and even tasting the rich, slow, warm barren-reek milk-reek, the flowing immemorial female, hearing the slow planting and the plopping suck of each deliberate cloven mud-spreading hoof, invisible still in the mist loud with its hymenal choristers. (883)

This is striking language—what in various contexts others have called “baroque” or “an exalted lyrical strain”²⁸ and which, I submit, is among the most rhapsodic prose Faulkner ever wrote.²⁹ Interestingly, this passage also emphasizes an engagement on Ike's part with his environment that privileges sensory experiences other than vision—that part of the sensorium that in modernity is so fully associated with the city.³⁰ I suggest that Faulkner indulges his writing so completely in this section of *The Hamlet* because, however earnestly he does so, Faulkner describes a relationship that is not exactly “real.” As we have seen through several examples, human connections in Faulkner's world are hard. Whether this was due to some of Faulkner's own personal frustrations in life, his sense of the impossibility of actually possessing (or describing) the perfect woman, or, as I have been suggesting, the difficulties of human contact in an increasingly urban and abstract world, Faulkner finds his truest and most lovingly described love affair in his fiction between not a man and a woman (nor between two men or two women, as other examples in his life and fiction allow), or even between two human beings.³¹ It is the fact of “displacement,” then, away from the object of affection or even a fully attainable human love, but also from the increasingly urbanized spaces of twentieth-century America, that language affords—especially such refined language as Faulkner here fashions.

I say that what Ike pursues is not a real (human) relationship. And we would do well to remember that, for all its fulsome poeticizing, this section of *The Hamlet* never directly depicts Ike's coupling. It does, however, clearly intimate ecstasy. During this final encounter, Ike has a heady, almost out-of-body experience. Having left the barn and finding himself back at the spring, remembering again his time with the cow, Ike feels “the well of days, the still and insatiable aperture of earth. It holds in tranquil paradox of suspended precipitation dawn, noon, and sunset; yesterday, today, and tomorrow—star-spawn and hieroglyph, the fierce white dying rose, then gradual and invincible speeding up to and into slack-flood's coronal or nympholept noon” (903). Penetrating the hieroglyphics of Faulkner's prose, we go to the heart, or climax of this section of the novel: Ike's imaginative conflating of all time, past and present, in one rapturous moment.

Another way to put this would be that with Ike, as with Rosa Coldfield, Faulkner writes in ways that we cannot quite understand. The length of the sentences, the obscurity of the diction—these qualities make it difficult to clearly “see” the events that the narrator describes in *The Hamlet* or to follow the events of Rosa’s chapter. Reading these passages, we are constantly aware of the material presence of the words in them as well as their semantic meanings. But such challenges to readers lead them somewhere productive: away from the scene(s) depicted and, by a circuitous route, back to both the textual and corporeal body. The obscurity of Rosa’s chapter or sections of *The Hamlet*, their difficulty, in this view, are their force. They also fashion their own unique pleasure. Gesturing toward a Utopic, not-quite-realizable but nevertheless concrete encounter with the textual and the bodily real, these moments accomplish something crucial, offering a loving, even eroticized riposte to the flattened, affectless, “color blind” abstractions of Faulkner’s earlier descriptions of sexuality. Life in Faulkner’s city, particularly erotic life, was never as fully embodied as are Faulkner’s later, somewhat idealized—but simultaneously, compellingly corporealized—descriptions of Ike’s interlude and Rosa’s longings.³²

It is a material, formalist aspect of words that Faulkner shows both early and later in his career to such positive effects, as well as powerful affect. Faulkner finds in *The Hamlet* and *Absalom* a way of offering characters (and readers) something that does not seem available either in the city or, except in rare cases, the modernizing Southern countryside. After a series of questioning looks at several environments, Faulkner does find a space for eroticism. He finds it in characters who, although they appear in novels written after his early city fiction, live in a time period that antedates a full-blown urban modernity. Yet as we have seen, the novels in which they appear also show some connection to modern phenomena such as the metropolis and the market. In response Faulkner moves his search for a splendid language of eros away from both the city and, to a degree, from the country. Eroticism and desire exist in Faulkner. Yet they do so in what, as a modernist, Faulkner may have felt was one of the only spaces free from the sway of commercial life available to him—the pure, “unretailed” space of his writing. More and more as he wrote, and the further he went from the city as a direct subject, Faulkner wrote in a manner that was “refined.” That he most often did so to describe feelings of love is not simply fortuitous. Doing so allowed him to bring together his own love of language and its materiality as well as its aesthetic possibilities, its sensual beauty. Returning to the body and to sensuality in *Absalom* and *The Hamlet*, Faulkner also returns to the bodily quality of writing. As we have seen, the prose of *Absalom*, *Absalom!* and *The*

Hamlet is written in such a way that we have to grapple (or grope) with it. Yet that process allows readers to have an experience that is itself more than simply imaginative and that partakes of the bodily and the physical. In the context of a modernity that made greater and greater demands of abstraction, calculation, and reason, such a return to the body and the senses can make of reading a more powerful, even intimate occasion than many were able to find in their lives and in the period of Faulkner's career.

Faulkner's engagement with the erotic and with writing—and with the erotic *through* writing—follows a long line forward from *Mosquitoes*. This line traces the development of Yoknapatawpha and of Faulkner's (ostensible) move away from the city generally as well as from the baroque scene of New Orleans and the phony posturing of a group of sophisticated aesthetes. Such a group and such a scene, however, gave Faulkner ways to explore what it meant to be a writer and to approach certain experiences with words. And some of the lessons he learned with that group served him well as he returned to his "native postage stamp" and wrote about characters and environments with which he was more intimate and genuinely familiar. With Ike Snopes and Rosa Coldfield we are a long way, in one sense, from the scene of two girls kissing on a boat outside New Orleans. Yet in another regard, in the sense of how we kiss (or use our *langue*), our "playfulness," refinement, elegance, or style, as well as how we write or consider writing (in other words, how we read), we may not be so distant, after all.

NOTES

1. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel Jr. (New York: Vintage, 1991), 32.
2. This passage and other deletions from *Mosquitoes* appear in Minrose C. Gwin's work of textual criticism, "Mosquitoes' Missing Bite: The Four Deletions," *Faulkner Journal* 9:1&2 (Fall 1993/Spring 1994), 31–41.
3. Gwin, 32.
4. Of course the same is true of English, in which "tongue" also connotes language or a way of speaking. Yet as the scene in question points up, the French apparently know something about tongues and kissing as well as about language, as a good deal of poststructuralist theory suggests (and to which my discussion attends).
5. William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (New York: Liveright, 1997), 9. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
6. John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 15.
7. William Faulkner, "An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*," in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed., 1994), 226, cited in Matthews 18.

8. Marjorie Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?," *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007): 558–69.

9. Eagleton sees the aesthetic as a philosophical category that is "radically double-edged." On the one hand, it encourages "a mode of being which [especially after Kant] is entirely self-regulating and [which thus] . . . provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operations," *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 9. On the other hand, Eagleton avers, the aesthetic offers "a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought. It signifies a creative turn to the sensuous body" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 9). It is this second view that I see Faulkner enable with his own particularly aestheticized prose.

10. Christopher Beach, "Recuperating the Aesthetic: Contemporary Approaches and the Case of Adorno," in *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies*, ed. James Soderholm (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 100.

11. See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 24, 6, and "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1988), *passim*. I will return to the deleterious effects on sexuality of a managed, consumer culture shortly, as well as to Faulkner's efforts to critique and resist them.

12. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 132.

13. The passage appears on the novel's second page; its evocations of Eliot and British aestheticism are apparent: "Outside the window New Orleans, the vieux carré, brooded in a faintly tarnished languor like an ageing yet still beautiful courtesan in a smokefilled room, avid yet weary of ardent ways. Above the city summer was hushed warmly into the bowled weary passion of the sky. Spring and the cruellest [sic] months were gone, the cruel months" (10), cited in Brooks 132.

14. A similar connection exists between retail activity and artistic life in *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*. In *Mosquitoes* Tallifero works in the women's section of a department store, a profession that supports him in his support (in turn) of the artistic community in New Orleans; in "The Wild Palms" Charlotte Rittenmeyer dresses department store windows in Chicago so as to be able to pursue her work sculpting erotically charged (if also perverse) figurines. See Taylor Hagood, *Faulkner's Imperialism: Space, Place, and the Materiality of Myth* (Louisiana State University Press, 2008) for an account of the particular economic history of New Orleans and its role in *Mosquitoes*.

15. John T. Matthews traces the elaborate and, indeed, desperate negotiations over income in the novel in "The Autograph of Violence in Faulkner's *Pylon*," in *Southern Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Jefferson Humphries (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990). Interestingly, although Matthews pursues a Bakhtinian reading of the book, emphasizing the importance of class antagonism, wage earning, and *Pylon's* suggestions of revolutionary energy, he does not attend to the related (Bakhtinian) matter of bodies and sexuality that the novel also introduces.

16. William Faulkner, *Pylon*, in *Novels 1930–1935* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 808. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

17. Critics have suggested that the newspaper passages in *Pylon* show Faulkner emulating the direct visual as well as the semantic impact that the large-block lettering of the headlines make. See Karl Zender, *The Crossing of the Ways: William Faulkner, the South, and the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 51.

18. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press 1964).

19. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 121. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

20. This is a similar line of argument about the modern metropolis as we find in several European theorists of modernity, such as Guy Debord, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer, all of whom drew on Simmel. See Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994); Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) and *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997); and Kracauer, "On Photography," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947).

21. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, in *Novels 1930–1935* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 181, 182. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

22. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, in *Novels 1936–1940* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 92–93. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

23. Richard Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

24. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, in *Novels 1936–1940* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 944. Subsequent references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

25. "The trace is not only the disappearance of origin. . . . [W]ithin the discourse that we sustain . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace" (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press], 61).

26. We might recall the etymological root of "grope" from the Old English, now obsolete, which was to "grasp" or to "touch," or its connotations of sexual play (Oxford English Dictionary, online version). And while clinically speaking the tongue is an organ, it seems apt to consider it (in light of the implications of Rosa's statement here) as another of those muscles that grope (or reach or grasp) at memory or, as in Rosa's own example, at human connection.

27. See Elizabeth Harris Sagaser, "Flirting with Eternity: Teaching Form and Meter in a Renaissance Poetry Course," in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark Rasmussen (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 185–206, for an account of the way that verse or rhythmic writing acts on readers corporally.

28. Richard Grey, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 218. Andrea Diminio, "Why Did the Snopeses Name their Son 'Wallstreet Panic'? Depression Humor in Faulkner's *The Hamlet*," in *William Faulkner: Six Decades of Criticism*, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 344.

29. Many critics have written about Faulkner's stylistic intensity, including Arnold Weinstein, who attributes this superlative to Rosa (*Vision and Response in Modern Fiction* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974], 140).

30. I have written elsewhere about the fact that, in his fiction after 1939, Faulkner moves away from an emphasis on vision and, as this scene with Ike illustrates, toward an effort to bring tactile, olfactory perceptions to the world of his characters and, by extension, his contemporary readers. See Peter Lurie, *Vision's Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 174.

31. John Irwin has described how, over his career, Faulkner maintained a creative energy in response to a series of failed relationships. See "Not the Having but the Wanting: Faulkner's Lost Loves," in *Faulkner at 100, Retrospect and Prospect: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 1997, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 154-64. For Faulkner's remarks about describing the "ideal woman," see *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, ed. James B. Merriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), 127.

32. In a very different interpretive context from mine, Tony Fabijancic points to moments in Faulkner in which his language restores his poor white farmers to a kind of perceptual life after their senses as well as their hope have been blunted ("Reification, Derivation, Subjectivity: Towards a Marxist Reading of William Faulkner's Poor-White Topography" (*Faulkner Journal* 10:1 [Fall 1994])). Fabijancic offers examples such as Darl Bundren's lyrical utterances in *As I Lay Dying*, poetic flights that appear despite his family's difficulties both economically on their farm and more generally on their journey to bury Addie. In a gesture that relates to my discussion above, Fabijancic refers to Fredric Jameson's account of writing like Faulkner's and examples from visual art, works whose effects Jameson says create a "semiautonomous space" and "an act of compensation which ends up producing a whole new Utopian realm of the senses" (Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1991], 7, cited in Fabijancic 90).