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Peter Lurie
University of Richmond, plurie@richmond.edu

SCREENING READERLY PLEASURES: MODERNISM, MELODRAMA AND MASS MARKETS IN *IF I FORGET THEE, JERUSALEM*

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The opening chapter of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* includes a reference to the pre-fabricated tastes of the provincial doctor and his wife that introduces one of the novel's principal concerns. Describing the wife's gumbo, the narrator points to her and her husband's dislike of fresh fish. "And when he (the doctor) came home at noon she had the gumbo made, an enormous quantity of it... to be warmed and rewarmed and then rewarmed until consumed by two people who did not even like it, who born and bred in sight of the sea had for taste in fish a predilection for the tuna, the salmon, the sardines bought in cans, immolated and embalmed three thousand miles away in the oil of machinery and commerce" (499-500). Although a passing reference, this mention at the novel's outset of industry and commerce, of the large-scale production of "consumable" goods at a distant (coastal) location, suggests a key point of reference for the narrative that follows. What the doctor and his wife epitomize for Faulkner is a kind of consumer and a kind of taste. Pre-fabricated, mass-produced consumer items, distributed as part of a centralized, national economy are for these characters preferable to home-spun, freshly cooked recipes with a local or regional flavor.

Such is the case, this novel will assert, for many of its readers. Although Faulkner had already, with his earlier fiction, established himself as a practitioner of a rarefied, regional modernism, in *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* he addresses the reading tastes and pleasures of the commercial market. Commenting as he does on the doctor and his wife's tastes in the novel's opening, Faulkner reveals his disdain for people who prefer the culture industry's generic products to something more personal or idiosyncratic. Yet as his potential audience, those people or their tastes were of interest to Faulkner in 1939, the year the novel appeared. Following extended periods working in Hollywood, as well as efforts in his magazine short fiction to satisfy the insatiable market for what he called "trash," Faulkner was in a position and a mood to examine critically the standard plots and subjects of mass culture. Taking these on in "Old Man" but, especially, in the "Wild Palms" section of the novel, Faulkner shows readers their own "canned" tastes for certain forms of narrative. [1] The strategies of representation in "The Wild Palms" and its story suggest an immensely popular and influential genre: the domestic tragedy and the melodrama. As wayward lovers on the run from the sterile confines of marriage, Charlotte and Wilbourne epitomize a classically melodramatic trope. And with the section's ending, Faulkner extends and sharpens his critique of popular cultural materials. In the use of the closed-cell setting at the end of "The Wild Palms," Faulkner suggests the deep affinity between structures of feeling commonly produced by popular culture, and in particular by one of its sub-genres: pomography. Against these strategies, and reflecting critically on them, the "Old Man" section also invokes a cinematic model. But it does so through an abstract and modernist use of language that subverts the "The Wild Palms" romance of lovers on the run.

In the second section of "Old Man," we encounter the River for the first time. A stylistic oddity of the novel is that in this section, Faulkner presents the River in a series of descriptions that function ostensibly to

set the scene for the flood, but which in fact do little to provide a realistic account of setting. At the outset of the novel, that is, Faulkner uses a descriptive strategy that isn't really descriptive but rather one that is unreal or abstract.[2] One of the distinctive features of the landscape and the River in "Old Man" is, paradoxically, its featurelessness. Rather than a rich, variegated vista, what this portion of the novel offers is a flat, monochromatic surface, evident in Faulkner's first depictions of it: "[The convicts] now looked at a single perfectly flat and motionless steel-colored sheet... It was perfectly motionless, perfectly flat. It looked not innocent, but bland. It looked almost demure. It looked as if you could walk on it. It looked so still that they did not realize it possessed motion until they came to the first bridge" (536). In this account, we can hear the insistence on the act of looking and the implication of a detached and passive experience of vision, an experience that I suggest determines both the convict's and the reader's experience of the flood. Later the tall convict "looked at the rigid steel-colored surface not broken into waves but merely slightly undulant" (544). In addition to invoking the activity of looking, the very first description of the River's appearance stresses its flat, still, and – importantly – reflexive qualities: "[N]ow they saw that the pit on either side of the road had vanished and instead there lay a flat still sheet of brown water which... raveled out into long motionless shreds in the bottom of the plow furrows... gleaming faintly in the gray light" (536). This "gleaming," gray or colorless sheet off of which the day's weak light reflects also provides an object for the convict's act of reflection, not a marker of location or orientation. That the River provides the occasion for reflection is clear when, upon seeing it for the first time, the convict finds himself musing on his own appearance. Seeing the faint line of the other levee, he realizes "*That's what we look like from there. That's what I am standing on looks like from there*" (544). Prodded out of his reverie by the guard, the convict is forced to leave off this moment of specular, reflexive identity forming.[3]

Readers too, like the convict, are thrown back on themselves as they confront this static, shapeless surface. For what they "see" in such descriptions is not an illusory, realistic space of depth or an imaginary setting, but a singular flat monolith possessed of a gray-colored, reflective sheen. Treating the River this way in turn reflects on the methods and content of the novel, including those of "The Wild Palms," as well as other examples from outside it of popular narrative such as pulp fiction, film, and melodrama. *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* performs a critique of those popular models that Faulkner incorporates into his text, the flood, as we shall see, is one specific means of doing so.[4] Presenting readers with a reflexive, unbroken expanse, the descriptions of the River subvert a common aspect of reading experience. Performing figuratively, even abstractly, rather than offering an element of setting or description, the River takes on a massy, material, and inert quality that foregrounds the language used to describe it and less the object of description. In its resemblance to a mirror, the River shows readers themselves reading, a figure which breaks the process of identification and empathy. Being "blocked," as it were, from imaginatively entering the narrative space of these sections, the reader is then not absorbed into the story or into an identification with character.[5]

In our introduction to the convict, when we learn the impact of his overidentifying with the characters in adventure stories, we are given an object lesson in the dangers Faulkner associates with a naïve or too direct involvement with characters in fiction. In "Old Man," then, Faulkner avoids the fault that the convict attributes to the dime-novel writers. For the convict blames not himself but those "whom he believed had led him into his present predicament through their own ignorance and gullibility regarding the medium in which they dealt and took money for, in accepting information on which they had placed the stamp of verisimilitude and authenticity" (509). Unlike the writers of dime novels, then, Faulkner's practice with "Old Man" denies strategies of "verisimilitude and authenticity."

Faulkner's treatment of the flood scene includes other indications that, as a narrative space, it operates differently from realist fiction – as well as from other sections of the novel, particularly the realist practice of "The Wild Palms." Passing into the area of the flood

in the second section of "Old Man," the convicts enter a space that is less a recognizable landscape or location than a uniquely surreal, imaginary realm. From the time the convicts, riding the truck, leave the marker of their trail back to the penitentiary and what they know of reality, they enter a space denoted as unreal. Making their way into the area of the flood, the convicts cross out of the mapped and plotted geography of their rural setting and into the unplotted, formless topography of dream: "They crossed another bridge – two delicate and paradoxical iron railings slanting out of the water, travelling parallel to it for a distance, then slanting down into it again with an outrageous quality almost significant yet apparently meaningless like something in a dream not quite nightmare. The truck crawled on" (538). Entering into the dream-like, watery space of the flood, the novel foregrounds its interest in evoking for readers a narrative system and visionary space that functions as oneiric, hallucinatory, or unreal.

At this point Faulkner's other figure for the River may have become clear. The other model for experiencing narrative that interested Faulkner in this novel was the film, in particular the silent cinema. In addition to resembling a mirror (or to performing like one), the descriptions of the flood recall the dream-space of the cinema and the movie screen – another flat, two-dimensional surface Faulkner had in mind in the period he wrote this novel and which, he understood well, encouraged audiences' collective acts of dreaming.[6] There are a number of instances in the "Old Man" section that hint at this awareness of film. One of these is an apparent reference to cultural representations of the Old South. In the middle of the second chapter of "Old Man," Faulkner's convicts witness a plantation burning. Seen from the moving train that takes the inmates to the levee in the midst of the flood, the image of the flaming plantation house appears as mirage-like and surreal:

> Two hours later in the twilight they saw through the streaming windows a burning plantation house. Juxtaposed to nowhere and neighbored by nothing it stood, a clear steady pyre-like flame rigidly fleeing its own reflection, burning in the dusk above the watery desolation with a quality paradoxical, outrageous, and bizarre. (542)

What are we to make of this substanceless image and obvious anachronism in the middle of Faulkner's novel? Clearly Faulkner means to evoke an image of the Southern past – but he does so in order to render its (re)disappearance (the flame "fleeing its own reflection"). For although plantation houses remained in Mississippi in the twenties and thirties, they did not function in the region's social and economic life then as they had historically. Where and how they existed more predominantly, however, was in representations of Old South living, particularly in that supremely visual medium, the Hollywood cinema. In the same year in which the novel was published, David O. Selznick's International Pictures offered another spectacular and sustained image of burning plantation – "Twelves Oaks," in the film version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. Years earlier, the image of Atlanta burning had seared itself into the collective unconscious in D.W Griffith's immensely popular *Birth of a Nation*. Faulkner here refers to the act of evoking the plantation – evoking it, like the films, to raze it, burning in the eye and in the public imagination.

Later in "Old Man," happening on the pregnant woman in the tree whom he's been sent to retrieve, the convict reveals a habit of thought produced, Faulkner makes clear, through his film viewing, and in particular from the kind of romanticizing practiced by Hollywood.[7] Seeing the pregnant woman lower herself into the skiff, the convict is shocked at how much his real charge is at variance with a popular-cultural or Hollywood version of the female in distress. "[A]nd now he watched her move, gather herself heavily and carefully to descend... and who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragoned keep, when he and his companion embarked in the skiff" (596). In addition to furnishing a specific reference to popular culture and to film, this mention of Garbo indicates the convict's mental operation of projecting himself into an imaginary or fantasized role. In a signal passage that occurs later in this section, this act of dreaming or of

projecting effected by the River (and the screen) extends from the convict to his listeners in the prison barracks and, possibly, to the novel's readers. As the convict relates the sequence of being shot at by the National Guardsmen when he attempted to surrender, he affects his listeners in a singularly captivating way.

> And now when he told this, despite the fury of element which climaxed it, it (the telling) became quite simple... as though he had passed from the machine-gun's barrage into a bourne beyond any more amazement: so that the subsequent part of his narrative seemed to reach his listeners from beyond a sheet of slightly milky though still transparent glass, as something not heard but seen – a series of shadows, edgeless, yet distinct, and smoothly flowing, logical and unfrantic and making no sound. (613)

The description of the convict's act of telling his story in the prison barracks specifically evokes the apparatus of cinema and its projective surface, the screen. The "bourne" from beyond which the convict tells his story implies a remote, shadowy realm or dreamy space. And the images depicted in this visual "telling" strikingly resemble figures from film – "a series of shadows, edgeless" that are fluid and moving, "yet distinct," in that they depict realistically the human form. This, in other words, is Faulkner's overt interest in the terms and manner of the convict's narrative: its roots in and similarity to the experience of film viewing.

We have seen the River's suggestion of a mirror and of the screen in the opening sections of "Old Man," and the role the operation of reflection plays in it. "Old Man" also, however, reflects on the novel's other section, "The Wild Palms." One of the clearest and most important differences between the novel's two sections, and one which leads to a consideration of their relationship, is the general use in "The Wild Palms" of conventional novelistic method. Like other popular genres, the romance story of Harry and Charlotte relies on readerly empathy and identification; such identification, as we know, is predicated on realism. Unlike "Old Man," "The Wild Palms" presents its story more or less conventionally. The section has its descriptive flourishes, such as the descent into the Utah mine, or its flights of metaphysical speculation, such as Wilbourne's monologue to McCord at the train station. Yet overall it presents its characters and their story straightforwardly, with realist accounts of setting, character, and dialogue. And unlike the dense, material, and somewhat static prose of "Old Man," the "The Wild Palms" section reads as more of a narrative. The story of Harry and Charlotte, in other words, *moves* – a quality accentuated by its characters' preoccupation with travel.[8]

This escapist element of "The Wild Palms" points up a paradox about the section. The "Wild Palms" narrative, for all its critical awareness of the cultural market (including Charlotte's selling her "esoteric" sculptures and Wilbourne's pulp pornography), offers a generic, commercial version of narrative. The couple's adultery and flight from conventionality, though performed to escape what they perceive as bourgeois convention and predictability,[9] is itself a hallmark of popular narrative – from its roots in the 17th and 18th century, through the Hollywood cinema of today; it is a melodrama, and a scandalous, sensational one at that. As the story of a "fallen" woman who leaves a bourgeois marriage and her children to pursue passion, only to die a painful and graphically depicted death. "The Wild Palms" takes up the classically melodramatic plot of tragic, misguided love. In its reflexive, self-critical structure, it also shows readers their own experience of cultural consumption and their expectations, within that experience, for a certain kind of narrative pleasure.

One of the clearest ways the novel does this is through the character of Harry. Several sections of the novel demonstrate Wilbourne's tastes, primarily for the melodramatic story in which he himself takes part. In the scene in Audubon Park in New Orleans in which Harry watches the scene of Charlotte and her husband in a kind of mental cinema, he demonstrates a decidedly melodramatic imagination. This passage appears after Harry and Charlotte have left New Orleans and Charlotte has become pregnant. She's returned to her husband, ostensibly, to ask him not to pursue her and

Wilbourne, should something in her health go wrong. What we get from Wilbourne is something different.

> And now, sitting on his bench... he watched against his eyelids the cab... stopping before the neat and unremarkable though absolutely unimpugnable door and she getting out... and mounting the steps... He could see them... Rittenmeyer in the double-breasted suit...; the four of them, Charlotte here and the three others yonder... the daughters... the younger sitting perhaps on the father's knee, the other... leaning against him;... he could see them, he could hear them. (645)

It is important to note that this sequence presents Charlotte and her husband only indirectly. As in other novels, Faulkner reveals a scene filtered through the subjective, watchful consciousness of one of his characters. "Projecting" the scene in his head, using his eyelids as a kind of screen, Wilbourne casts Charlotte and Rittenmeyer in the standard roles of wanton woman and scorned husband and he fashions a scene of family tragedy.[10] What is pleasing about this scene to Harry as it goes on is that it conforms to the kind of plot he would expect of Charlotte – or of any married woman with her husband. Despite his own role in the adultery, or perhaps because of it, Wilbourne imagines a scene in which Charlotte acts out of character in her passivity and remorse. Rittenmeyer's behavior especially, his rectitude and moral forbearance, accords with Wilbourne's misplaced sense of honor. Faulkner positions Wilbourne on the bench so as to consume images of Charlotte and her husband as viewers do the images of commercial film. In so doing, he reveals to readers their own familiarity with and taste for melodramatic narrative – a genre that Faulkner produces in the "Wild Palms" section but which his treatment ironizes and critiques.

As Harry plays out the meeting of Charlotte and Rittenmeyer, it includes several elements of classical film melodrama, portraying in its brevity the moral universe that early film scenarists like D.W. Griffith favored. Over all, there is the sanctity of the nuclear family (with the father, kneeling, his daughters sitting and leaning against him forming a triangle, Christian symbol of divinity and the holy trinity); as well there is the image of the scorned husband bearing, tragically and stoically, the loss of his children's mother. Finally, this scene offers a "blessing" of the world Rittenmeyer and his family represents

> He will not answer, this man of ultimatums... who would have denied the promise she did not ask yet would perform the act and she to know this well, too well, too well – this face impeccable and invincible upon which all existing light in the room will have seemed to gather in benediction. (648)

In a description that reveals Harry's cinematic as well as moral sensibility, he uses a piece of photographic key-lighting that suggests, not altogether subtly, that Rittenmeyer bears the light of grace. Faulkner's irony in this description comes from the fact that it is Harry, not the authorial narrator, who produces it. For it is Wilbourne's interests or moral sense that the passage points up. And it is the Victorian, domestic world-view that melodrama evinces and which Harry embraces. Even the tone in this passage is suggestive of melodrama and romance – the fallen heroine knowing "*too well, too well*" of her lover's forgiveness and the contrition such knowledge implies; the strong husband's "*impeccable and invincible*" face; and, above all, the husband/hero's "*incontrovertible*," "*tragic*" rightness. This is the phraseology and value-system of melodrama, writ large for the purposes of Faulkner's critique of what this scene, generically, represents. The scene of high drama and moral conflict conforms to standards of melodramatic content and form, affirming the Victorian sense of the sanctity of the family and punishing the reprobate mother. With this demonstration of Harry's fantasy and spectatorial pleasure, Faulkner shows readers the tragic world of melodrama they have seen in film, and that they (unwittingly) expect from the "Wild Palms" story.

And, consequently, are denied. Not only in the novel proper, but in the immediate aftermath to this scene. Finishing his "screening," Harry leaves the park and joins Charlotte in the cab to the train station.

Maintaining his reverie, he asks "'They were both well?'" – to which Charlotte responds by jolting him back to reality and to her harsh, unromantic sensibility. Promising, like a good tragic hero, that he "will hold [her]" if she becomes fatally ill, Charlotte cuts him off with the admonition that he not "be a fool" and that he "[g]et to hell out" (649) if in fact something goes wrong. Charlotte's voice here speaks in the tone of the novel's ending and against Harry's longing for a romantic conclusion to his escapist fantasy. Here we see the dangling of a romantic plot only to subvert or frustrate it, an example of what I have been arguing is central to the method of the novel.

Melodramatic plots and narrative strategies appear elsewhere in "The Wild Palms", and similarly are offered up to readers for their recognition of the novel's critical use of cinematic content and method. One such scene takes place in the Utah mine. At the dramatic "climax" of Charlotte and Wilbourne's stay in Utah, Charlotte confronts the angry mob of miners. Of interest for my reading of the novel is the way in which Faulkner renders this scene and the communication with the "audience" of the workers. Coming toward the end of the couple's stay, this scene addresses the exploitation of the workers that Wilbourne knows of and in which he has been, at least passively, an accomplice. Simultaneously, it registers a political effect of early cinema towards maintaining that type of exploitation.

To begin, the miners are positioned in the passage as spectators. Following Charlotte and Wilbourne from the mine into the commissary, they're described as though they've entered the cinema and are reduced to watchful, expectant eyes. "In the gloom after the snowglare the faces vanished and only the eyes watched [Wilbourne] out of nothing, subdued, patient, obedient, trusting and wild" (630). Like the audience for early silent film, the miners are spellbound before a mysterious and novel spectacle. And also like the audience for early silent film, they are immigrant laborers. [11] Displacing the workers from the urban industrial centers where many of them lived, Faulkner nonetheless shows the miners in circumstances similar to those of early film audiences: exploited, overworked, and susceptible to the sensory stimulations of the new medium. Important to this resemblance is the motive for Charlotte's drawing. She and Wilbourne feel uneasy, recognizing the miners' pent up energy over months of not getting paid and sensing that their frustration may soon be directed at them. Charlotte's response strikingly calls forth both the cinematic apparatus and the subjects of the silent film. "[A]nd now they all watched [Charlotte]... as she fastened with four tacks... a sheet of wrapping paper to the end of a section of shelves where the light from the single window fell on it" (630). Setting up her "screen" on which falls the projection light, Charlotte proceeds

> to draw swiftly... the elevation of a wall in cross section with a grilled window in it unmistakably a pay window and as unmistakably shut, on one side of the window a number of people unmistakably miners... on the other side of the window an enormous man (she had never seen Callaghan, [Wilbourne] had merely described him to her, yet the man was Callaghan) sitting behind a table heaped with glittering coins which the man was shoveling into a sack with a huge hand on which glittered a diamond. (630- 31)

There are several details to note about this description. In the first place, Charlotte's drawing recalls a scene from a classic melodrama: the New York section of D.W. Griffth's *Intolerance*, with its labor dispute modeled on an actual strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts. [12] Important to this similarity is the role in Charlotte's drawing, as earlier in Wilbourne's imaginary film, of the stock type. The image of Callaghan is recognizable to Charlotte (she's never seen him "yet the man was Callaghan") as well as to Wilbourne and the miners – because as in most melodrama, the figure she depicts is a generic one: the corporate owner. This image of Callaghan itself suggests a specific icon from Griffth's film: the industrialist manufacturer in a deep-focus shot of him sitting alone and isolated at his desk. We might also note the use of the participle construction "was shovelling" to indicate that this is a *moving* picture. Or the fact that Charlotte's drawing suggests one of photography's technical properties: the capture and

manipulation of light, suggested by the references to the "glittering" coins and ring. The depiction of Charlotte's drawing goes on in ways that further enforce its connections to a silent film model and which reveal the terms of Faulkner's critique. Working fast in order to save herself, Charlotte again takes up the drawing. Indicating a doctor (Wilbourne) who is himself getting exploited, she draws an image of an immediately recognizable physician-figure who is being pickpocketed by the owner.

> This time [the figure] was indubitably a doctor, anyone would have known it – the horn glasses, the hospital tunic every charity patient, every hunky gutted by flying rock... has seen, a bottle which was indubitably medicine in one hand, a spoonful of which he was offering to a man who was compositely all of them, every man who has ever labored in the bowels of the earth. (631)

Making use of a "composite" image of all workers, of "every man who has ever labored", Charlotte's drawing suggests Griffith's "universal language", the utopia that he envisioned cinema to be. Imagined as a liberating tool for the masses, cinema spoke in an idiom "beyond words", and communicated in a manner and a spirit Griffith hoped would cut across national, class, and ethnic lines.

The effects of Charlotte's drawing, however, like those of Griffith and other early commercial filmmakers, are less clearly allied with the worker. Specifically oriented toward the proletarian masses, both Griffith's cinema and Charlotte's drawing appear to function progressively. Offering images that were immediately recognizable to non English-speaking or even illiterate workers, Griffith's cinema hoped to empower laborers and working class audiences – or at the least, offer them a way to collectively bond without the benefit of a shared language or education. Yet much of silent film, although conceived this way, served mainly to distract workers from their economic circumstances. Charlotte's actions ultimately function in the same manner. Charlotte intervenes in a near revolt on the part of the miners, and her production of silent, moving images siphons off the threat they pose. Although she makes the drawings to establish an identification between Wilbourne's and the miners' shared exploitation, Charlotte nevertheless serves the interests of the mine's owning company. Like the early nickelodeons, Charlotte's silent, moving pictures distract workers from their discontent and economic conditions and preempt their revolutionary intentions.

Faulkner's conservatism, as I seem to have described it, may not have been intentional. That is, what I maintain he offers readers in this episode is a "staging" of a model – and an effect – of melodramatic cinema. In structuring the scene with Charlotte and the miners like a picture-show, Faulkner allowed readers to recognize the ways in which early silent film functioned politically. [13] Charlotte's diverting of the miners is performed self-protectively, not with the intention to exploit them. My argument is that Faulkner's novel manifested its interest in the workings of popular culture in several ways, all of which revealed his awareness of its strategies, materials, and effects.

Faulkner's most pointed critique of popular film appears in the novel's close. Moving beyond his consideration of melodrama, Faulkner uses the scenes of Wilbourne in the prison cell to suggest the confinement of viewers in the trap of consumer culture. More than a suggestion of a literal imprisoning, the novel's close, including the scenes surrounding Charlotte's death, reveal Faulkner's recognition of popular culture's management and commodification of desire. Closing this section as he does in a prison cell, with Harry providing a focalizing consciousness, Faulkner offers readers a final way to witness Wilbourne's treatment of his affair with Charlotte as a consumable narrative. In doing so, he suggests a connection between Wilbourne's act of viewing his own experience, a process Faulkner structures like pornography, and the experience of film viewing more generally.

Wilbourne's nostalgic treatment of Charlotte's memory while he is in prison amounts to a form of narrative autoeroticism, providing a pseudo-pornographic object for his mental gaze that will provide him both titillation and, he believes, a means to honor Charlotte's memory. In order to remember her this

way, however, Wilbourne first needs to "record" his time with Charlotte and, in particular, his images of her body.

Wilbourne's preparation of his story materials begins well before his incarceration. Waiting in the hall of the hospital during Charlotte's surgery, Wilbourne remarks to himself that the lighting inside the operating room resembles Kleig lights – high-powered floodlights used in Hollywood film production (710, 702).[14] For Wilbourne, Charlotte's death occurs under the circumstances of a film shoot, allowing it to become another source of replayable visual pleasure for him (like the scene of Charlotte and Rittenmeyer in New Orleans). After Charlotte dies, Wilbourne is permitted to enter the operating room, where the recording process continues. Although the "Kleigs were off" (701), another "single dome light burned" above the operating table, lighting Charlotte's body which appeared "arrested for the moment for him to look at" (702). Through the use of lighting, Wilbourne's photographic eye records the image of Charlotte's naked body on the operating table. Unlike the surgeon who is unable to preserve Charlotte's life despite his ability to remake human bodies (we're told he once saved a patient's life by "vulcanizing" two sections of his intestine "like an inner tube" [699]), Wilbourne's own efforts at synthetic preservation are more successful. And they rely on techniques, like the surgeon's, that make use of technology. Like the image of Charlotte's body on the operating table, earlier in the chapter is another, more explicit reference to Charlotte's body artificially "lit" for gaze. Waiting in the shack for the doctor to return, Wilbourne sees Charlotte on the bed

> on her back, her eyes closed, the nightgown... twisted about her just under the arms... [I]t began to seem to him that the sound [of the wind] was rather the murmur of the lamp itself... the rustle and murmur of faint dingy light itself on her flesh – the waist ever narrower than he had believed, anticipated, the thighs merely broad... the... neat nip of belly between the navel's flattened crease and the neat close cupping of female hair. (687)

As in the operating room, the light here is trained on Charlotte's body in ways that facilitate both Wilbourne's clear view of it, as well as his technical remembering or "recording". Even the light itself has become "dingy", suggesting the tawdry quality of Wilbourne's imagination.

Later, then, in several passages from Harry's cell, Faulkner conflates Wilbourne's acts of memory, masturbation, and what may be seen as a kind of film viewing. Charlotte's memory, we are told, cannot exist for Wilbourne completely separate from her body; there must be "flesh to titillate" (714) or at least the palpable, material reminder of flesh. In the absence of Charlotte's actual body, Wilbourne's filmic memory of her provides this "titillation". Masturbating over the quasi-pornographic image of Charlotte, "thinking of, remembering the body, the broad thighs and the hands that liked bitching" (714), Wilbourne is able to re-view scenes from their erotic life together in ways that, he believes, allows her to live on. "*But memory. Surely memory exists independent of the flesh*", Harry reasons. Then, correcting himself, he thinks, "*But this was wrong too. Because it wouldn't know it was memory... It wouldn't know what it was it remembered. So there's got to be the old meat, the old frail eradicable meat for memory to titillate*" (709). In the absence of Charlotte's actual body, he uses his stored-up, pornographic images of it.

Preparing himself for a fifty-year prison sentence, Wilbourne provides himself ample material to sustain his nostalgic longing. This nostalgia, however, does not function to help Wilbourne overcome Charlotte's loss; rather, it takes the form of a sustained, faintly pleasurable suffering. In this way Wilbourne's "grief", his memorializing of Charlotte through replaying her image, is also a form of indulgence. And this aspect of Wilbourne's grieving returns us to a consideration of commercial culture. The masturbatory pleasure Wilbourne has stands finally for Faulkner as the kind of experience prompted by popular cultural forms. Commercial film, particularly in genres such as pornography or even the silent film melodrama, may titillate the senses or even provide temporary satisfactions. It may divert workers, as it does the miners in Utah, from a condition of economic

oppression. Or, as with Wilbourne here, it may provide an outlet for erotic, even romantic longings. But commercial film, like all consumer culture, as Adorno suggests, deliberately functions so as not to fulfill the desires it stimulates, leaving consumers always ready to buy more. Doing so leaves consumers in a state something like Harry's at the end of the novel: a melancholy condition of being repeatedly drawn back to the source of an unfulfilled longing or a loss. Seeing Harry in his prison cell at the end of the novel, readers may come to recognize the similarity between his position of entrapment and passive spectatorship and that of the consumer of commercial fare. Visual forms of narrative and popular culture, whether they seized on images of the female body or depictions of the bourgeois family, produced in its audience an appetite that was constantly stimulated but constantly frustrated. It was this unsatisfied longing inherent in commercial forms that Faulkner recognized and that he uses Harry's self-satisfying grief at the novel's close, like its other melodramatic reproductions, to demonstrate and critique.

With the ending of "The Wild Palms", and with *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* more generally, Faulkner demonstrates the ways in which other forms of popular culture produced a similarly melancholy, debilitating effect. Watching his memories of Charlotte as though they were a movie, standing in his private screening room, and masturbating, Wilbourne shows readers what Faulkner wanted readers to see about their own experience: the deadening, narcissistic prison of popular culture that refers consumers only to projections of their own desire. The ending of "The Wild Palms", however, may provide something more for readers than the films and popular cultural models Faulkner critiques. Harry's story in "The Wild Palms" may not, itself, provide the kind of satisfaction I am here suggesting that popular culture denies. Yet through its workings – its references to the culture industry that Faulkner deplored, its ironic representation of its generic materials, and its undermining by the strategies of "Old Man" – Faulkner provides readers something unavailable to Harry in his prison cell: a way out of the metaphoric prison of consumer culture and its transient pleasures – artificial, "melancholy", and profit-serving.

Peter LURIE

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NOTES

1 • The novel is saturated with such references; at the outset, however, it is worth glancing at a few of the novel's representatives of the culture industry. The convict's imprisonment follows his reading of "the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such" (509) who wrote popular westerns and crime fiction. In the same passage from "The Wild Palms" that describes "the lunch rooms with broad strong Western girls got up out of Hollywood magazines," Charlotte will be described as "resembling Joan Crawford (636)," herself a star of several 1930s vehicles. Early in his journey on the river, the convict registers his fascination with an icon of the silent cinema, Greta Garbo (596). And

late in the novel as Charlotte lies dying, Wilbourne, seeking a way to understand his experience, seizes on the author of a 1902 novel, *The Virginian*, which by 1939 (the year Faulkner published this novel) had already prompted three separate film versions: "He was trying to remember something out of a book, years ago, of Owen Wister's, the whore in the pink ball dress who drank the laudanum and the cowboys kept taking turns walking her up and down the floor" (689).

2• Charles Hannon sees the influence of Twain, particularly, in Faulkner's treatment of the River, reading Faulkner's descriptions of it as an example of a modernist questioning of 19th century realism. My own analysis suggests that Faulkner is engaged in both a modernist undermining of realism, as well as what Hannon calls, using Jameson, a postmodern "infus[ing]" of his novel "with the forms, categories, and content of [the] culture industry" (Jameson quoted in Hannon, 143). The use of popular cultural titles, figures, and methods, as well as a canonical text like *Huckleberry Finn*, connotes the realist strategy which "The Wild Palms" largely reproduces, but which I argue Faulkner uses "Old Man" to frustrate or disrupt.

3• Classical theoretical accounts of film viewers' subject-formation, although they anticipate my discussion of the River as a figure for the screen, are helpful here. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" follows terms for the specular formation of identity Lacan elaborates in his mirror stage. The subject's recognition of itself in a mirror, which Mulvey elides with the viewer's contemplation of the figure on a screen, provides another model for what I see the convict experience when he "discovers" himself by looking at the River. For as we shall see shortly, when on the River he treats himself and the characters with whom he interacts there as projected or idealized versions of characters he has seen in silent film. Richard Allen, in *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality*, provides an extensive contextualizing of Mulvey's model of film viewing. Throughout his considerations, he returns to formulations which repeat the elision of subject, mirror, and screen: "Although this spectator does not perceive her reflection in the screen-mirror (she has already passed through the mirror stage), her gaze is endowed with an omnipotence that is like the gaze of the child before the mirror" (141). It is the convict's "childlike" discovery of himself when gazing at the River that Faulkner's narrator stresses, and which later will prompt an example of cinematic, Lacanian mis-recognition.

4• As Michael Grimwood says of it, "the flood's meaning transcends its physical existence" (121). At first glance Grimwood's remark looks similar to earlier, "first-wave" readings of the novel that seek in it transcendent, universalizing meanings – such as the River as an emblem for an omnipotent Fate, or the continuous flow of time, etc. Grimwood's interest, however, lies elsewhere, and rather than transcendent meanings he situates the novel in relation to particular 1930s economic developments, such as reactions to the Depression, and to popular cultural practices and materials such as disaster stories and films (118-123). Grimwood finds possible sources for Faulkner's method in two 1937 film releases, one a documentary, Pare Lorentz's *The River*, produced by the Farm Security Administration, and the other John Ford's popular success *The Hurricane*. The two pictures provided the two poles for film practice – both of which Faulkner avoided. Documentary realism and Hollywood escapist melodrama function as contrasts for a narrative method that Faulkner chose because he wished to comment critically on both of these earlier forms. As Grimwood puts it, "[Faulkner] chose in late 1937 to write about a flood because it was then a topical, and proven, subject... He chose it however, not because he assumed it might lead to popular success but because it *had led* to a kind of success... Faulkner chose a flood as his subject so that he could invert a theme that seemed marketable. He chose to frustrate his audience's expectations, and his adversarial relationship with his readers is part of his subject" (122-3). Though less combatively, I see Faulkner likewise seeking to undermine his readers' expectations in their act of reading about the flood.

5• Richard Godden suggests that Faulkner's novel, or more specifically the "Wild Palms" section, is notable for its encouragement of readerly identification. Arguing that it has much in common with a popular 30s genre, the prison novel, Godden compares the method of "The Wild Palms" to that of James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*; he goes on to say that the genre's confessional format "attempt[s] to implicate the reader." Godden implies that Cain's novel (and by implication, Faulkner's) "performs like much pulp, by absorbing its public through empathy" (201). My point is that on a fundamental level, "The Wild Palms" works like popular fiction to involve readers with its characters; working against these conventions, "Old Man" limits that capacity for involvement.

6• The watery, boundaryless world of the flood, in other words, resembles the fluid state of the unconscious, an area of mental life that has often been compared to the manner of articulation in movies. Film's dreamlike feel and its approximations of the unconscious have been noted by its earliest observers, and they have as well informed the aesthetics of whole schools of film practice, such as that of the surrealists. Jean-Louis Baudry begins his classic meditation on film perspective, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," with a reference to Freud's use of an optical model for the unconscious, and the Freudian and post-Freudian take on film's resemblance to dreaming and the unconscious appears throughout film theory. In addition to these examples from film practice and theory, there is Faulkner's own reference to "the silver dream" of movies in the short story "Dry September,"

suggesting his own awareness of the affinity of cinema with the unconscious or dreaming.

7• Significantly, we are told that the convict does not fall under Hollywood's thrall, or even see a movie, until he is incarcerated (607) – a fact that potently suggests the connections between a state of imprisonment and the condition of being captive to the Hollywood fantasy. This connection will return with even greater urgency in the close of the "Wild Palms" section, with Wilbourne in jail.

8• In several ways "The Wild Palms" resembles a sub-category of melodrama whose preoccupation with flight and movement has been effectively exploited by another Hollywood genre: the road movie. For a medium ontologically defined by its affinity for motion, the road movie has consistently demonstrated its lure. Classic pictures such as *It Happened One Night* and the Bob Hope-Bing Crosby road series, including *Road to Utopia*; revisionist or socially critical films such as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Badlands*, *Easy Rider*, or even *Something Wild*; and more recent, highly derivative movies like *True Romance* and *Kalifornia*: all demonstrate the readiness of commercial as well as independent film to make use of the road genre and its tropes of travel and freedom. Interestingly, the travels that the road movie conventionally depicts express concerns manifested by Wilbourne and Charlotte. Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider*, explaining why Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda are a threat to the Southerners they encounter, talks about their characters' "freedom" in ways that could apply to Faulkner's lovers. "Talking about [freedom] and being it, that's different things. I mean it's hard to be free, when you're bought and sold in the marketplace" (quotation appears in the "Introduction" to *The Road Movie Book*, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds.). Despite their efforts at freeing themselves from bourgeois constraints, Wilbourne and Charlotte continue to find themselves tied to the commercial market. In the mention of Joan Crawford as the couple rides cross country on a bus, we find a reference to film on Faulkner's part that indicates his sense of the film industry's hegemony. Stating that "Hollywood is no longer in Hollywood but is stippled by a billion feet of colored gas across the face of the American earth" (636), Faulkner's hyperbole expresses the same lament that theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer were to voice years later: the fact that the culture industry's influence had already, in 1939, reached trans-national proportions. Steven Coban, in his assessment of the road movie, provides suggestive terms for a consideration of Wilbourne and Charlotte's wandering, in particular their utopic treatment of travel and the American West. He asserts that the road movie functioned "to represent America as a utopic space in which the nation's citizens... feel 'at home' on the road by discovering, through their travels, the popular culture they all share" (116). This seems to me as reasonable an explanation as any for the fact that, as they travel across the American West aboard a bus, Charlotte appears to Wilbourne to "resemble Joan Crawford, asleep or not he could not tell" (636). There, in Wilbourne's imagination, he finds the utopic fulfillment of his compulsive travel and longing.

9• Godden refers to this aspect of " The Wild Palms." "By showing how his couple confuse mobility with freedom, Faulkner demonstrates an infinite regress that allows no exit and no future; his is a precise representation of the prison of liberal utopianism that elects flight from the bourgeois relations rather than their transformation" (207).

10• Melodrama's roots in the English morality play prove useful as a way to consider Faulkner's treatment of Rittenmeyer, at least as he is seen and represented through Wilbourne. Thomas Elsaesser, in his essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," provides a comprehensive genealogy of the genre. Originating in the late medieval morality play and other oral and dramatic narratives, melodrama has as its most prominent formal element an emphasis on recognizable surfaces and character types. "The characteristic features... in this tradition are not so much the emotional shock-tactics and the blatant playing on the audience's known sympathies and antipathies, but rather the non-psychological conception of the *dramatis personae*, who figure less as autonomous individuals than to transmit the action and link the various locales" (69). Like the figure of Virtue in *Everyman*, or like the scorned husband in film, Rittenmeyer is brought on to the "stage" or "screen" of Wilbourne's imagination to demonstrate simple and undeniable virtue. The role in which Rittenmeyer is "cast" has much in common with other standard plots and characters from melodrama, particularly the way in which he stands in for a set of assumptions about Victorian, bourgeois respectability.

11• In his essay "Apocalyptic Cinema," Lary May traces the development and cultivation of a new, American middle-class audience for the movies. He indicates that prior to the advent of the feature film and the "photoplay," audiences for the short subjects were almost exclusively working-class and foreign. "Laborers still comprised 70 percent of the 1912 audience [for movies]; but 20 percent were now clerical workers and 5 percent were respectable bourgeois men and women. Without losing the original audience of immigrants, then,... filmmakers... created a medium that cut across class, sex, and party lines" (30-31). From its inception until the efforts of filmmakers and civic leaders to organize film production and exhibition, movies were predominantly an entertainment for urban, immigrant laborers.

12• May, 48.

13• Grimwood refers to this scene in his discussion of the novel's class divisions. In addition to the Polish miners, and including the Cajun alligator-hunter, the fisherman whom Harry sees from his prison window, and the Tall Convict and his fellow inmates, Grimwood asserts that "They [all] belong to Faulkner's anonymous, 'enduring' class, whereas

Harry belongs to the same self-pauperized 'leisure' class that Faulkner ordinarily perceives as his own" (102). Discussing the plight of the convict in "Old Man," Grimwood refers to the way he, like other Faulkner characters of the labor class such as the miners here, are conferred a type of dignity through their capacity to suffer and endure, but not, importantly, a willing resistance to the economic circumstances that require that suffering: "Faulkner assigned to his 'enduring' classes not revolutionary zeal but a long, patient submission in life (104). Charlotte's drawings contribute to a "social discontinuity" Grimwood claimed that Faulkner "liked," encouraging the miners' willingness to continue their submission to their exploitative treatment by the mining corporation and thus maintaining their social and economic position. My reading of the politics of this scene is similar to Grimwood's but also seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the effect of Charlotte's drawings parallel those of the early cinema.

14. Hannon refers to the cinematic terms Faulkner uses in suggesting Wilbourne's "filming" of Charlotte's death, such as the Kleig lights and the projector. Because she and Wilbourne pursue a postmodern strategy of simulation in their affair, Hannon argues, "her demise is only representable in terms reflective of simulation: [cinematic] projection and illusion" (148).