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[Introduction to] Vision's Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination

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Adorno's Modernism and the Historicity of Popular Culture

William Faulkner hated the movies. Or so he was fond of saying and apocryphal accounts of his life have made famous. Joseph Blotner reports that, assigned to a screening of a Wallace Beery wrestling picture when he went to work for MGM, Faulkner cut the session short with the assertion that he knew how it would end.[1] Faulkner also despised the popular magazines, if not the short stories he frequently chose to submit to them. In a letter to the editors at *Scribner's* from early 1930, he explained why he thought the magazine should publish his story "Red Leaves": "Not because it is a good story; you can find lots of good stories. It's because I need the money" (*Selected Letters*, 46). In another letter from 1932 to Harrison Smith, Faulkner refers to his work "whoring again with the short stories" during a period when he wanted to work on a novel (*Selected Letters*, 59).

Despite these protests and their suggestions of a distaste for the products of mass culture, however, Faulkner was keenly aware of the methods, types, and formulae of the popular art of his period. As the following discussion suggests, this awareness is clear throughout Faulkner's fiction of the thirties, in particular in the four novels that are the subject of this study. Comprising the central

texts of his mature modernism, these works repeatedly address the circumstances of modern mass cultural production. The conflation here is deliberate. That is, an account of Faulkner's 1930s novels that addresses their engagement with mass culture must also consider that engagement as constitutive of Faulkner's development as a modernist. As a writer deeply aware of his historical moment, Faulkner produced a modernism that reflected not only his high-art ambitions but his concern with the attitudes and tastes of the market for commercial art as well. His modernism developed, that is, in part because of his critical response to popular culture. Faulkner may well have hated film, as he claimed. He certainly cared little for Hollywood (though there seems a clear distinction between his contempt for Hollywood and his regard for silent art film)[2] or for the short story market for magazines. Yet despite this antipathy, Faulkner's novels in the thirties show continued involvement with a popular art that defined its forms and its cultural role differently than did the high modernism with which he is regularly identified.

That Faulkner was aware, like any modern writer, of the popular culture around him is apparent, a fact that was crucial to his approach to his four most important novels of the thirties: *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939). His own extensive work producing material for the culture industry includes the several stories he submitted and published throughout the decade, his interest in selling the rights to his novels to the film studios, and above all, his work in Hollywood as a screenwriter.[3] All of these examples point to Faulkner's direct involvement with the consumer art he claimed to disdain. A fifth novel from the period—*Pylon* (1935)—examines journalism as a commercial, popular mode of writing that differed meaningfully from what Faulkner deemed more serious literature. Appearing at first glance as an alternative to popular culture, Faulkner's modernism is, in fact, heavily mediated by his relationship to it, a relationship that included envy, fascination, frustration, contempt—and that produced some of the most powerful as well as the most unsettling effects of his writing.

Although this study means to show the ways in which Faulkner's approach to popular culture contributed to his development as a modernist, the relationship between modernism and mass art has often been conceived rather differently. Earlier models of modernism stubbornly denied the connection between modernist and popular art. Both Andreas Huyssen in *The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* and Theodor Adorno in his

theoretical work generally argue for modernism's strict autonomy. In particular, both believe that modernism derives its identity (and its aesthetic and cultural value) from its opposition to the simplistic, escapist pleasures and commercial impulse of mass art. Lamenting commercial art's susceptibility to instrumental uses, Adorno writes, "What is involved in this process can best be shown by looking at low-brow art and entertainment, integrated, administered and qualitatively changed as they are today by the culture industry . . . [T]here is at least a parallel here between the masses' relation to art and their relation to real consumer goods" (*Aesthetic Theory,* 24). In contrast to consumer art, modernism's act of turning "inward" through its attention to characters' interior lives and its pleasure in the anti-utilitarian play of language and form prevent its ready consumption. Against the sense of popular art as a consumable product, Adorno posits the fundamentally negative social role of all art, and especially of modernism in its nonmimetic ("non-identical") aspect. For Adorno "every work of art spontaneously aims at being identical with itself. . . . Aesthetic identity [in modernism] is different, however, in one important respect: it is meant to assist the non-identical in its struggle against the repressive identification compulsion that rules the outside world. It is by virtue of its separation from empirical reality that art can become a being of a higher order, fashioning the relation between the whole and its parts in accordance with its own needs" (*Aesthetic Theory,* 6). This "non-identical" struggle, present in all art but epitomized for Adorno by the modernist work, allows modernist art to resist commodification. As Lambert Zuidervaart describes this aspect of Adorno's theory, "Certain modernist works have sufficient experiential depth and technical progressiveness to resist the commodification of consciousness" (*Adorno's Aesthetic Theory,* 42).

Huyssen's position on the difference between modernism and mass art appears similarly unforgiving. Orienting his discussion from Flaubert, Huyssen uses Emma Bovary as the model of a reader who overinvests in her reading of popular romance novels. Flaubert himself, by contrast, through his repudiation of sentimentality and his rigorous devotion to style, became "one of the paradigmatic master voices of an aesthetic based on the repudiation of" commercial art produced for and consumed by the masses (45). Referring to the "core of the modernist aesthetic," Huyssen offers an account of modernist autonomy and separation from reality similar to Adorno's. "The [modernist] work is autonomous and totally separate from the realms of mass culture and everyday life," he writes (53). Elsewhere Huyssen extends what, for him, is a

critique of modernism, asserting that as a "reaction formation to mass culture and commodification" (57), modernism denies its relation to "the matrix of modernization which gave birth to it" (55).

Theories of modernism's separation from mass culture have had a long history. Their orienting point is difficult, if not impossible, to trace, but it includes several high-profile statements and critical schools. In hindsight, it appears that certain eras and cultural contexts lent themselves to the view of modernism's "vertical" position above popular art, and this insistence has included both celebratory and more skeptical positions. In their heralding of the detached aesthetic uniqueness and edifying nature of literature, the American New Critics resolutely denied even the possibility that a high-art school like modernism (including, and at points especially, that of a writer like Faulkner) might involve itself with art for the masses. Other critics like Clement Greenberg, in his once-canonical and widely influential essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" from 1939, strenuously asserted the categorical and qualitative difference between a challenging, demanding modern form of painting, appreciable only by an educated and refined viewer, and a debased popular version of "poster art," consumed—but not genuinely "felt"—by the public. Explaining these differences by way of a rather broad view of history and urban development, Greenberg writes,

> The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide. (10)[4]

Writing in the 1940s and 50s, Greenberg sought to encourage greater interest on the part of what he saw as an American taste resistant to the less innately pleasurable or "beautiful" visual aesthetic of painterly modernism.[5]

The move from a laudatory emphasis on modernism's superiority over commercial culture to an awareness, particularly in a neo-Marxist vein, of the elitism of views like Greenberg's was a short one. Yet even in the interests of

questioning such supposed elitism, theorists like Fredric Jameson often maintained or repeated the terms of cultural division that Huyssen and others have used. Showing the standard view of modernism's autonomy in his account of postmodernism, Jameson points to "the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or consumer culture" (*Postmodernism,* 2). According to Jameson, modernist authoritarianism and elitism gave way to a range of cultural practices that came to be identified as postmodern and which, unlike modernism, had in common as their "fundamental feature" a populist blending of high and low art. Whether referring to it as a "frontier" or a "great divide," earlier theorists of modernism have stressed its separation from the realms, production, and orientation of mass art.

Huyssen's particular view of this separation is useful in returning this discussion to Faulkner. Though Huyssen shares with Adorno and others a view of the distinction between modernism and popular culture, he claims that Adorno and other theorists take a more rigid approach to the question than he. "My point," Huyssen writes, "is that the champions of modernism themselves were the ones who made [its] complex history into a schematic paradigm" (55). To a degree, Huyssen is right in his account of Adorno's uncompromising critique of mass culture. Yet in such moments he also overlooks a key component to the workings of Adorno's aesthetic theory: the dialectical cast to both his perspective and his manner of articulating it. Adorno's thinking about modernism includes definitions which appear to work against one another but which, as is often overlooked, function complementarily. Articulating those definitions and their specific relevance to Faulkner suggests a use of Adorno "against himself," as it were. Doing so, however, remains true to both the content of Adorno's thinking and to his own theoretical method. "Critical theory," writes Guy Debord, "must be articulated in its own language. This is the language of contradiction, which must be dialectical in its form as in its content" (*Society of the Spectacle,* paragraph 204). Approached in this manner, Adorno offers a useful way to describe how Faulkner's writing addresses, in Huyssen's words, "the matrix of modernization which gave birth to it."[6]

Above all, what my study seeks to draw attention to is precisely this aspect of Faulkner's modernism: the way that, through its encounter with mass cultural strategies and forms, his writing shows a deep awareness of the modernization around it. Most specifically, and often most provocatively, this occurs through Faulkner's imaginative use of formal and representational modes of the mass

arts, above all, the cinema. Although direct and indirect references to particular films or texts occur throughout Faulkner's thirties fiction and inform the discussion that follows, what I find most compelling as a way of reading Faulkner's modernism is its inflection by what we might call the "film idea," the manner of impression and visual activity his novels emulate from the cinema. Pursuing such an approach, however, informed though it is by recent scholarship (and in particular by reconsiderations of modernism, postmodernism, and mass culture),[7] requires a caveat. Describing Faulkner's way of including elements of film or other examples of mass culture, I do not suggest that these sources appear necessarily positively or as a way to politically "redeem" his high-art elitism (as might an earlier cultural studies). The critical approach suggested by recent debate and that my study pursues is attention to the fluid, creative, and critical use to which Faulkner puts the cultural phenomena of his era.[8]

Adorno's notion of "identity" is particularly helpful for orienting my consideration of Faulkner. If all art, particularly high art, maintains its "nonidentity" and presumes to have nothing to do with the reality that surrounds it, it ceases to maintain what Adorno would describe as another necessary component of art: its *retention* of what it is not. "In its difference from the existent, art of necessity constitutes itself in terms of that which is not a work of art yet is indispensable from its being. The emphasis on the non-intentionality in art . . . indicates that art became aware, however dimly, that it interacted with its opposite. This new self-conception of art gave rise to a critical turn" (*Aesthetic Theory*, 11). This self-conscious similarity *and* difference is what confers on art its "negative" relation to society. Without its trace of reality, art would too nearly approach its ideal of self-identity; it needs to retain the hint of the reality from which it differs in order to distinguish itself as a separate (negatively critical) entity. Without an index of the circumstances that surround its production, moreover, art loses another key element for Adorno's conception of the aesthetic: the marker of its historical specificity. "[I]n all dimensions of its productive process art has a twofold essence, being both an autonomous entity and a social fact" (*AT*, 8). Despite its apparent autonomy, art must not deny its social and historical identity—which in the case of modern works of art includes the "pressure" of conformity, homogenization, and the market. Modern art is valuable in this way in that it reveals its influence by modern technical and economic forces. "The fact that art has a critical edge in relation to society is itself socially determined," Adorno writes. "It is a reaction to the numbing

pressure of the body social . . . it is tied up with the progress of the material forces of production outside" (*AT*, 48).

Important to Adorno's theory, and what connects it to my reading of Faulkner, is Adorno's claim that art performs its own version of cultural critique. In "Cultural Criticism and Society," Adorno advocated for the necessity of art to reflect on its position *in* culture, to include an awareness of itself as part of the same society that produced it. Describing the way in which "[a]s a result of the social dynamic, culture becomes cultural criticism" (28), Adorno argues for cultural critics' and artists' engagement with the objects of their criticism. Declaring that "[n]o theory, not even that which is true, is safe from perversion into delusion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object" (33), Adorno makes clear the need for cultural criticism to avoid the appearance of transcendence or a position outside of the culture of which it is a part. Failure to do so results in the false sense of superiority that adduces to cultural criticism (and, often, to Faulkner). For modern art, this process would include acknowledging the "material forces of production." As Adorno puts it, "Rooted in society, these procedures and experiences are critical in orientation. Such truly modern art has to own up to advanced industrial society rather than simply deal with it from an extraneous standpoint. The mode of conduct and the formal idiom of modern art must react spontaneously to objective conditions" (*AT*, 49).

Adorno's notion of the "spontaneous" reaction of modern art to its circumstances contributes significantly to understanding Faulkner. Unlike other forms of culture (including those prominent in the 1930s such as proletarian literature and social realism), modernist artworks reveal Adorno's idea of art "owning up" to its historical reality indirectly—through veiled references, for example, or, more importantly, as manifested in artistic form. "Many authentic works of modern art," Adorno claims, "while anxiously avoiding a thematic focus on industrial reality . . . allow that reality to come back with a vengeance" (*AT*, 49). In Faulkner's thirties fiction, modern industrial reality—in the form of commercial cultural production, generic types and forms, and prefabricated, popular attitudes and tastes—all "come back with a vengeance." Appearing throughout the novels of this period and pointing up many of the most invidious patterns of contemporary thought, the consumer cultural elements of Faulkner's fiction reveal his critical take on the "objective conditions" of his work as a writer. The role of those conditions often manifests itself in parody or allusion, appearing in Faulkner's use of generic types from fiction, such as

the gangster, or in stereotypical representations of race and gender drawn from early film. The presence of mass culture in these novels is also often indirect, traceable, as Adorno says of much modern art, on the level of form. Sections of *Sanctuary*, for instance, appear as deliberate, even self-conscious reproductions of the diction and style of hack fiction as well as the accessible realism of popular writing. *Sanctuary*, though, also demonstrates a decided split in its use of language: "low" cultural slang and idioms jostle with classical allusion and stylized, high-modernist lyricism. Above all, representational strategies in *Sanctuary* and Faulkner's other thirties novels draw attention to their resemblance to a modern, technical, and increasingly visual mass culture. Temple Drake in *Sanctuary* and Joe Christmas in *Light in August* both offer themselves up to an objectifying, mass-media "gaze" that informs their sense of identity and that is manifested textually in the narrator, as well as in the actions of other characters. In a manner that recalls the cinema, processes of imaginative "projecting" structure the several acts of narrating Thomas Sutpen's story in *Absalom, Absalom!* Rosa Coldfield's language in her chapter of *Absalom*, as well as Faulkner's descriptions of the Mississippi River in the "Old Man" section of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, further approximate the experience of viewing a film. All of these examples suggest the way Faulkner's formal strategies respond to, or even reproduce, aspects of the modernization that surrounded them.

More important to Adorno's theory of modernist form and to my reading of Faulkner is the role of tension and discontinuity. For it is this dimension of modern art that, above all, marks its historicity. As the first novel I consider, *Sanctuary* offers several examples of modernist "dissonance." In the case of Popeye and its gangster story, *Sanctuary* makes some of Faulkner's most overt references to mass cultural fare. Moreover, in his own comments on the novel, Faulkner suggested his sense of it as a novel written to pander to market tastes.[9] Yet undermining Faulkner's statements about its being written in order to court scandal and thus promote sales, *Sanctuary*—particularly its original version—includes several examples of the formal innovation and fragmentary narrative structure that had characterized Faulkner's earlier high-modernist works, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). In its multiple flashback technique, shifts in narrative point of view, and self-consciously lyrical use of language, *Sanctuary* uses several experimental strategies that define Faulkner's modernism. These strategies thus work against what we will see as the novel's more crassly or brutally commercial practices—often in deliberate resistance to them. "A successful work," as Adorno puts it, "is not

one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions . . . in its innermost structure" ("Cultural Criticism and Society," 32). Faulkner's use of modernist *and* commercial devices combine in *Sanctuary* and elsewhere to "negatively embody" their society's contradictions. This combination also contributes to some of the novels' more uncanny effects—an odd, tense suspension in which readers "watch" the various representational strategies contend. Like *Sanctuary, If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* offers variant literary styles, an opposition that produces an ambivalent "atmosphere" in both novels and a means by which these books allow their materials to reflect critically on one another. In this respect they exemplify a quality Adorno ascribes to modernist works: "The tension in art . . . has meaning only in relation to the tension outside" (*AT*, 8).

In this light and as the orienting point of my discussion, the opening of *Sanctuary* is instructive. For there we see Faulkner's effort to allegorize the two main strands of thirties cultural production—modernism and mass art—as figured in the characters Horace Benbow and Popeye, as well as his placing them in a position of mutual regard. In addition to examining popular cultural materials, an important dimension of *Sanctuary's* cultural criticism is that with this novel Faulkner also shows a critical awareness of his own modernism. In Horace, a figure for the academic modernist, certain tendencies such as linguistic superfluity or an aversion to the physical, sensory pleasures of commodities come under scrutiny. The result is a novel that exhibits an oddly divided or self-regarding habit, figured in the book's opening with Popeye and Horace confronting one another at the spring.

This activity of looking is central to each of the novels I consider, and its pervasive, culturally critical role in Faulkner's thirties writing is expressed by my study's title. Vision plays a particularly important role throughout the thirties novels, both as it appears in characters' acts of looking and as it is reproduced or simulated in the reader's encounter with the texts. Vision's "immanence" throughout the period thus refers to the way I see Faulkner manifest his critical stance vis-à-vis popular culture while at the same time maintaining an engaged relationship with it as an object of inquiry. The voyeuristic pleasure Temple Drake furnishes the male characters in *Sanctuary* is one clear and well-known manifestation of this focus on sight. So too, however, are several other instances of the look in *Sanctuary* and elsewhere. Horace demonstrates his own visual and onanistic preoccupation with his stepdaughter's image in her photo-

graph, as well as with Temple in their interview. Through Faulkner's descriptions of Temple, readers are also encouraged to participate in an imaginative version of looking at her—an activity that through the novel's workings becomes itself subject to critique. Surveillance and the gaze thoroughly condition both characters' and readers' experience of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, evident in textual operations that track Joe from his first appearance in the novel at the mill. As a child, Joe is subjected to the carceral,[10] institutional gaze of the orphanage and the lunatic scrutiny of Doc Hines; late in the novel, Percy Grimm acts as the apparatus and "eye" of the State. After Joanna Burden's murder, the reader also participates in the activity of surveilling and looking for Joe through the "policing" action of its crime and mystery plot.[11]

Looking is important in other novels as well. Though I do not include it in my study for reasons I describe below, the main action of *Pylon* centers around the activity of watching airplane races and Faulkner's elaborate accounts of characters' like the reporter's and Jiggs's jaundiced visual perceptions. Quentin Compson's encounter with the Sutpen narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* is described throughout the novel with references to his act of "watching" or "seeming to see" its events. In another of the novel's optical effects, the language in Rosa Coldfield's chapter approximates an experience of reading that is visual. At the end of the decade, the "Wild Palms" section of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* depicts Harry Wilbourne imaginatively "screening" events from his own life like a viewer of a melodrama. In the same novel, the Tall Convict performs a sustained act of looking at the Mississippi River and its mirror-like surface that contributes both to a formation of identity suggestive of Lacan and to the novel's self-reflexive, culturally critical operations.

Beyond detailing the range of visual effects in these novels, it is important to assess the particular role of this visual impulse in Faulkner's thirties fiction and to ask what accounts for it. One answer lies in the increasing role in the first decades of the twentieth century of that supremely visual and reifying form: film. The period of the late 1920s to the late 1930s saw not only the increased consolidation of film production in the hands of studio heads and the development in the industry of an elaborately structured power hierarchy (which placed writers, like Faulkner, at its bottom), but above all and simply, the massive proliferation of movies.[12] Accompanying the broad distribution of a centrally produced, standardized product as well was film's capacity to shape the consciousness of millions of spectators, an aspect of film that for many, including Faulkner, was both a fascination and a concern.[13]

Initially, Faulkner's interest in film had been based on optimism. As indi-

cated earlier, his fiction includes at least a handful of references to what Faulkner considered the artistic value of the medium, especially its silent-era practitioners.[14] Like most Americans in the early decades of the century, Faulkner went to the movies frequently when he was growing up in Mississippi.[15] His long affair with Meta Carpenter, a script supervisor whom he met at the Twentieth Century Fox lot and who for Faulkner embodied Hollywood's potential romance, suggests a fascination with the film industry that played itself out in his life. Faulkner also enjoyed a productive, genuine friendship with the director Howard Hawks, who helped Faulkner with several screenplays and, perhaps more importantly, with his troubled relationship with the studio heads. Later, Faulkner demonstrated what seemed real interest in cinema in his work in Oxford, Mississippi, on the film version of *Intruder in the Dust* (1948).[16]

What drove Faulkner's sharper and more critical interest in movies, however, and what provides the basis for this discussion, was the enormous and at times destructive power of the new medium. This aspect of film had been apparent in its earliest history, exemplified by a director like D. W. Griffith, whose widely influential *Birth of a Nation* (1915) both relied on and disseminated a racist ideology. Based on a notorious and best-selling novel that Faulkner encountered at an early point in his life, *Birth* was a film Faulkner almost certainly saw.[17] Like other movies, *Birth* based its appeal on its capacity to present viewers with a compelling visual simulacrum—in this case, a convincing image of history and the Civil War. Upon its opening in 1915 and for years thereafter (due in part to its re-release in 1930), *Birth* became the most widely viewed film in history. As the first "blockbuster" movie, it accelerated a pattern for film viewing and consumption that had begun in the teens but that only increased in the years that followed, particularly during the rise of the classical Hollywood cinema of the thirties.[18] The thirties also saw Faulkner spend several years participating in the film industry as a screenwriter, an experience that contributed to his understanding of its workings and the nature of its product. During this period, then, Faulkner saw the increased influence of film as a cultural force and as an economically vital, self-contained system, as well as—importantly—his own frustrated effort to find a broad audience for his books.[19] One result was Faulkner's impulse to work out a critical response to film through his novels written in this period. In their repeated visual tropings and negative regard for the movies, that is, Faulkner's novels were in dialogue with a competing medium.

Although none of his novels are actually set in Hollywood or depict the

activity of film viewing, two of Faulkner's short stories epitomize his highly critical take on the movie industry. "Golden Land," about a Los Angeles real estate developer and his would-be starlet daughter, and "Dry September," which includes a scene of an aging spinster becoming hysterical at the movies, both show the pernicious effects of Hollywood. The earlier of the two, "Dry September" (which appeared in *Scribner's* in 1931), is overt in its account of the danger produced by film's escapism. References in the story to the cinema house—its polished, rarefied atmosphere used to sell the "silver dream" of romance (*Collected Stories*, 181)—as well as to film's wholly superficial images of beauty and youth strongly link the experience of film viewing to Minnie Cooper's accusations of rape. Her fatal story about Will Mayes appears prompted by her desperate (and financial) need to re-occupy a position as an object of male desire like the images she sees on the movie screen. As a result, Mayes becomes a ready scapegoat for the racist and violent need of the men in the story to protect their idea of white female purity. Faulkner's metonymy of the town square with the cinema seems complete when, on Minnie's way to the picture show and after Mayes's lynching, her crossing the square affords the opportunity for Minnie's visual consumption by the Jefferson men. "She walked slower and slower . . . passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking at her: 'That's the one: see? The one in pink in the middle.' 'Is that her? What did they do with the nigger? Did they—?' 'Sure. He's all right.' 'All right, is he?' 'Sure. He went on a little trip.' Then the drug store, where even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed" (*CS*, 180). Once inside the movie house, Minnie's recognition of the picture's false promise arrives, ironically and tragically, too late, as she becomes unhinged by hysterical laughter during the movie and has to be ushered from the theater by her uncomprehending friends.

Written later than "Dry September" and after Faulkner's initial forays in Hollywood, "Golden Land" (1935) treats the experience and effects of film viewing less directly. Yet it reveals Faulkner's dark attitude toward the industry even more violently than had the earlier story. Its protagonist, Ira Ewing, does not produce movies or even, we expect, ever go to see them. He does, however, sell real estate in Hollywood, and his daughter is an aspiring actress who changes her name and, the story implies, takes part in a sex orgy to help her film career. Faulkner's story communicates his distaste with the Hollywood scene in these details of its plot, but perhaps more clearly in its descriptive

language. One passage in particular reveals its narrator's wholly negative, even apocalyptic vision for film. Driving through the Beverly Hills streets, Ewing passes a scene that reflects Faulkner's mind-set:

> [H]ad he looked, he could have seen the city in the bright soft vague hazy sunlight, random, scattered about the arid earth like so many gay scraps of paper blown without order, with its curious air of being rootless—of houses bright beautiful and gay, without basements or foundations, lightly attached to a few inches of light penetrable earth, lighter even than dust . . . which one good hard rain would wash forever from the sight and memory of man as a firehose flushes down a gutter—that city of almost incalculable wealth whose queerly appropriate fate it is to be erected on a few spools of substance whose value is computed in billions and which may be completely destroyed in that second's instant of a careless match between the moment of striking and the moment when the striker might have sprung and stamped it out. (*CS*, 719)

In a voice that is hard not to hear as Faulkner's own, twice in this paragraph the narrator shows a violent impulse toward destroying the California scene before him. Combined with other references in Faulkner's fiction to the "celluloid germs" and contagion of film images (*Pylon*, 984) or, in his correspondence, to his antagonism for the movie industry, this passage suggests a measure of rage on Faulkner's part toward Hollywood. The urge for a Biblical "good hard rain" to "wash forever from the sight and memory of man" the rootless city is only slightly removed from the more human fantasy of setting a match to Hollywood's figurative but also real economic foundation in film stock.[20]

Incendiary moments occur elsewhere in Faulkner, and one of them at least may add to our understanding of this scene. Darl Bundren's burning of Tull's barn in *As I Lay Dying* seems an act of protest—obviously not of Hollywood, but over his family's treatment of his mother. This passage from "Golden Land," however, suggests Ab Snopes and his act of violent protest in "Barn Burning" (1939). Written after Faulkner went to Hollywood, the story clearly expresses an understanding of exploited labor—an idea Faulkner held about his work for the studios.[21] Ab's statement when he arrives at Major de Spain's, for instance, might well describe Faulkner's feelings toward the various studio heads every time he returned to Hollywood: "I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months" (*CS*, 9). Ab's feelings of frustration at his financial circumstances

suggest a connection to Faulkner's own frustration at his work in Hollywood as well as to what appears in "Golden Land" as a similarly violent, if only imaginary, response to them.

As these examples suggest, Faulkner was highly skeptical of film and its commercial imperative. Yet film was only one of a range of cultural phenomena that Faulkner observed critically in the thirties and that depended on visuality for its effects. Another reason for Faulkner's visual tendencies in the decade may have to do with the fact that social practices as well as cultural forms in the modern period were increasingly shaped by visual experience. Several cultural historians and theorists of modernity have pointed to the particular role of vision as a defining feature of modern social, economic, and aesthetic life, a development occasioned by the increased role of forms like film and photography as well as by whole systems of social relations and organizing. Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* is especially provocative in this light, as he defines the spectacle as both a material phenomenon (as in commodities and visual forms of culture) and an agent for social ordering: "The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images . . . In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, advertisement or direct consumption of entertainments, the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life" (paragraphs 4, 6). Consistently elliptical, Debord suggests the ways that vision and socially organized acts of looking serve to unify parts of society (the agents of looking) and exclude others. As he writes, "The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all looking and all consciousness. Because of the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the location of the abused look and of false consciousness" (paragraph 3). Vision plays a singularly important role in the enforcement of rigid lines of separation in Faulkner's South, especially as it concerns questions of race, gender, and social identity, and in ways that strikingly resemble Debord's thinking. In *Light in August*, as we will see, the "abused" look produces a false consciousness for characters and for readers as well.[22]

Aspects of the visual component of southern as well as modern social and cultural reality played a key role in developments of which Faulkner's novels appear acutely aware. It has been suggested, for instance, that male fantasies in the South about black sexual potency and white female purity gave rise to efforts to control black men through surveillance, as well as subtended cultural

forms like the plantation romance. Women's role as objects of the gaze in southern social and cultural institutions like the plantation and the romance was similar to their function in the developing mass media—a fact that was not lost on Faulkner.[23] This is evident in his depiction in *Sanctuary* of Temple Drake's mass-media subjectivity, and in Jefferson's cinematic and fantastical response in *Light in August* to Joanna Burden's murder and perceived rape.

Central to Faulkner's thirties fiction was the fact that modern and popular cultural experiences of vision played a role in structuring attitudes about race as well as gender. From the earliest depictions of African Americans in film, stereotypes of black behavior, such as a willing subservience, sexual threat, or physical menace, predominated.[24] These stereotypes obtain in Faulkner's depiction of Joe Christmas, as do descriptions of his movement and appearance that offer a variation on what has been described as the cinematic "spectralizing" of the event.[25] Of particular concern to my discussion of Christmas as well is the way in which blackness appeared as a distorting demarcation and a spur to the eye in popular fiction in the period during which Faulkner was writing. Popular novels about black urban life such as Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) and others of the Harlem School, for instance, played on notions of black exoticism and danger at the same time that they demonstrated a fascination with the image of blackness as a (consumable) spectacle.

The slightly anomalous *Pylon* appeared in the precise middle of the decade and, like *Light in August*, offers a critical account of violent spectacle. Faulkner's novel of air shows, journalism, and modernity (written, he claimed, as a relief from his struggles with *Absalom, Absalom!)* also pays attention to communal perceptual experience and to individual characters' acts of seeing. This is clear in the spectators of the barnstorming as well as, often, in Faulkner's "visualizing" of experiences ordinarily considered nonvisual. In the novel's several accounts of characters reading the newspaper, we find an instance of a strategy that appears at other points in Faulkner's thirties writing: the abrogating of verbal and cognitive processes to what Faulkner depicts as the specifically unreflexive, acritical experience of looking. References to the way "[t]he eye, the organ without thought speculation or amaze, ran off the last word" (850) as the reporter reads, sound, we will see, a good deal like textual and stylistic effects that occur in *Absalom, Absalom!* In this respect, and in its critique of the spectacle of the air show—and especially of the newspaper's "selling" stories of the airmen's death—*Pylon* shares strategies and concerns with other of Faulkner's thirties novels.

Pylon does not, however, treat these same issues as reflexively as do those works. Acts of collective and individual looking figure thematically, for instance, in *Light in August*, but they also shape to a considerable degree readers' engagement with Christmas and with racial typing. The visual mode in *Absalom*, particularly the way in which vision displaces verbal narrative (and functions "without thought speculation or amaze") surfaces throughout the novel, conditioning readers' as well as characters' experience of the Sutpen story. *Pylon* does not quite implicate readers along with characters in its critical treatment of vision as do Faulkner's other thirties novels. We might also say that *Pylon*'s popular cultural elements are perhaps *too* manifest a form of cultural criticism. Its emphasis on spectacle or sensationalism; its use of Hollywood fodder (the courageous pilots, the love triangle, and the use of bold-face "headlines" throughout the text, a practice Faulkner used in his own screenwriting[26]); and its satire of the newspaper and its editor Hagood, who in his insistence on stories that will sell resembles one of Faulkner's magazine editors, are all evident references to mass media and technology. In a similar fashion, *Sanctuary* certainly makes overt uses of popular cultural materials. Yet *Sanctuary* and especially the other novels of my study also approach their use of mass art practices obliquely, alongside (in dialectical relation with) their modernist strategies. In its more direct references to popular culture, *Pylon*, while relevant to a discussion of Faulkner's thirties fiction, helps point up the presence of mass art in what would appear to be the less likely places, for example, in the high-modernist novels. Despite its considerable interests, *Pylon*'s approaches to visual and mass culture are not as veiled and therefore—importantly—as implicative as are those of the other novels from the decade.

My other reason for not including *Pylon* in this study has to do with its position relative to Faulkner's canon. While certainly it is about the "modern" phenomena of technology, newspapers, aviation, and spectacle, as well as about the role in each of a vicious economic imperative and system, *Pylon* is not as recognizably modern*ist* as are the other novels of this period.[27] Set almost completely in unified space (Faulkner's fictionalized New Orleans), and following a series of events that take place over a circumscribed period of time, *Pylon* makes use of few of the narrative and temporal ruptures that characterize high-modernist experimentation.[28] Moreover, in his use of a single narrative voice and perspective, Faulkner offers with *Pylon* a work that, in comparison with his perhaps most famously fragmented narrative experiments *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, as well as with each of the novels I

consider here, is relatively straightforward.[29] My overriding argument in this study is with those theorists and critics who have claimed that modernists like Faulkner excluded all traces of popular art from their writing, an assertion that is more readily countered with works that are identified with the modernist canon.

In addition to the visualizing of race and the advent of consumerist spectacle, Faulkner's thirties modernism showed an awareness of a range of visual effects and influences. Historical thought as well, in the period before and during which Faulkner produced his modernist fiction, suffered from what he understood as a visual "crisis," one that he recognized was exacerbated by film. Offering revisionist and aesthetic treatments of history, films like *Birth of a Nation* effected a "removal" of history from "the field of vision."[30] Under the guise of a seeming realism, the use of nostalgia and an idealizing vision of the past in films like *Birth* (and others such as Edwin Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [1903] or Paul Sloane's *Hearts in Dixie* [1929]) obscured history rather than clarified it.[31] In *Absalom, Absalom!,* written during and after his own work in Hollywood and following the re-release of *Birth* in 1930, Faulkner used a repeated reference to characters' acts of "watching" the Sutpen narrative as well as what I call a "visualized" prose style, one that performs an immanent critique of film efforts to narrate and visualize southern history.

Faulkner's final novel of the thirties, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem,* squarely and repeatedly confronts patterns of cultural consumption that, at the end of the decade, had solidified into a vast, transnational system. More than any of the novels of the period, *Jerusalem* alludes to a range of popular cultural models: *The Virginian,* Joan Crawford, detective magazines, Greta Garbo, confessional pulp pornography, popular romance, and the domestic film melodrama. Less directly, it also makes critical use of two very different 1937 movies: John Ford's enormously successful commercial release *The Hurricane* and Pare Lorentz's *The River,* made for the WPA. As examples of both documentary and fictional treatments of disasters, these movies offer variations on generic approaches that Faulkner critiques in his own narrative of flooding and catastrophe. In "Old Man"'s story of an escaped convict adrift during a flood and its suggestion of Hollywood conventions such as disaster stories and chain gangs, and with the mass popularity of film melodrama as the backdrop for "Wild Palms," *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* considers a cultural landscape that by 1939 had blurred into a bland continuum.[32] In addition to popular films like *The Hurricane, Jerusalem* also targets Hollywood vehicles like Crawford's *Possessed*

(a 1931 romance involving madness, murder, and suicide), and *Sadie McKee* (from 1934, in which Crawford endures a marriage of convenience while harboring passions for two other men). In *Jerusalem,* Faulkner resists tendencies in pictures such as these toward sensationalizing or a ready emotional escapism, furnishing instead means by which readers confront their own pleasure in stories of natural (or marital) disaster. In the novel's conclusion, where Wilbourne is depicted remembering and "recording" images of Charlotte's body to replay for himself "pornographically" when in prison, Faulkner extends and sharpens this critique. I argue that Wilbourne's position at the novel's end, trapped in the repeated act of consuming his own projective desire, refers readers to their own entrapment by a culture industry that, as Adorno and others show, works to stimulate but never satisfy consumers' longing.

Other theoretical work has suggested a relation between literary modernism and film and visual culture that is similar to my consideration of the visual in Faulkner. In his introduction to *Signatures of the Visible,* Fredric Jameson declares, "The visual is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination" (1). Suggesting elsewhere a link between the mesmerizing spectacle of film and Marx's conception of the auratic "magic" of commodity aesthetics, Jameson posits an explanation for the visual's uniquely commercial capacities: "Briefly, this view can be characterized as the extension and application of Marxist theories of commodity reification to the works of mass culture" ("Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 10).[33] Jameson claims that film lends itself to commercial practices because of its reliance on a purely sensory, largely visual, and ultimately abstracting experience. This manner of defining film by its capacity to provoke an uncritical response is common in theoretical treatments of it, particularly by Frankfurt School thinkers; their position is also useful in describing the critique of film that I argue is immanent in Faulkner's various visual practices.[34]

Jameson is apt here because of his effort to historicize not only properties of film but changes in the way visual activity came to be experienced in the modern period, as well as those changes' social effects. As he puts it, "[T]he only way to think the visual, to get a handle on increasing, tendential, all-pervasive visuality as such, is to grasp its historical coming into being" (*Signatures of the Visible,* 1).[35] Seen as a clear vestige of commodity aesthetics, the privileging of vision as it appears in various modern forms, especially film but also certain high-cultural models, requires a reading of those forms' historically determined nature. One manner of doing this would be to do away with

the different categories of culture (Huyssen's "great divide") in an effort to grasp their more significant and historically contingent mutuality. As Jameson put it in an early essay, "[W]e must rethink the opposition high culture/mass culture in such a way that the emphasis on evaluation to which it has traditionally given rise . . . is replaced by a genuinely historical and dialectical approach to these phenomena . . . as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism" ("Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 14). Jameson's appeal here for a dialectical reading of high and mass art is key. It anticipated work like DiBattista's and Huyssen's reassessment of *The Great Divide;* it also echoes Adorno's famous pronouncement that modernism and mass culture "both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change. Both are torn halves of an integral freedom to which however they do not add up."[36] Jameson's call for an historical and dialectical reading of high and mass culture is important because it suggests a way to see modernism point up reifying tendencies in other cultural forms, such as film and popular culture's emphasis on visual experience.

This historicizing impulse was central to Faulkner's thirties novels and to their culturally critical strategy. The visual and the filmic as they appear repeatedly in Faulkner's fiction, that is, do so as part of his cultural and historical critique as well as in dialectical relation to his modernism. Unlike his models, Faulkner's use of the visual is not reduced to "rapt, mindless fascination." Even when readers are mesmerized by Faulkner's language, as I argue they are by the Rosa section of *Absalom, Absalom!,* their experience of a visual mode occurs in the context of Faulkner's demonstrating or objectifying it, putting the effects of such a type of reading experience on display. A similar effect occurs elsewhere in his writing, as in *Sanctuary,* wherein referential or descriptive writing strategies are put into tension with more abstract, occlusive uses of language. If the visual in Faulkner is not "essentially pornographic" (though in places it is this too), it is because Faulkner allows readers a means of resistance by treating the visual as a textual and aesthetic function, pointing up its tendency toward commodification and reifying.

Like the novels' several visual elements, generic strategies and types figure prominently in Faulkner's interaction with popular culture. Genre is important to my discussion because it was both a successful element in the culture industry's standardizing of its product and another way that Faulkner's novels reflect on the popular culture that surrounded them. This procedure is perhaps clearest in the case of *Sanctuary,* in which gangster, crime, and *roman noir*

models heavily inform Faulkner's narrative of Temple Drake, Horace, and Popeye. In Faulkner's novel, however, generic elements such as Popeye's inhuman, synthetic construction, or set pieces like the gangster funeral scene encounter a critical pressure as Faulkner parodies or ironizes them. My discussion of *Light in August* also highlights generic tendencies. Operating frequently as a mystery, *Light in August* is structured so as to draw readers into a search for the killer of Joanna Burden. These effects, as well as references in the book to the way Joe's identity is constructed by his own reading of detective magazines, are at play in the novel's manipulation of genre and its way of implicating readers into its mystery or detective plot.

Absalom, Absalom! shows a marked awareness of genre through its suggestions of historical film and Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in particular. Notably revisionist in its treatment of history, *Birth* also forged a radical new language for cinema. In doing so, it produced a narrative expansiveness (as well as a market) for the feature film that was to have an unquestionably profound effect on film history as well as on popular conceptions of the South. As such, its impact on Faulkner is hard to dispute. In my chapter on *Absalom* I argue that Faulkner's method in the novel amounted to a literary alternative to cinematic approaches to southern history epitomized by Griffith's film. Characters' romanticizing of the Sutpen narrative, such as those of Rosa Coldfield or Shreve, appear analogous to practices of *Birth* and other films that substituted a romantic and idealized account of historical events for a critical understanding of their causes.

In asserting that Faulkner's modernism was shaped by the popular culture that surrounded it, I draw on other commentary that connects Faulkner to his cultural setting and, importantly, that culture's climate. In *Faulkner and Modernism,* Richard Moreland theorizes the position of the modern southern writer in ways that help clarify the connection between Faulkner and film. Moreland's assessment of the "melancholiac," drawn from Freud's model for loss and mourning, offers a way to understand Rosa Coldfield's fixation on the South and her uniquely modern reaction to the Civil War. In Moreland's reading of the various narrators' efforts to come to grips with the loss of the Old South, Rosa, like Freud's melancholiac, "compulsively repeats a scene of trauma or loss" (28). Recalling the technical dimension of film and the mechanical, repetitive nature of its several depictions of the South, Moreland's comments contribute to my description of a broad-based, cultural "melan-

choly" toward the war in the period in which Faulkner wrote and of which Rosa's position is highly symptomatic.

Bruce Kawin offers the most sustained reading of Faulkner's relationship to cinema. Looking closely at Faulkner's work on film scripts in Hollywood, Kawin points to ways the screenplays suggest Faulkner's facility with writing for a different medium as well as his ability to produce material that he expected would sell.[37] In his consideration of Faulkner's screenplays such as *The Road to Glory,* Kawin also describes Faulkner as using his screenwriting to work through themes that informed his fiction—in the case of this film, for instance, "the individual's relation to history" (*Faulkner and Film,* 91). In addition, Kawin reads formal elements of Faulkner's novels as literary versions of filmic devices such as Eisenstein's practice of dialectical materialism and montage. Kawin sees Faulkner's narrative impulses as similar to Eisenstein's or Griffith's efforts to associate ideas or to produce narrative tension by the combination of opposites.[38] More than other critics who see affinities between Faulkner's representational practices and those of film, Kawin grounds his reading in an understanding of film's cognitive or philosophical impact.[39]

My own approach is distinct from Kawin's in several ways. The most important of these is my suggestion that Faulkner's cinematic strategies followed an impulse that was not only formal and imitative but critical, an approach that is more evident in Faulkner's serious literary projects than in work he produced with Howard Hawks (or that he wrote to appease studio heads like Irving Thalberg). That is to say: Faulkner's approach to the medium of film and to the particular practices of Hollywood—many of which he observed when working for the studios—differs significantly when he stood at a distance from them in his novel writing. The scripts he wrote show Faulkner as an able storyteller and, in general, willing to subordinate his more experimental tendencies to the need for accessibility or narrative coherence. Faulkner went to Hollywood, as he often stated—and, as Kawin and Blotner both note—to make money. Because he could not easily do so at the same time as expressing his frustrations with the film industry, Faulkner displaced that critique into his novels. It is this that gives his modernist works from the thirties their uniquely dialectical quality: they are engaged with filmic practices at the same time as they invent new versions of the novel form.

I also differ from Kawin in my more extensive appeal to film theory. Film theory is important to the project because it offers ways to sharpen my claim

for the filmic properties of Faulkner's writing and to articulate formal affinities between literature and cinema. The assessments of Siegfried Kracauer and others of the spell-binding, mesmerizing effect of film, for instance, contribute to my account of Quentin's and the reader's "cinematic" response in *Absalom* to the idea (and image) of southern history, as well as to my description of Rosa's singularly affecting voice.[40] Daniel Dayan describes film's shaping of narrative through the "glance of a subject," a process that resembles the reliance on the structuring of narrative through the play of glances in *Light in August.* Temple Drake's characterization in *Sanctuary,* as we will see, owes much to practices common in cinema, including early film, which contributed to women's status as the object of male desire. These practices have long been staples of feminist film theory, examples of which contribute to my account of Temple as a popular cultural fetish or icon. Film theoretical accounts of cinematic means of structuring narrative proved especially helpful in explaining what I consider one of the key moments of narration in *Absalom.* Faulkner's effort at the end of the novel to conjoin his "viewing" and narrating subjects (Quentin and Shreve) with the object of their narration (the southern past), I argue, resembles one of the principal unifying strategies of narrative film. Described by film theory as *suture,* the process by which a film's lost "object" is recovered and reincorporated into the body of the text, this effect shares much with the characters' encounter in *Absalom* with a reanimated, uniquely vivid encounter with southern history. Quentin's and Shreve's processes of narration and identification, we will see, recall as well the efforts of early cinema to falsely heal or "suture" social divisions produced by the Civil War.

Other critics also look to Faulkner's thirties work, in particular his writing for the studios and the short story market, as an index of his cultural critique. In "Faulkner and the Culture Industry," John T. Matthews closely reads the World War I story "Turnabout," which appeared originally in the *Saturday Evening Post* (the rights for which MGM eventually paid Faulkner $2,250). In his reading of both the story and Faulkner's script for the film, Matthews sees several self-critical and resistant gestures toward the war genre (a foregrounding of the homosocial aspects of wartime camaraderie, an exposing of the limits of modern martial technology, and a surprisingly antiauthoritarian ending and tone). Matthews also suggests that when Faulkner was asked to change his screenplay for the film version to include a romantic lead for Joan Crawford, he subtly worked out a plot that drew attention to its own contrived nature (the story originally did not include a female character), at the same

time that it adhered to Hollywood's conventions. In "Shortened Stories: Faulkner and the Market," Matthews reveals Faulkner's other self-critical and resistant strategies in the pieces he routinely submitted to magazines.

My approach to the novels, though concerned with a similar aspect of Faulkner's relationship to the culture industry, is different from that of Matthews. Working this question somewhat in reverse, I expose the ways in which Faulkner's canonical, high-modernist works reveal traces of the market, particularly of film, even when Faulkner was supposedly writing in opposition to its effects. The difference between my approach and Matthews's is that it shows the way Faulkner's critical awareness manifested itself throughout his writing in the thirties, even in places where it is less immediately apparent and when he did not appear to have the culture industry in view.

In addition to laying a theoretical ground or identifying scholarly influences, an introduction to this study should also point to the contradictions or limitations in Faulkner's engagement with popular culture. For Faulkner was not always certain about his use of mass art or even, more importantly, in full control of that use's effects. Emulating the strategies of best sellers in *Sanctuary,* for instance, Faulkner also demonstrated an acute anxiety about doing so. This is evident in moments in *Sanctuary* that manifest particular ambivalence toward the masses at whom the novel was purportedly aimed. In these moments, and especially in his revisions of the novel, Faulkner demonstrates a certain antipathy toward a mass readership and crowds. His discomfort with writing for the market thus provides a way to read Faulkner's conflicted approach to this novel.[41] In addition to offering moments of what Faulkner called "horrific" practices of writing, *Sanctuary* reveals an impulse toward high-art lyricism or classical allusion. The result of this conflict in Faulkner's approach with *Sanctuary* is a novel that bears the marks of its self-division openly, even on the level of its very sentences.

One of the most troubling instances of the complications surrounding Faulkner's critique of consumer culture manifests itself in his treatment of race. Though *Light in August* reveals the impact of early examples of popular art on received attitudes toward African Americans, the novel ultimately performs many of these same textual and ideological operations. Due largely to its manipulation of the mystery genre and its placement of Joe Christmas at the center of a narrative that prompts the reader's activity of "policing" him, *Light in August* produces a reassuring comfort for its readers, one that unwittingly secures for them a position of false security outside of the novel's incessant

violence. The novel repeatedly depicts the victimization of subjects who, like Christmas, Joanna Burden, or Gail Hightower, are brutalized because of their perceived status of racial, regional, or sexual difference. The novel's manner of drawing readers into its narrative action of monitoring and tracking its protagonist, facilitated by its uniquely invasive form of textual omniscience, aligns readers with several acts of looking that detect, and ultimately punish, Joe. In describing Christmas's death, Faulkner's elevated language also produces a position for readers of detached aesthetic contemplation. As a result of these effects, Faulkner's attention to race in the novel constructs a position for its implicitly white readers similar to that of the characters in it, and to whites generally, of freedom from scrutiny or definition as well as from attendant acts of physical and institutional violence. Unlike the social and textual position of blackness, which is heavily coded and relentlessly surveilled, whiteness in the novel remains an invisible, unmediated, and unmarked (and therefore "unremarked") social position.[42]

My critical reading of *Light in August* departs from the approach I take to the other novels under consideration here. Overall, I see Faulkner's novels of the thirties interacting with mass culture in ways that allow them a critical perspective and a formal complexity which, after Adorno, I would suggest is uniquely modernist in its capacity to reflect on the circumstances of its production. Although my reading of Faulkner seeks to provide a context for his modernism in cultural history and might thus be described as "Adornian," Adorno's theory does not appear directly in the individual chapters. Its influence might best be described as a background for an approach to Faulkner that highlights his interest in mass forms of culture and accounts for that interest as contributing to his modernism. My attention to what amounts to a blind spot about race in *Light in August,* or, as we will see, about labor in "Wild Palms," suggests moments in Faulkner's fiction for which my theoretical approach does not claim to account. Endeavoring as he did to expose the limitations of mass cultural production such as a denial of history, the treatment of artworks as consumable mass-market commodities, and the disseminating of stereotypical attitudes about gender and race, Faulkner also reproduced some of the same problems he sought to address. In a perhaps darker manifestation of Adorno's notion of the artwork's "unconscious" reproduction of social and historical conflicts, *Light in August* suggests an example of the way Faulkner did not always avoid the political shadings and troubling ideology of the popular culture he elsewhere succeeded in critiquing.