As I Lay Dying in the Machine Age

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The cultural transformation marking the New South was structured by a central dialectic: the dynamic relation between modernization and modernism. Various plans to rejuvenate the South after World War I urged the adoption of modernized modes of production, including tenancy and credit reform for farmers; crop diversification; increased commodity consumption; technological improvements, such as electrification and mechanization; cooperatives for equipment and supply purchasing; improved housing; reforestation and erosion work; and the development of small, local industry.[1]

Despite significant differences in the panoply of New South programs (for example, differences over the degrees of commitment to northern capital and management techniques, or over the extent to which black fortunes

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1. This list is drawn from Michael O'Brien, *The Idea of the American South: 1920–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 67. O'Brien summarizes Howard Odum's proposals in *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936).

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would be integrated into the envisioned future) and despite the persistence with which antebellum relations of class, race, and gender held sway—and even were actively refurbished beginning in the 1880s[2]—the South decisively mobilized itself for a renaissance through modernization. At the same time, many southern writers coming of age at the time of the New South's emergence during and after World War I gravitated to the novelties of international aesthetic modernism. Daniel Singal has pointed out that the earliest southern hospitality to literary modernism was extended by the Vanderbilt Fugitive group in the early twenties.[3]

The dialectical nature of these movements might be appreciated when we follow the transmutation of Vanderbilt modernism into Vanderbilt Agrarianism. With the publication of the notorious *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren signaled that the poets were ready to ratify what Singal has called "the shift to southernism" (*WW*, 200) that began in the mid-twenties. Their modernism, in the first place, already had had to recognize its dialectical relation to modernization, for the New South was essentially a product of southern Victorianism. In its confidence in technological progress, education, commerce, and industry, the New South stood squarely on the belated circulation through the post–Reconstruction South of Arnold's and Tennyson's mid-Victorian optimism (*WW*, 23). Aesthetic modernism allowed some southern writers both to welcome the breakup of a moribund Cavalier tradition of paradise lost and to dispute the progressive materialism boosting the bourgeois New South.

From this standpoint, it is not so difficult to understand the Agrarians' move from modernism to a renovated agrarian Old Southernism. The Fugitives' modernism, inspired by Pound and Eliot, formulated itself in opposition to the sentimentalism, historical escapism, and verbal lavishness of the extended romantic tradition in poetry through the turn of the century. At the same time, however, it initially allied itself with a social mentality rooted in Victorian progressivism. This synthesis of anti- and pro-Victorian im-

2. On the persistence of racism, for example, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South: 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; republished in 1971 with a critical essay on recent works by Charles B. Dew), especially chapter 14, "Progressivism—For Whites Only." See also John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

3. Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); hereafter cited in my text as *WW*.

pulses gave way to modernism's antithetical departure from the processes of modernization. The modernist project develops doubts about technology and progress, particularly in the aftermath of World War I. High modernism's apparent uninterest in representing social reality—its abstractness and autonomy—constitutes a defense against an intolerable present and an unimaginable future.[4]

A new synthesis arises in the form of the Agrarians' reactionary antebellum mythology. This mythology depends on what Singal has called a "modernized and sanitized"[5] version of the myth of the Old South. Agrarianism "vehemently attacked the New South shibboleths of national reconciliation, industrialism, and the modernization of southern society, and called instead for the supremacy of tradition, provincialism, and a life close to the soil."[6] Michael O'Brien summarizes this relation in a way I find useful: "By modernism I mean that shift in sensibility that has been closely linked to, but not necessarily sympathetic with, the process of modernization, the growth of industry, cities, secularization, democratization, and a mass bureaucratic society. . . . Modernism is, in short, a sensibility in dialectic with modernization."[7] I have risked this extremely sketchy rehearsal of a full and nuanced body of work on southern modernism because, in what follows, I want to suggest how Faulkner's fiction of the early thirties engages the dialectic between modernization and modernism.

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At the very moment the Fugitive modernists were moving toward Agrarianism, Faulkner wrote his two most modernist works, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). What is striking about both is the extent to which they conform to the received understanding of the modernist work as one that is, according to Andreas Huyssen, "autonomous and totally separate from the realms of mass culture and everyday life."[8] "The major premise of the modernist work is the rejection of all classical

4. Peter Bürger distinguishes the avant-garde from modernism on the basis of the former's self-reflectiveness as a form of social criticism in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

5. Singal uses this phrase in discussing *The Unvanquished* as an example of Faulkner's ambivalent modernism (*WW*, 196).

6. Singal, *WW*, 198. See also O'Brien, *Idea of the American South*, 14.

7. O'Brien, *Idea of the American South*, xvii.

8. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 53; hereafter cited in my text as *GD*.

systems of representation, the effacement of 'content,' the erasure of subjectivity and authorial voice, the repudiation of likeness and verisimilitude, the exorcism of any demand for realism of whatever kind" (*GD*, 54).[9]

Everyone remembers that *As I Lay Dying* itself identifies one important frame of reference for its modernist aesthetic when Darl describes his mother's coffin resting on sawhorses in the blazing Gillespie barn as looking "like a cubistic bug."[10] This is a suggestive remark, for not only does it encourage taking the radical perspectivism and antimimetic abstractionism of the novel as Faulkner's attempt at literary cubism, it also illustrates "the exorcism . . . of realism" performed in section after section.

No other novel of Faulkner's so successfully establishes the autonomy of the modernist text. The abstractness of its form reinforces the abstractions that preoccupy its discourse. The aesthetic of literary high modernism appears in the novel's fragmented narrative: radical relativism generated by contradictory points of view, concentration on psychology rather than event (as if the narrative of mind *is* the story), stream of consciousness technique, and elaborate rhetorical complexity (elliptical syntax, metaphysical conceits, and belaborings of metaphor).[11] Such massive rejection of conventional realistic procedures sits well with the rarefied content.

To see modernism as a refusal to address the repellent expansion of commodity capitalism, technologization, and mass culture has been a mainstay of its detractors from at least Lukács forward. Yet, notice how the language of the market, to anticipate my analysis by way of a preliminary example, has saturated the most private formulations of personal identity. Darl struggles to deduce his existence through pure reason, but into his Cartesian meditations floats the paradox of commodity exchange: "I can

9. Donald Pease shows the roots of American modernism's suppression of context to lie in the aesthetics of post–Civil War writers, like Twain, who seek to lay to rest the trauma of violent political conflict. Pease discusses the cultural work performed by the modernist text's refusal of history and the modern critic's consonant preoccupation with high culture (at the expense of mass culture) in *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), especially 41–44. In what follows, I describe the dynamics of such an opposition in a modernist text and attempt to break down the grounds for it.

10. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, The Corrected Text (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1987), 201. All quotations are from this edition and are cited by page number only.

11. On the novel's exploration of figurality, see Patrick O'Donnell, "The Spectral Road: Metaphors of Transference in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*," *Papers in Language and Literature* 20 (1984): 60–79.

hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does" (72). The Bundrens' function as "middlemen" in this transaction becomes a metaphor for Darl's selfhood—not an end but a means, not property held but property in circulation, not self-possession but severally possessed.

What a more dialectical approach to the question of modernization and modernism might demonstrate is the *process* by which the autonomy of the modernist work establishes itself. According to Adorno's dialectical analysis of aesthetics, the modern work constitutes itself in a process of opposition to the "empirical" world, to all that is not art: "It is by virtue of its separation from empirical reality that the work of art can become a being of a higher order, fashioning the relation between the whole and its parts in accordance with its own needs. Works of art are after-images or replicas of empirical life, inasmuch as they proffer to the latter what in the outside world is being denied them. In the process they slough off a repressive, external-empirical mode of experiencing the world."[12]

Huyssen's reading of Adorno specifies the elements of modern culture that modernism must engage. In the first place, the commodification of culture that emerges during the nineteenth century permanently alters society, and art's relation to it: "What, then, are the traces of this commodification of time and space, of objects and the human body, in the arts?" (*GD*, 18–19). Huyssen's question suggests the kind of tasks practical criticism might perform in light of Adorno's general principle that "the ideology of the art work's autonomy is thus undermined by the claim that no work of art is ever untouched by the social. But Adorno makes the even stronger claim that in capitalist society high art is always already permeated by the textures of that mass culture from which it seeks autonomy" (*AT*, 35).

The questions I want to put to Faulkner's modernist endeavor in *As I Lay Dying* are the following: (1) Where do we find the "substratum" (*AT*, 6) of empirical reality that the work of art seeks to separate itself from? (2) How does the modernist work mediate social reality by turning it into aesthetic form? (3) How does *As I Lay Dying* demonstrate that a modernism *open* to the forces of modernization retains an analytical capacity that earlier practitioners like the Vanderbilt Fugitives short-circuited and abandoned prematurely? and (4) How does Faulkner prevent his work from being en-

12. T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 6; hereafter cited in my text as *AT*.

tirely determined by the demands of the modernized mass culture that it reflects upon?

Modernization and the Commodification of Culture, or, Cash Relations

It has always been tempting to view the Bundrens through the lens of Agrarian nostalgia for the endurance of the yeomanry. For all their selfishness, cruelties, and obtuseness, Faulkner does put them in the position of triumphing epically and comically over their life and death tribulations. Despite the stench of the partially putrefied farm family toting its losses to town, the novel begrudgingly acknowledges a will to survival and, even more, a will to reorganize and prepare for the future.[13]

What I would like to suggest in this section is the extent to which the Bundrens do *not* represent simply the South's version of a natural relation to the universal rhythms of living, working, and dying. Nor is it enough to historicize their plight superficially—as that of a productive, self-sufficient farm family about to be ruined by modernization. Were this the case, *As I Lay Dying* might be taken as a kind of grotesque Agrarian fable, one that allegorizes a phase of lapsarian southern history: the loss of the self-sufficient yeoman farmer to the growth of larger-scale, mechanized, agribusiness, to greater opportunities in the towns, to the homogenizations of mass culture and a consumer economy. Such a reading would place the novel as Faulkner's idiosyncratic contribution to the myth of the South's perpetual Fall, a myth then being rehabilitated by the Agrarians.[14] But such a view misjudges the degree to which the Bundrens have already been *constituted* by the dialectical history of capitalist agriculture, commodified economic and social relations, and the homogenizations of mass culture in the nineteenth-century South. What I hope to show in this first step of my analysis is that Faulkner's modernist treatment of the social reality indicated by the Bundrens' predicament is not entirely absorbed into the aesthetic of

13. See Warwick Wadlington, *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 101–30, for an account of how voice seeks to overcome death.

14. On this point, I seek to challenge the nostalgia for the producer farmer that limits Susan Willis's otherwise compelling analysis of the onset of the consumer society in the South of *As I Lay Dying* ("Learning from the Banana," *American Quarterly* 39 [1987]: 586–600). Ironically, Willis's exaggeration of the agricultural South's earlier connection to the land (for all her awareness of Faulkner's criticism of the economic oppression it rested upon) coincides with the agrarian sentimentalized portrait of the yeoman farmer.

modernist abstraction that universalizes their story. Rather, the traces of very specific historical conditions appear in the novel, and they appear in such a way as to suggest that modernization is part of a dialectic internal to the workings of the novel and of the history it reflects upon.

Cash Bundren's devotion to his carpentry might best represent the ethos apparently being replaced by the mass reproduction of goods in a consumer society.[15] In opposition to machine-made production, Cash crafts Addie's coffin with as personalized a relation as imaginable between producer and consumer. He shapes every board with "the tedious and minute care of a jeweler" (70), holding each one up to his dying mother's inspection while she gazes at his labor from her window. The mother's interested image framed above Cash "is a composite picture of all time since he was a child" (44). Making this final receptacle for the one who has made him, Cash conceives the coffin as the most intimate expression of his natural reproductive relation with Addie.

Like the celebrant of a ritual, Cash resists all pressures to economize. He will not use ready-made boards from the barn; he will not shelter his work from the elements; he will not compromise the seemingly pointless extravagance of beveling every board. This handcrafted coffin, originating purely for its use function, destined never to possess exchange value, enjoying visibility only during the performance of the rite of burial, might represent art before the age of mechanization and commodification.

But Cash's relation to the ethos of use value, personalized production, and blood loyalties remains ambivalent throughout the novel. Cash professes regret that "folks seem to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it" (216). Nevertheless, he recognizes the continuity between the old ways and the new. Rationalizing Darl's removal after his act of arson, Cash insists that "there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into" (221). The reification of labor into a product that can be stored over time, possessed as property, and sold when the producer decides requires a conceptualization of labor and production that is fundamentally commodified.[16]

15. I discuss the novel's interest in forms of mechanical reproduction in "Faulkner and the Reproduction of History," in *Faulkner and History*, ed. Michel Gresset and Javier Coy (Salamanca: University of Salamanca Press, 1985), 63–76.

16. Gavin Wright claims that the crisis of labor was the distinguishing characteristic of the

Cash reveals this mentality regularly when he discusses the sanctity of what a man has produced for himself. But he also welcomes the advent of a much more technologically sophisticated and heavily mediated mass consumer market. Cash's graphophone represents the displacement of labor and gratification into reified form—into a commodity. The graphophone's music sounds to Cash as "natural as a music-band" (218), an illusion that mystifies the artifice of disembodying live music and reducing it to an object that can be stored and later returned to simulated life. (Note the analogue to Addie's postmortal speech.) The graphophone promises comfort and relaxation to the laboring man:

> Seems like when [a fellow] comes in tired of a night, it aint nothing could rest him like having a little music played and him resting. I have seen them that shuts up like a hand-grip, with a handle and all, so a fellow can carry it with him wherever he wants. (239)

Music has become private, portable property, limitlessly reproducible, subject only to the consumer's desire. The process of substituting commodity gratification for emotional loss carries over into Vardaman's longing for the red train he has seen in town, and to Dewey Dell's effort to distract him with the novelty of bananas. Commodification cuts the product off from the circumstances of its production, just as consuming the commodities helps divert the laborer from the weariness that pays for them.

The Byzantine complexity of petty finances in Faulkner's fiction is notorious. The Bundren family accounts actually flush the original economic sediment of the nuclear family to the surface at the moment of highest consumer desire (which is also the moment of greatest personal loss), for it is clear that the Bundren family has the meter running on all the relations that the myth of agrarian familiarity upholds against the assaults of modern commercialism. Money silently constitutes and openly mediates the family in the agricultural South. When Jewel begins sneaking off at night to earn cash for his horse, he is too tired to do his chores properly; Addie protects her favorite: "It was ma that got Dewey Dell to do his milking, paid her somehow" (115). Jewel's eventual purchase of the wild pony provokes a crisis of economic authority in the household. Jewel denies that he has bought the horse on Anse's "word"; it is not his father's credit (a precious commodity in the sharecropping South) but his own earnings that give Jewel

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regional economy of the post–Emancipation South in *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), especially 7.

the freedom to buy—and the freedom of buying. Anse has another reading, though: "You went behind my back and bought a horse. . . . Taken the work from your flesh and blood and bought a horse with it" (121). Addie sees the destructiveness of rendering labor in monetary terms, most horribly within the family, but she is helpless to articulate an alternative relation based on need and generosity: " 'Jewel,' ma said, looking at him. 'I'll give———I'll give———give———' Then she began to cry" (120).

I want to emphasize that the sudden rupture of the family by Addie's death precipitates a crisis that exposes the economic contradictions of the modern farm family and its extension, the community. The Bundrens' neighbors are drawn into a process that confronts the monetization of personal relations. Jewel's ferocious efforts to pay for the extra hay his horse will eat at Samson's or for the use of Tull's mule underscore the ambiguous fluidity of personal and financial dealings. The codes of hospitality and charity conflict with those of economic self-sufficiency. Anse constantly trades on this ambiguity as he casts himself on the goodwill of those he meets: "I reckon there are Christians here" (218).

Accordingly, Anse blames the expansion of state authority as much as any natural catastrophe for his troubles:

> Putting it [the road] where every bad luck prowling can find it and come straight to my door, charging me taxes on top of it. Making me pay for Cash having to get them carpenter notions when if it hadn't been no road come there, he wouldn't a got them; falling off of churches and lifting no hand in six months and me and Addie slaving and a-slaving, when there's plenty of sawing on this place he could do if he's got to saw. (32)

It is state paternalism in the twenties and thirties that replaces the individual father's authority in the modernized United States,[17] but such paternalism is a social transformation that, in *As I Lay Dying*, helps to expose the arbitrary authority of the father in the nuclear family. Anse and his ruggedly individualistic neighbors complain about state incursions, like roads and taxes. Anse even takes Darl's long-threatened incarceration as more

17. Though they are interested in the breakup of the "Oedipal family" as an index of social upheaval in the modernization of the South as it is reflected in *As I Lay Dying*, Wesley and Barbara Morris offer an extremely simplistic and traditional account of Faulkner's resistance to change, and they fail to grasp the complexity of the relation between social and aesthetic discourses. See their *Reading Faulkner* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), especially 26–38 and 150–75.

state meddling: "They would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business" (32), Anse puts it economically. Eventually, of course, the state's law does intervene in family affairs, forcing the Bundrens to choose between defending themselves against a lawsuit and sacrificing a son to the state asylum.

Contemporary upheavals in the South's labor practices derive from the dismantling of the chattel slavery system. After emancipation, labor is no longer a capitalized factor in production. The southern economy is forced to develop a new reliance on wage labor.[18] When Anse thinks of his and Addie's work as "slaving and a-slaving," he inadvertently points to the way the biological family was exploited as non-wage labor in the post–Civil War agricultural South. That Anse's offspring begin to earn their own money continues a history of emancipation for a variety of underclass subpopulations. Addie mocks patriarchal economic domination in her derisive balancing of the reproductive books: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine" (162). But the next generation of dispossessed seems a little less pliant. Dewey Dell warns Anse off her cash: "Dont you touch it! If you take it you are a thief" (237).

Cora Tull occupies a transitional position in the history of commodified relations and market involvement in the modernized South. On the one hand, in her egg business she has grasped the principles of deferring profit in order to maximize capital investment, of reinvesting profit to assure growth, and of the advantage of producing goods for sale rather than for personal consumption. She stocks the best breed of hens, accepts the fact that early losses mean that they "couldn't afford to use the eggs ourselves" (5), and organizes her banking business vertically, becoming her own supplier of eggs and trading for the rest of what she needs.

Cora's savvy seems to dissolve when she learns that Miss Lawington's customer for her cakes has canceled the order, leaving her with a perishable stock. She refuses to enforce the agreement and rationalizes her potential losses: "Well, it isn't like they cost me anything" (6). The cakes cost her nothing monetarily, because she saves out the eggs above those she has contracted to sell, but she does not recognize the cost of her own labor: "But it's not like they cost me anything except the baking" (8). Cora cannot appreciate that her labor is already capitalized in her business, nor does she count the lost profit that the unsold eggs would have brought.

18. See Wright, *Old South, New South*, 84–90.

This "miscue" (8), as she calls it, suggests the naïveté of the novice merchandiser, but I think Cora's rationalization of loss also points to a fundamental contradiction in a commodity economy. The ideology of the market claims that producers are matched with consumers through mutual need, and that exchange proceeds according to a rationalized process of equivalence. Cora's defense of her customer's behavior rests on her conviction that the woman "never had no use for them now" (6). To Cora's mind, use value remains inseparable from exchange value. From this standpoint, Cora refuses to submit to the impersonal abstractions of the law of the market.

I have been attempting to identify the sedimented empirical reality in *As I Lay Dying* as the process of modernization. This process includes the commodification of social and economic relations, the permeation of mass-market desires and gratifications, and the mechanization of everyday life. Such changes merge to produce the Bundrens' keen appetite for products delivered by an increasingly sophisticated technology and market: cheap false teeth, exotic bananas, electric toys, mechanically reproduced music, even culturally produced popular knowledge, like animal magnetism. When we discover Dewey Dell window shopping for an abortifacient in Mottson, we have reached the deepest penetration of the market into individual mentality.

Dewey Dell's perfect inexperience as a purchaser of anything, let alone what Lafe leads her to believe she can buy at a town drugstore, makes her dependent upon the merchant's desire to sell. Moseley feels "her eyes full on me and kind of blank too, like she was waiting for a sign" (183). Though this unit of an expanding consumer market feigns indifference, it is primed for activation. Even before the shock of what she actually wants hits Moseley, he is already feeling sorry that he will be the agent of her corruption by cosmetics. He thinks she wants "some of this female dope" that will ruin her complexion: "It's a shame, the way they poison themselves with it. But a man's got to stock it or go out of business in this country" (184). Moseley lets market pragmatics rationalize his exploitation of a defenseless clientele, never sensing how the profit motive here conflicts with his moral indignation over Dewey Dell's request for something to end her pregnancy.

Like so many of the other desires in *As I Lay Dying*, even Dewey Dell's longing to be relieved of what grows within her has been deeply conditioned by the market. In the first place, by the late 1920s, virtually every state had had strict antiabortion laws on the books for nearly three decades. In the period between 1880 and 1900, "the United States completed its

transition from a nation without abortion laws of any sort to a nation where abortion was legally and officially proscribed."[19] At least part of the strength of the antiabortion movement in the later nineteenth century involved the professionalization of medical practitioners.[20] These physicians were committed to scientific training and practice, founded the American Medical Association in 1847 to advance their cause, and attacked nonprofessional practitioners, who performed the great majority of abortions between 1840 and 1880. The morality of abortion could not be separated from its real and symbolic significance as a form of non-regular medicine. The illegalization of abortion consolidated the triumph of professionalized medicine in the United States by the 1880s (Mohr, 238–39).

If Dewey Dell finds herself up against the patriarchal state in her quest for an abortion in 1928, her mother found herself shackled to the patriarchal family in her efforts to control her body's reproduction. Addie describes her first pregnancy, with Cash, as the moment her "aloneness" is "violated" for the first time (158). Her second pregnancy is more betrayal than violation: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it" (158). Addie considers reproduction forced labor and immediately begins to plan her death wish. Her revenge plot lodges her protest that Anse should be the one to decide how many children she must bear ("Nonsense," Anse said; "you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two" [159]), that *Anse* should be the name for the shape of her body "where I used to be a virgin" (159).

Addie's resentment of maternity may also be measured against the long and complex history of reproductive rights for women in the United States. Mid-nineteenth-century America witnessed sharp increases both in the number of abortions and in the acceptability of the practice. The abortifacient industry marketed dozens of "guaranteed" cures—"French lunar" pills, "renovating" pills, and so on. The drug industry was expanding just as the medical industry was, and women wanting to limit family size constituted a market prime for development. Up through the 1880s, apothecaries sold a variety of over-the-counter abortifacients, including cotton-root, which was

19. James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: Origins of National Policy, 1800–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 226; hereafter cited in my text as Mohr.

20. The first crusade against abortion in the United States was launched by so-called regular physicians in the 1850s.

particularly popular in the South because of its long-standing reputation as a slave remedy for unwanted pregnancy (Mohr, 59–60). Profits from commercial abortifacients proved very high, and some of the country's largest drug firms entered the market by the 1870s (Mohr, 59).

Dewey Dell's confidence that she can get something at the drugstore must originate in a history of once lawful, now clandestine, trade in abortifacients for desperate, poor, and ignorant customers. But Dewey Dell's predicament also reflects substantial shifts in the status of women during the 1920s. If one recalls that the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote, had finally been ratified in 1920, Dewey Dell's insistent and brazen demand to be served symbolizes the rise of an entire gender.

If we place Dewey Dell's desire to stop what she calls the "terrible . . . process of coming unalone" (56), we may read her behavior as part of a larger resistance to oppression by women in the modernized South. Like Addie, Dewey Dell describes pregnancy as the sensation of multiplying herself: the daughter feels "my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone," as her mother thinks of having two children as being "three now" (159). Dewey Dell's quest for an abortion at least entertains the possibility of release from this process of mandated disintegration. The novel gestures toward other forms of potential emancipation—Cora's ventures into the marketplace in the face of her husband's doubtfulness, the power of education and other mass movements that put individuals in touch with the energies of progress (both Cora and Addie were schoolteachers), and women's enfranchisement at the ballot box.[21]

The female vote played a decisive role in Mississippi politics in the twenties.[22] An early indication of the effect of enfranchisement in 1920 was the candidacy of the first woman to run for office in Mississippi—in the 1922 senatorial contest. Belle Kearney polled nearly 12 percent of the popular vote but lost to James K. Vardaman in a three-way contest. (Vardaman was himself defeated in the runoff and retired from public life that year.) In 1923, the gubernatorial election drew one hundred thousand new voters, probably sixty-five thousand of them women. The front-runner and eventual winner

21. Anne Firor Scott recounts the emergence of professional and political opportunities for southern women in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

22. Information in the following paragraphs is drawn from Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876–1925* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964, originally published Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1951).

of the governorship was Henry L. Whitfield. He campaigned on a platform of reduced taxes, even though he had advocated higher taxes in an earlier position as state superintendent of education under then-Governor Vardaman.[23] The Vicksburg *Herald* credited newly voting women with Whitfield's victory over the infamous Theodore Bilbo. (Whitfield was strongly supported by the Delta and central regions of the state, which would have included Faulkner's home county.) The appearance of Whitfield's name attached to Addie's emancipatory lover creates a political resonance for their alliance. Addie expresses the meaning of her liaison with Reverend Whitfield in theological and metaphysical imagery, but it is pertinent to think of a buried political edge to Addie's development of a private life apart from Anse and to her temporarily refusing her body to him (161).

Of course, Addie has had her own occupation before Anse comes a-courting so persuasively. She and Cora Tull could well have owed their careers as schoolteachers to the Progressivist policies of Governor James K. Vardaman, who was elected to office in 1903 after three attempts, the last successful because of the recent adoption of direct primary voting.[24] Vardaman campaigned for social and economic reforms common to the national Progressivist positions: the regulation of corporations, women's suffrage, educational improvements, and Prohibition.

By the time Vardaman tried to recover the Senate seat he had lost in 1918, he was reduced by discouragement and mental illness to virtual incapacity. During the senatorial campaign of 1922, he sat on platforms while others spoke for him. The Jackson *Daily News* summed up his plight derisively: "It would be just as sensible to go out to the Mississippi Insane Hospital, pick out one of the unfortunate inmates . . . and adorn him with a Senatorial toga."[25] It is likely that Vardaman Bundren was born and honorifi-

23. Faulkner's interest in state politics would have been heightened by his family's involvement. In 1919, his uncle managed the successful gubernatorial campaign of Lee Russell, son of a tenant farmer from south Lafayette County and onetime law partner of Faulkner's grandfather. Bill Faulkner accompanied his uncle on many of the candidate's local appearances. In the summer of 1922, his uncle himself ran for election to a district court judgeship, and Bill served as his chauffeur during the campaign (see Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, 2 vols. [New York: Random House, 1974], 243–45).

24. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 275.

25. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks*, 302. Vardaman and his Progressivist successors, like Theodore Bilbo (governor from 1915–1919), contributed to two projects whose effects we see in *As I Lay Dying*: an ambitious road construction program and the improvement of public health facilities, like the mental asylum in Jackson, to which Darl is sent (it is named after Whitfield). The Faulkner family supported Vardaman's career, though they

cally named during this last hurrah, when Vardaman's loyal constituencies actually delivered him a plurality in the open election but were insufficient to win the runoff.

Disintegration

I have sought to re-embody *As I Lay Dying* in order to measure the vast effort of transmutation that produces one of modernist literature's most thematically abstract and aesthetically elite works. The negation of empirical reality, if we recall Adorno's description of the process, allows the modern work to transcend its opposite—that which is not art—at the same time the work remains in communication with that opposite. The particularity of the modernizing South does, I admit, have little ostensible effect in *As I Lay Dying*. Criticism of the novel properly attends to the philosophical, metaphysical, psychological, and technical issues that comprise its main interests. At the same time, however, we can uncover the novel's reflection on the processes that produce these interests. If modernization is the novel's sedimented material, how does modernist form attempt to disembody it in the process of turning it into art?

The plot of *As I Lay Dying* centers on a crisis of disintegration. The Bundren family, deprived of its wife and mother, struggles to mobilize itself. Burdened by the dead past, which continues to exercise its will ghoulishly over the present, the Bundrens momentarily lose their balance. The family is threatened with disintegration: Along the way, Addie disappears into a box, a river, and a hole in the ground; Jewel disappears into the countryside; Vardaman runs off; Cash slips under water; Dewey Dell vanishes into a basement; and Anse goes into a house for a long time. Eventually, the forces of reintegration muster themselves, but it is difficult not to read the story as a fable of social upheaval, as I have suggested, with the modernization of the South implied both in the Bundrens' move to town and in their centrifugal impulses away from the broken forms of family and community.

The novel's replete imagery of dismemberment and disunification may be represented by a passage in which Vardaman thinks of Jewel's horse, invisible in the barn:

> It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings and stamp-

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never permitted him or the similarly lowborn Lee Russell to be favored by their social intimacy.

> ings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*. I see him dissolve—legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames—and float upon the dark in fading solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. (52)

Addie's death is a synecdoche for a whole set of disintegrative events in the novel's world. The New South's partial rejection of the ways of antebellum gentility; the ruptures induced by emancipatory movements among formerly subjugated populations like blacks, poor whites, and women; the economic endangerment of the small farmer; modernism's rejection of realism and traditional modes like epic or tragedy—all these create the sensation of disintegration, dissolution, disembodiment. Faulkner himself once said that to write about the disappearance of the aristocratic South of the Sartorises was to attempt "if not the capture of that world and the feeling of it as you'd preserve a kernel or a leaf to indicate the lost forest, at least to keep the evocative skeleton of the dessicated [sic] leaf."[26]

I want to recall the ambivalence that early modernism displayed toward the disintegrative force of modernization. For example, technology, the expression of the masses' desires and their gratification, the redistribution of wealth and means of production, the extension of enfranchisement, and so on nourished utopian hopes.[27] As small farmers attempted to amass some capital by selling their labor and other goods (like timber) on the market, they hedged against extreme reliance on cotton, whose prices fell after World War I and whose production was nearly ruined by heavy rains in the late twenties—the worst occurring in 1929, the summer before Faulkner began *As I Lay Dying*.

As the coherence of the world from the standpoint of certain privileged racial, class, and gender positions begins to disintegrate, new voices and subjectivities emerge. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the morose grief of the Compson brothers for their lost Caddy figures in part a pathologically nostalgic aristocracy moaning over its dispossession. By the last section of that novel, however, it becomes clear that the whole world does not share this mentality. Dilsey emerges from the ruination of the Compson house to

26. This quotation is from an unpublished manuscript in the Yale University Library, but it is quoted here from Blotner, *Faulkner*, 531–32.

27. Huyssen describes how the avant-gardist movements embraced the emancipatory potential of the machine age in *GD*, 12–13.

mark out the "endin" of one historical period and the "beginnin," perhaps, of another.[28] Idiocy, suicide, paranoia, hypochondria, delusion—these are not everyone's destinies, only those cast down, like the Compsons. The analytical potency of Faulkner's fiction forces us to ask *who* experiences these changes as disintegration.

As I Lay Dying also openly worries that modernization will lead to greater misery. The novel's imagery reflects the fear that humans themselves are becoming technologized. Consider the interest in prosthodontics and graphophonic simulations of live sound. The hardworking Tull describes his mistrust of introspection "because [man's] brain it's like a piece of machinery: it wont stand a whole lot of racking. It's best when it all runs along the same, doing the day's work and not no one part used no more than needful" (64). As Cash saws the coffin boards singlemindedly, Darl sees the "in and out of that unhurried imperviousness as a piston moves in the oil" (69). Similarly, Darl describes Jewel and Vernon wading across the flooded river: "It is as though [the surface] had severed them both at a single blow, the two torsos moving. . . . It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time" (149). Surely these anxieties derive from a historical fear that the proletariat in industrialized countries will increasingly become deadened extensions of machinery.

Such views of the dangers of modernization would be fairly commonplace within the general post–World War I modernist project of rejecting the dream-turned-nightmare of technology and the vulgarities of social realism.[29] The difference in a writer like Faulkner arises from his refusal to reconcile the ambivalence toward modernization. The ambivalence remains in active dialectical relation, and the efforts to reconcile the differences are subject to conscious reflection within *As I Lay Dying*.

Disembodiment

The body of social material that constitutes the sediment of any work of art must be negated, left behind in the process that establishes the work's required autonomy. Modern art—artistic production with a desacralized cultural function—must seek autonomy for itself; it is not ordained by ritualistic or other supramundane authority. The work of art constitutes its identity and

28. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 344.
29. Huyssen observes that Adorno conceived of modernism as "a reaction formation to mass culture and commodification" (*GD*, 24).

autonomy by mediating the "substratum" of content through artistic form. Adorno formulates this relation between art and social reality:

> It is by virtue of its separation from empirical reality that the work of art can become a being of a higher order, fashioning the relation between the whole and its parts in accordance with its own needs. . . . We can say that art's opposition to the real world is in the realm of form; but this occurs, generally speaking, in a mediated way such that aesthetic form is a sedimentation of content. (*AT*, 8–9)

The sediment of content becomes such through a *process* of sedimentation. I want to try to describe the way *As I Lay Dying* transmutes the empirical realities I have been describing above. In this modernist text's foregrounding of formal problems, we see the effort to mediate the ambivalence toward modernization. In Adorno's terminology, "the unresolved antagonisms of reality reappear in art in the guise of immanent problems of artistic form. . . . The aesthetic tensions manifesting themselves in works of art express the essence of reality in and through their emancipation from the factual facade of exteriority" (*AT*, 8). Adorno's emphasis on the dynamic process of sedimentation, of "sloughing off" a "repressive, external-empirical mode of experiencing the world" (*AT*, 6) distinguishes his approach from a primitive distinction of form and content.

Early in *As I Lay Dying*, Darl describes the peculiar pitch of the Bundren house. Because it slants downhill, a "feather dropped near the front door will rise and brush along the ceiling, slanting backward, until it reaches the down-turning current at the back door: so with voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head" (18). Here, Darl identifies what I will call the disembodiment effect, which characterizes almost every major facet of the novel. The image of voices loosed in the air, floating bodiless around the listener's head, precisely marks the status of voice and body in the novel.

Some of the most brilliant criticism of *As I Lay Dying* describes the varieties of disembodiment. In *The House Divided*, Eric Sundquist gives the problem its fullest treatment in a chapter organized around the relation of the novel's rhetoric to its themes of death and grief: "The book is obsessively concerned with problems of disembodiment, with disjunctive relationships between character and narration or between bodily self and conscious identity."[30] Sundquist elaborates on the disjunctions that plague

30. Eric Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 29; hereafter cited in my text as *HD*.

the characters' efforts to affirm the integrity of identity, of voice and body, of one mind and another, of word and deed. The entire novel, according to Sundquist, engages the author and reader in a process analogous to grieving, in which one expresses "an identity that is most intensely and passionately present even as it passes away."[31]

One goal of my earlier examination of the substratum of social antagonisms in the novel was to put us in a position to resituate this disembodiment effect. The typical view largely grants the work's "seclusion" from social reality; Sundquist, for example, notes that although it continues Faulkner's exploration of "the intimate family brutalities" in the earlier *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*, *As I Lay Dying* "can, more than any of his major novels, be read independently" (*HD*, 28). As "a compendium of . . . problematic techniques," that is, the novel floats free of its social ground. I propose that the disembodiment manifested formally in *As I Lay Dying* constitutes the sedimentation of social disintegration.

I have used the term *modernization* to encompass various strains of social disintegration indicated in *As I Lay Dying*. The literal traces of this disintegrative process share the idea of disembodiment: Addie's decorporealization into metaphor ("My mother is a fish" [74]), memory, and print; Dewey Dell's quest to disburden herself of another's body ("And I am Lafe's guts" [54]); Darl's efforts to project himself telepathically into others' bodies; Jewel's yearning to rigidify and so deaden his body; Cash's willingness to inanimate one limb; and so forth. In all these quarters, we find suggestions of the larger processes of the work, which seek to mediate the emancipatory, yet deadening, antagonisms of social disintegration by formalizing them. Thus, the formal disjunctions of speaker and utterance,

31. *HD*, 42. Two other studies of formal disembodiment will secure my point. Stephen M. Ross has meticulously distinguished the mimetic voices of *As I Lay Dying* (i.e., those that create the illusion of personalized speech) from the textual voice of the novel (that element of the discourse that resists anthropomorphism and has the status of pure writing) in "'Voice' in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*," *PMLA* 94 (March 1979): 300–310. This line of analysis establishes the disembodiment of voice into writing and describes an irreconcilable fissure in the novel's discourse. Ross's categories explain the discrepancies between the language on the page and the characters' expressions they are supposed to represent. Likewise, Patrick O'Donnell subtly uncovers the "ambivalence of metaphor" in *As I Lay Dying*. He demonstrates that metaphors are "signs of the *relationality* of language conceived as a series of semantic shifts" (see O'Donnell, "Spectral Road," 63). O'Donnell demonstrates that language signifies through the slipping contact of signifier and signified, and that this conceptualization of metaphor informs the imagery describing the uncertain relation between surface and depth, inner and outer, embodiment and essence.

figure and meaning, radical perspectivism and coherent narrative, and so on function to "express the essence of reality" by disguising "the factual facade of exteriority" (*AT*, 8).

Faulkner concentrates the activities of disguise in his author surrogate Darl so that he can examine them critically. In so doing, Faulkner comes to distinguish one modernist aesthetic that is exhausted from another that will prove productive. Darl's reference to the "cubistic bug" identifies his aesthetic procedures: In the earlier part of the sentence, he describes the barn's "conical facade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin" (201). Darl's cubism substitutes formal intricacy for the reality of a blazing barn; it converts the issue of his agency in destroying property into a question of geometry. Darl relies on two principal methods of modernism in treating experience in *As I Lay Dying*: he aestheticizes and he universalizes.

The first technique instances his poetic temperament and artistic eye.[32] Describing Cash's hard work in finishing the coffin, Darl transforms the grime of spent energy and labor into a beautifully rendered moment:

> The lantern sits on a stump. Rusted, grease-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth. Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas. The boards look like long smooth tatters torn from the flat darkness and turned backside out. (67)

Notice how the material reality of Cash's work first becomes an intensely aesthetic effect and then becomes de-substantialized into the abstract image of tatters of darkness reversed. The modulations toward disembodiment practiced in this passage characterize Darl's regular efforts to expunge a certain kind of reality through aesthetic treatment. The verbal version of aestheticization appears in the following passage, in which Darl's playful musical effects conspire to make Addie's expressions meaningless: "The breeze was setting up from the barn, so we put her under the apple tree, where the moonlight can dapple the apple tree upon the long slumbering flanks within which now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret

32. On the poetic effects of Darl's style, see François L. Pitavy, "Through Darl's Eyes Darkly: The Vision of the Poet in *As I Lay Dying*," *William Faulkner: Materials, Studies, and Criticism* 4 (July 1982): 37–62.

and murmurous bubbling" (195). Darl turns the "talk" of Addie's decomposition into alliterative and pictorial abstraction.

Darl's complementary treatment of his material universalizes its meaning. Having bought cement in Mottson to repair Cash's leg, the Bundrens must find a bucket and water to mix it. As they pause, Darl notices that Dewey Dell still carries the package supposed to contain Mrs. Tull's cakes:

> "You had more touble [sic: for "trouble"] than you expected, selling those cakes in Mottson," I say. How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls. Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death is Cash. (191)

The discourses of economics and labor frame Darl's cosmic despair. He responds to his sister's desperation by generalizing to the point of vertigo, arriving at a protective irony that is mostly verbal posturing. Making his brother into a sawdust-leaking doll underscores Darl's talent for the metaphysical conceit, but it also identifies him with the cerebral retreats from politics and history practiced by Mr. Compson, not to mention the Vanderbilt modernists.[33]

Reintegration

The danger for all cultural products in an age of consumption is that they will be neutralized through commodification. Faulkner fought this battle strenuously. One thinks of his slamming "shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists"[34] in order to write at least one book—*The Sound and the Fury*—that need not defer to consumer taste. On the other hand, Faulkner also understood that the market presented the only way the novelist could reach the readers who would confer literary immortality. He constantly wrote for film and short story markets because, in effect, they were financing his art fiction. Faulkner's engagements with the nascent culture industry in the United States bring him to the brink of being able to see a profound shift in the status of the work of art:

33. See Richard Moreland's account of modernist irony as a component of the Agrarians' social outlook in *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 23–26.

34. William Faulkner, "An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*," ed. James B. Meriwether, *The Southern Review*, n.s., 8 (October 1972): 710.

> Just as art works become commodities and are enjoyed as such, the commodity itself in consumer society has become image, representation, spectacle. Use value has been replaced by packaging and advertising. The commodification of art ends up in the aesthetization of the commodity. (*GD*, 21)

As well as this description fits the elementary negotiations of consumer society by the Bundren family, it also describes the product of high cultural commodification, the modernist novel itself.

That *As I Lay Dying* is produced by the very processes it critiques may be seen in the traces of reification apparent in Faulkner's own comments about writing it. He referred to this novel as his tour de force and said that he could write it so exceptionally fast (six weeks, without changing a word—some exaggeration, but not much) because he knew every word before he began. Composed with the hum of the University of Mississippi's power station in the background, in the hours Faulkner worked on the night shift, *As I Lay Dying* takes on the sheen of a highly technical, even machine-made object.

Cash's graphophone quietly reminds us of the technologically reproduced, illusorily prosthetic qualities of novels themselves—mass-produced, mass-consumed goods that simulate life and speech, and that gratify us imaginatively when life is full of discontentment and loss. As the crisis of bereavement begins to move toward resolution, we might wonder whether the novel functions like the graphophone that eases Cash's odd hours, or like the bananas that console the novel's two disappointed shoppers. If *As I Lay Dying* wraps up its story of misery by reintegrating it into a tragicomic narrative of aesthetic virtuosity—if it is, again, like the graphophone, "all shut up as pretty as a picture" (241)—does it not fail in the modernist project of resisting and transmuting the forces of modernization and commodification?

Darl's impulse to integrate the complex and intractable realities of his world into abstract structures represents a danger in the modernist project. *As I Lay Dying* rejects the sort of falsifying modernism represented in Darl's overly aesthetic and universalized responses to his material. His incarceration at the end of the novel figuratively confirms Faulkner's repudiation of the sort of art that too effortlessly fills the gaps of a story, that too readily composes itself abstractly, and that too hastily universalizes its meaning. Unfeeling as the remark may seem, I wonder if Cash is not right in concluding about Darl that "this world is not his world; this life his life" (242). For Faulkner to proceed into the 1930s with his great fiction of social and

historical analysis, he needed to exorcise the strictly aestheticist impulse of his modernism. Instead, the critical, self-reflective modernism he forged became a powerful instrument for *making* a world out of this world, a life out of this life.

Decomposition

Does Cash really believe that the music coming from the new Mrs. Bundren's graphophone is *as* natural as a music band? Are we to believe that Cash means to replace one Mrs. Bundren with another in his story without noting their difference? Do bananas make Vardaman as happy as the red train would have? At many points, *As I Lay Dying* seeks to pass off replicas and substitutes as the real thing. Here, the novel sees into the core of mass culture—in which image replaces substance, reproduction eliminates the very idea of an original, commodification masks the circumstances of production. Yet, the novel also resists its own impulses by sabotaging the faithful workings of biological, mechanical, and social reproduction. Slips, miscues, gaps, and hesitations interfere with the powerful drive toward reintegration.

One kind of textual interference shows up in the novel's many ellipses. The notorious example belongs to Addie: "The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*" (159). In this disruption of syntax, Addie produces a problem, some resistance, a hesitation about the authority males have to name, possess, and take the woman's intactness. Compare a similar moment in Moseley's section, just after he has furiously sent Dewey Dell back to the custody of her father, brother, boyfriend, "or the first man you come to on the road." He goes on to think, "But it's a hard life they have; sometimes a man . . . . . if there can ever be any excuse for sin, which it cant be" (187; ellipses in original). The breaking off of Moseley's sentence allows him to entertain genuine sympathy for Dewey Dell's plight and likely victimization. In gaps like these, we are invited to think about problems from conflicting standpoints, to evaluate the pressures silencing discourse, as well as those producing it.

The small snarls in the plot line also produce moments of reflective pause. An example occurs at the point the Bundrens enter Jefferson, when the stinking coffin overtakes several blacks on the road: " 'Great God,' one says; 'what they got in that wagon?' " (212). Jewel "whirls" on the insulter but attacks the wrong person: " 'Son of a bitches,' he says. As he does

so he is abreast of the white man, who has paused. It is as though Jewel had gone blind for the moment, for it is the white man toward whom he whirls" (212). Darl jumps in to defuse the confrontation, but the moment spotlights the relation between racial and class strife. In Darl's judgment, Jewel would have to be "blind" to identify a white man as his adversary. Poor whites, especially hill farmers like the Bundrens, took their interests to be in direct competition with those of blacks. They consistently supported the otherwise progressive, but virulently racist, policies of politicians like James Vardaman, who was known as "The White Chief" for good reason. The irony of the moment involves its revelation of an authentic ground for conflict between whites. Jewel sulks that the white man has insulted them out of snobbery: "Thinks because he's a goddamn town fellow" (213). At moments like these, the novel makes us sort out the way racial conflict is an ideological construct that deflects potentially more productive class conflict in the South.

Perhaps the most potent sort of hesitation in the novel derives ultimately from Addie's death and from the numerous ways it disrupts the reproduction of everyday reality. Addie's more or less abrupt departure stops a lot of folks dead in their tracks. For all his cruelties and selfishness, the most touching victim may still be Anse. Addie's death makes Anse confront a dilemma. Repeatedly, narrators portray him as looking silently out over his land. The first time we see him meditating, Jewel has insisted that he decide about whether he wants his sons to haul one more load of lumber despite Addie's imminent death. Anse "gazes out across the land, rubbing his knees" (16). He is thinking about a real problem: the conflict between emotional and economic obligations. The summer of 1929 saw ruinous floods destroy cotton crops, whose value had fallen steadily throughout the decade.

The farmer's silent meditation on what is happening to farmland in the South possesses great poignancy when the social transformations of modernization are borne in mind. How many other times Anse and Darl are described as staring at their land! Here is Tull on Anse: "His eyes look like pieces of burnt-out cinder fixed in his face, looking out over the land" (27–28). Over and over, Darl broods "with his eyes full of the land" (32; see also 23 and 106). Dewey Dell might make fun of Anse's immobility, but there is a serious side to the image she offers: Anse "looks like right after the maul hits the steer and it no longer alive and dont yet know that it is dead" (55). The analogy echoes Addie's remark that Anse "did not know he was

dead" (160). One wonders if farmers like the Bundrens could already feel that they were sociological corpses.

My analysis of the reflective and potentially critical modernism of *As I Lay Dying* would not be complete unless I observed that opportunities to think descend on the characters as a kind of enforced leisure. Tull, for example, accompanies Anse and the younger Bundrens across the sunken bridge through a torrent and finds himself looking back in amazement at his own farm: "When I looked back at my mule it was like he was one of these here spy-glasses and I could look at him standing there and see all the broad land and my house sweated outen it like it was the more the sweat, the broader the land; the more the sweat, the tighter the house because it would take a tight house for Cora" (125). This moment of almost perfect defamiliarization comes on the heels of Tull's crossing the river. A child has led him, "like he [Vardaman] was saying They wont nothing hurt you. Like he was saying about a fine place he knowed where Christmas come twice with Thanksgiving and lasts on through the winter and the spring and the summer, and if I just stayed with him I'd be all right too" (125). This is a very odd juxtaposition of perceptions—they quite nearly read like hallucinations. The logic joining them arises from the utopian content of Vardaman's drive toward town, that consumer paradise where everyone is made a child by wanting something better than he or she is entitled to, where every worker fantasizes about leaving the sweated-out land and sweated-out house on the other side of the river.

In these moments of reflection, we may begin to appreciate how Faulkner's modernist aesthetic reequips itself for his major novels of the thirties. Leaving idle metafiction, like *Mosquitoes*, behind, radically interrogating and finally exorcising the effete poeticism of Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren, Faulkner prepares for an experimentalism deeply implicated in the search for truth about the South in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The way for Faulkner's aesthetic to keep the dialectic between modernization and modernism critically charged is to resist with the force of decomposition the impulse toward reintegration and commodification. The objects furnished by mass culture mark the very discontent they would neutralize. When Vardaman sees the toy train in Jefferson again, he says, "It made my heart hurt" (199). We understand his pure longing here. Later, he experiences that same hurt when he sees the Gillespies' barn burning: "Then it went swirling, making the stars run backward without falling. It hurt my heart like the train did" (208). To make a book that refuses to

solve its difficulties, that remains in communication with the sediment of reality it frames and forms, that forces its participants to think deeply about their lives, is to make a book that reproduces with a critical difference the conditions of its own making. It is to make a book that continues to hurt the heart.