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The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner

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3 Faulkner and the Culture Industry

"Thanks for your heart, Bart." – *Barton Fink*

Boy meets girl.

Boy sues girl.

Boy meets girl.

Boy sues girl. – William Faulkner

"Sometimes I think if I do one more treatment or screenplay," Faulkner complained in 1944, after a decade of intermittent screenwriting in Hollywood, "I'll lose whatever power I have as a writer" (Wilde 309). The myth of the artist corrupted by newly dominant commercial media like the movies and magazines has become the modern counterpart to the nineteenth century's myth of the serious writer condemned to popular neglect (H. N. Smith 3–15). Rather than Hawthorne's fury at the "damned mob of scribbling women" or Melville's lapse into obscurity and eventual silence, the 1920s and 1930s produced legends about Faulkner and Fitzgerald squandering years hack writing in California's Babylon.¹

Two reflections on the new market conditions for writing after World War I – one imaginative, the other theoretical – may help us understand what the mass media were to mean to Faulkner's generation. In their 1991 film *Barton Fink*, Joel and Ethan Coen illustrate the destructive effect of Hollywood on the serious writers who sought to make fortunes there while

preserving their artistic integrity. Barton Fink, launched by the triumph of his first Broadway play in 1941, agrees hesitantly to his agent's offer of a lucrative screenwriting contract with "Capital Pictures." A week of writer's block on his first assignment drives Fink to consult another writer, who chances to be a famous Southern novelist – America's greatest living novelist, according to Fink's startled salutation of Bill Mayhew in the studio men's room.

Fink comes to know a once great artist now lost to cynicism and alcohol, the drink standing, as Mayhew's mistress puts it, as a "levee" against the "manure" of Hollywood. Between rounds of violent delirium tremens, Mayhew inscribes a copy of his latest novel to Fink; he wishes that this book, *Nebuchadnezzar*, may "divert" Fink in his "stay among the Philistines." Despite the assurances of Capital's head, Jack Lipnik, that the writer is "KING!" at his studio (a promise sealed when Lipnik kisses the sole of the terrified Fink's shoe), it is the mogul who commands the writer's imagination. "Right now the contents of your head is the property of Capital Pictures," Lipnik's assistant warns Fink early in the film. After both Mayhew and his mistress, who admits to Fink that she has ghosted her lover's last two novels and several screenplays, are shot to death and then decapitated, Barton is left doubting if any writer can practice "the life of the mind" at Capital Pictures. As he sits beside the Pacific in the film's last scene, a young woman asks if the box beside him is his. Because he has been entrusted with the parcel by the murderer, we may suspect that it contains a victim's head, but Fink won't look and can't say:

"What's in the box?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't it yours?"

"I don't know."

After Lipnik has wrathfully rejected his "arty" screenplay, Fink is told that he will remain under contract, everything he writes belonging to Capital, but that the studio will use noth-

ing until he learns to turn out what is wanted. Fink must decide if he's been handed his head in a box, if the studio has indeed taken his heart.

Barton Fink conducts a narrative of initiation, complete with human sacrifice, through which the serious writer learns what it means to become a commercial writer. The Coen brothers care about historical specificity, populating their film with caricatures of recognizable figures from the studio decades, because they wish to identify a pivotal moment in modern American culture. To the extent the film satirizes moviemakers' pandering to consumers with mass-produced pulp under the direction of craven investors and assorted delusionaries, it exposes the emergence of what has been called "the culture industry." During those same years, two German Jews, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, took refuge in Hollywood from Nazism, and resumed their critical investigations of art in modern culture by writing a series of essays on the relation between enlightenment and artistic expression. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" argues that a singular transformation has occurred in contemporary art's admission that it is a commodity and that "a change in the character of the art commodity itself is coming about. What is new is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods" (DE 157).

For Horkheimer and Adorno, what the culture industry produces violates art's essential purposelessness, its expression of individuality through style, its insistence on beauty and pleasure in their pure uselessness, and hence its fundamentally negative function in society. Art ought to resist – impassively, through its willful beauty – the social and economic practices in which it is embedded. However much I may have to simplify their position (elaborated individually and collaboratively over a number of other works),² I do so to avail myself of a critique that probes mass culture much more deeply

than the shallow complaint that it lacks aesthetic merit. Horkheimer and Adorno let us ask what such debased art *does*.³

There is little doubt about what such art *is*, and how it got to be. Horkheimer and Adorno inveigh against the unremitting uniformity and predictability of art designed by the culture industry:

A constant sameness governs the relationship to the past as well. What is new about the phase of mass culture compared with the late liberal stage is the exclusion of the new. The machine rotates on the same spot. While determining consumption it excludes the untried as a risk. The movie-makers distrust any manuscript which is not reassuringly backed by a bestseller. . . . For only the universal triumph of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction promises that nothing changes, and nothing unsuitable will appear. Any additions to the well-proven culture inventory are too much of a speculation. The ossified forms – such as the sketch, short story, problem film, or hit song – are the standardized average of later liberal taste, dictated with threats from above. (*DE* 134)

When Jack Lipnik (the Coen brothers' version of Jack Warner, head of Warner Bros.) cries out to Fink to "tell a story. . . . Make us laugh, make us cry" and tries to explain to his new writer that his assignment involves writing to genre – "it's a *wrestling* picture" – he illustrates this point exactly. Only Mayhew's secretary-mistress, Audrey Taylor, knows how to teach the aspiring scriptwriter this lesson; she instructs him about "formulas," and as he embraces his new muse, the camera leads us into the bathroom and down the waste pipe of the toilet.

Horkheimer and Adorno see the emergence of the culture industry as a historical event, the product of the massive infusion of capital into the cultural sphere. Perhaps earlier the popular arts possessed more potential for originality, but once the "unleashed entrepreneurial system" (*DE* 120) gained control, "films, radio and magazines [came to] make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part (*DE* 120)." Fink arrives in 1941 to find this system firmly entrenched. But the

historical Faulkner arrived in 1932, when a Hollywood figure like Sam Marx (head of the Story Department for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) was hoping to recruit serious writers to the movies because “he was clearly interested in the possibility of their making an original and creative contribution rather than bent on turning them into formulaic ‘hacks’” (*FMS* xxiii). The attitude was shared by early studio pioneers, including the intellectually accomplished Irving Thalberg, who headed MGM, and by Howard Hawks, who grew to be Faulkner’s sponsor in Hollywood, but who admired him first as a reader of his fiction.

It would be tempting (but finally simplistic) to blame technology itself for the changes in mass culture that Horkheimer and Adorno find most deplorable. Walter Benjamin risks such a view in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” an essay remarkable for its grasp of how mass-production techniques govern distinctively modern art forms like photography, musical recordings, and film. But the force that determines the industrialization of art must be traced, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, to the interests of monopoly capitalism:

The basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole thing together until their leveling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered. It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. This is the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today’s economy. The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. (*DE* 121)

What makes the culture industry so pernicious is its hijacking of art’s capacity to resist the social order (including the dominant economic practice). Because mass culture in the

1930s and 1940s came to rely on centrally and complexly organized systems that oversaw national production, distribution, and advertisement functions, mass culture's own interests lined up with those of liberal monopoly capitalism, the prevailing social and economic order. As a result, the mass-produced cultural work delivered experiences that were socially "useful" to the status quo. Horkheimer and Adorno identify the way the culture industry produces false satisfactions for legitimate desires. If art ought to usher us into the realm of pure pleasure, industrial art disciplines pleasure to serve the narrative and moralistic ends of formulaic plot ("every kiss in the revue film has to contribute to the career of the boxer" [DE 142]); if popular art promises purposeless amusement, the movies or magazines insist that we consume cultural fare for self-improvement or cultural prestige, thereby rationalizing purposelessness under purposeful entertainment; if art lives as the sublimation of desire, the culture industry promises only to prolong and defer desire (it "does not sublimate; it represses" [DE 14]); if art ought to stimulate the audience's powers of imagination and reflection, the movie instead controls the direction and speed of response and robs the consumer of spontaneity (DE 126); if the greatest art expresses its dense negation of the stratified social order, mass culture superficially synthesizes serious and "light" art into harmless universality by pretending that elite and working-class interests may be aligned.

This last charge constitutes the severest failure of the culture industry for Horkheimer and Adorno, and it will carry us back to *Barton Fink* for a moment before we proceed to Faulkner's trials as a commercial writer. Because contemporary mass culture, as a debased form of bourgeois art, seems to absorb proletarian materials, it masks the conditions under which it comes into existence: the exclusion of the lower class, of the disfranchised under capitalism.

The purity of bourgeois art, which hypostasized itself as a world of freedom in contrast to what was happening in the material world, was from the beginning bought with the exclusion of the lower

classes – with whose cause, the real universality, art keeps faith precisely by its freedom from the ends of the false universality. Serious art has been withheld from those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness, and who must be glad if they can use time not spent at the production line just to keep going. (*DE* 135)

Serious bourgeois art can be faithful to its nature only by *admitting* it is founded on social exclusions and by *refusing* to pretend that “high” art belongs to all. Bourgeois art thus expresses an implicit negativity toward the social order responsible for class divisions by displaying the contradiction between claimed universality and the practice of elitist retreat from the material world.

Barton Fink offers up a deliberately cliché-ridden version of Faulkner–Mayhew as the suffering artist in Hollywood, the once kingly writer grazing madly like Nebuchadnezzar outside Babylon. But the Coens also assign some of Faulkner’s experiences to Barton Fink in order to examine the unwitting complicity of the serious writer with the culture industry, even as he anticipates resisting it. Like Faulkner, who arrived for his first interview with a studio official bleeding from a head wound, Fink suffers mosquito bites that disfigure his face and prefigure his bloody path through Hollywood. (Fink later slaps a mosquito on Audrey’s back and discovers she’s dead in his bed.) His first assignment is a Wallace Beery wrestling film, as it was for Faulkner, although Fink lasts through the nightmarishly repetitive screening of an earlier Beery success (“I will destroy you,” the wrestler promises to the viewer), whereas Faulkner left after twenty minutes (“Can you stop this thing? I know how it’s going to end,” he told the startled projectionist). Col. Jack Warner tricks Faulkner into a seven-year contract at the end of his Hollywood career, a biblically resonant number taken by the Coens for the length of Fink’s bondage, too. Fink is the latest avatar of the innocent writer, Faulkner’s youth, the doubling signaled by having aspirant and mentor share the Hollywood muse Audrey.

Fink’s aspirations in 1941, however, have been shaped by

the 1930s, the very decade so many of modernism's masters partially sat out in the studios of California. Fink tries to explain to his agent why he might not want to abandon the New York stage; he's on the verge of real success, "the creation of a new living theatre, of and about the common man." "I guess I try to make a difference," he professes. These are the very hopes he transplants to Hollywood, where they are given their comeuppance brutally. Fink's neighbor and apparent soulmate at the Earle Hotel is an insurance salesman named Charlie Meadows. Charlie sympathizes with Fink's struggles to write for the pictures, offers to tell him stories about a real salesman's adventures and to explain wrestling, and listens politely to Fink's description of himself as one who writes "about you – the average working stiff, the common man."

Not only will such writing fail to satisfy Lipnik, it finally enrages the common man himself. For it turns out that Fink's working stiff is a homicidal psychotic known as "Madman Mundt" to the Los Angeles Police Department detectives who solve the murders. In a moment of apocalyptic fury, Mundt sets fire to the hotel, guns down the two detectives, and releases Fink from the bed to which he's been handcuffed. Fink's fatuous presumption that he can be the Shakespeare of the common man (his Broadway success is called *Bare Ruined Choirs*, a phrase from Sonnet 73) vanishes into Mundt's roaring accusation "YOU DON'T LISTEN." Like the doctor who charges Charlie ten dollars to tell him he has an ear infection he already knows he has, Fink looks into the face of the disciplined and abused common man and discovers his murderous rage at being kept from everything beyond what he knows. Consumer, product, and victim of the culture industry, Mundt exposes its covert complicity with fascistic oppression. As he runs down the hotel corridor firing his sub-machine gun, he screams, "I'll show you the life of the mind," and executes one of the detectives with a "Heil Hitler." The 1930s turned bourgeois writers into "tourists with typewriters" (in Mundt's words), and they contributed to the taming of

the masses through the dissemination of industrial culture. "The masses, demoralized by their life under the pressure of the system, and who show signs of civilization only in modes of behavior which have been forced on them and through which fury and recalcitrance show everywhere, are to be kept in order by the sight of an inexorable life and exemplary behavior. Culture has always played its part in taming revolutionary and barbaric instincts. Industrial culture adds its contribution" (*DE* 152).

With the recognition that the life of the mind is the practice of violent repression, *Barton Fink* draws to a close its meditation on the emergence of the culture industry. At a time when the *Saturday Evening Post* might pay \$2,000 for a single story, or MGM that much per week to its celebrity writers, few professionals could afford to ignore such "gold mine[s]" (*SL* 110). From 1929, when Faulkner married the recently divorced Estelle Oldham Franklin (and gained two stepchildren), through his father's death in 1932 (leaving him as oldest son responsible for his mother), a daughter's birth in 1933, his brother's death in 1935 (for the welfare of whose widow and children he took responsibility), and the steady acquisition of a house and property in Oxford, Mississippi, until 1948, when he sold the film rights to *Intruder in the Dust* for \$50,000 to MGM, Faulkner struggled to remain solvent. Royalties from his novels rarely cleared three figures. What he could not raise in advances from his publishers, he earned by selling short stories or getting studio deals for six or seven months at a time. Complaining that writers ought to be free from such "bourgeois impediments" (*SL* 90), he submitted to these two forms of "orthodox prostitution" (*SL* 85).

Once we acknowledge the economic and social coordinates of all cultural expression, we may be tempted to simplify the nature of commercial work by seeing it as designed strictly to meet market requirements. But emphatically for a writer like Faulkner, even works aimed at the mass market possess reflective and resistant features that make their *relation* to the

culture industry and the social order it endorses the very heart of the problem. In the cases of Faulkner's limited experimentation with popular forms for his longer fiction, he typically ends up extending the conventions and probing more deeply into the causes of their popularity. Leslie Fiedler's survey of the pop culture material in *Sanctuary* demonstrates superbly how Faulkner both avails himself of formulaic detective and horror fiction, comic strips, and pornography and also reflects on the morality of an aesthetics of debasement. Anne Goodwyn Jones likewise shows how Faulkner's incorporation and transformation of popular romance elements in *The Wild Palms* expresses alarm about the stability of gender positions and artistic authority in a social and cultural hierarchy threatened by mass culture. How may we locate the same sort of reflective resistances in Faulkner's writing for screen and short-story markets?

The first piece of fiction Faulkner sold to Hollywood was a story called "Turnabout," originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (March 5, 1932). MGM paid him \$2,250 for the rights. Faulkner had already begun preparing scripts under his first studio contract at MGM when Howard Hawks suggested he work on an adaptation of his own story. Hawks was familiar with Faulkner's fiction and had entertained a project to film *Sanctuary*, but he despaired of getting anything resembling it past the censors. The director's brother William (later Faulkner's agent in Hollywood) called his attention to the *Post* story. Faulkner produced a script in a scant five days; it was so good that Thalberg gave Hawks permission to shoot it as it was.

In "Turnabout" an American aviator (a captain named Bogard) discovers a drunken British sailor asleep on the street in a port town during the war. Thinking to scare the apparently callow and underemployed boatman into a more professional attitude toward combat, Bogard takes Claude Hope on a bombing run over Germany. The naval gunner surprises with his mettle under fire and, on landing, lavishes praise on his

American colleagues for their skillful descent despite a dangling unreleased bomb under the right wing. Bogard blanches when he realizes the disaster they have unknowingly averted, and agrees to accompany Hope on the British sailors' next mission (which all the involved Americans suppose is mostly domestic harbor-tag).

Hope and his captain, taciturn but almost equally boyish, take Bogard on a terrifying, nerveless torpedo escapade, during which they, too, deal with an unreleased explosive; in this case, however, the crew winches the suspended torpedo back into place, drops it again from its backward-facing tube, and, as prescribed, outraces the launched missile before swerving from its course. Profoundly impressed by this display of fearless skill and high-spirited modesty, Bogard arranges for a case of Scotch to be delivered to Hope as he sleeps in the street. (Unlike other sailors, Bogard learns, torpedo boat crews had to leave their ships when they were stored under docks at night.) The story closes with Bogard's reading a subsequent notice of the crew's disappearance in action; in tribute to his English comrades, Bogard undertakes a particularly foolhardy and independent aerial raid on a château headquartering the enemy command. Although he survives to be decorated, Bogard's frustrated rage at war's destruction of the common man constitutes the story's last sentence. As he bears down on his target, he snarls, "God! God! If they were all there – all the generals, the admirals, the presidents and the kings – theirs, ours – all of them" (CS 509).

Faulkner's story of wartime adventure, with its celebration of individual courage and its warm discovery of Anglo-Saxon brotherhood beneath national suspicions, makes the kind of yarn popular between the wars. Hemingway included it in an anthology of war stories, and the studios made lots of pictures from such fiction. But "Turnabout" exceeds its mold at critical points, and in doing so reflects on the social and cultural formations responsible for its own commercial appeal.

We might begin by noting that Bogard's condemnation of

the political and military leaders responsible for war vastly widens the story's aperture of dissent. This pacifistic jolt may surprise a reader more familiar with Faulkner's portraits of gallant, foolhardy Sartorises and his own fascinated posturing about his (fictitious) military experiences in World War I. But the prospect of another war deeply depressed Faulkner, who later tried to enlist at age forty-five to help stop Hitler, and who wrote a monumental antiwar epic, *A Fable*, during the Cold War. "Turnabout" subtly identifies the forms under which capitalism has empowered certain social institutions to administer its interests. In the war's extreme "solution" to the crisis of monopoly capitalism in the modern era, however, such institutions betray their arbitrariness, fail to cover the behavior or desires they seek to control. "Turnabout" suggests three spheres in which the war allows glimpses of a shaken ideology: in the misplaced heterosexuality of the soldiers' intimacy, in the antiauthoritarianism of the rank and file, and in the underrationalized technology of warfare that endangers self and enemy alike.

Bogard's first look at Claude produces an odd impression: "He was quite drunk, and in contrast with the heavy-jawed policeman who held him erect on his long, slim, boneless legs, he looked like a masquerading girl. He was possibly eighteen, tall, with a pink-and-white face and blue eyes, and a mouth like a girl's mouth" (CS 475). It would be possible – mistakenly, in my judgment – to interpret this characterization of the "girlish" (476) Claude as evidence of soldierly "homoeroticism." Paul Fussell uses this term to distinguish "a sublimated (i.e., 'chaste') form of temporary homosexuality" (Fussell 272). Fussell contends that there was little active homosexual behavior among troops during World War I, but that the trenches prompted "something more like the 'idealistic', passionate but non-physical 'crushes' which most of the officers had experienced at public school" (272). One need not grant Fussell's total spiritualization of the homoerotic to take his point. The kind of tender fellow-feeling soldiers permit

binds them as a fighting unit; their fraternity – physically intimate yet generally nonsexual – resembles what Eve Sedgwick has called “homosocial” behavior. “‘Homosocial’ describes social bonds between persons of the same sex” (Sedgwick 1). In our society men vigorously police the border between the homosocial and homosexual, interposing homophobia and “normative” heterosexuality. But this is a historical asymmetry typical of our society and not all others. (Sedgwick claims that the ancient Greeks interwove homosocial and homosexual behavior under their form of patriarchy. Doubtless the present panic of the U.S. military over lifting bans against gays stems from an arbitrary opposition between “acceptable” unacknowledged homoeroticism bonding soldiers and “unnatural” homosexuality.)

In “Turnabout,” however, Claude draws Bogard’s *heterosexual* notice, at once promising and precluding a relation. Faulkner’s excessive figurative language endangers the “chaste” order of men without women under service. In the girlish Claude, Faulkner poses an irreconcilable hint of the sexualities (within and with others) repressed in defense of the dominant social order. In the story’s figural register, Claude carries the disruptive mark of the drag queen, the carnival (“masquerading”) transvestite. His valence actually contradicts the light air of predictable homoeroticism in all the other relations – particularly the public school game Claude and Ronnie carry on and the touching care the combatants take to furnish one another with shelter, raiment, and drink. Given the antiwar sentiment of Bogard’s final line, one might say that “Turnabout” understands war and capitalism to be practices by which patriarchy exercises its power, enacts order as a matter between men.

The combatants in “Turnabout” conflict with authority openly and behave with remarkable independence. The “King’s Regulations” turn into a subject for mockery early in the story, and Bogard is amazed to learn that the boat pilot determines the destination for each mission entirely on his

own: "It's Ronnie's show," Claude boasts (*CS* 499). Such freedom inspires Bogard to disregard his own orders when he attacks the château after completing his appointed mission; the narrator stipulates that had the exploit failed, Bogard "would have been immediately and thoroughly court-martialed" (*CS* 509). The antic, incorrigible nature of the sailors makes them seem childlike; Bogard tells the delivery man how to recognize the recipient of the Scotch: "He'll be in the gutter. You'll know him. A child about six feet long" (508). Claude violates military order in laying claim to the street as bedroom and getting in the way. The M.P. decides he "must think he's a one-man team" (478), a phrase that nicely summarizes the refusal to subordinate individuality to administered efficiency. The war machine echoes capitalism's contempt for deviant, disorderly, playful, useless behavior, but "Turnabout" stubbornly includes it without finding a place for it.

As the double escapade with balked explosives suggests, technology also proves to elude total administration. The makeshift windlass the sailors use to retrieve mislaunched torpedoes is the result of an initial disaster: "Made first boat, whole thing blew up one day" (507). Claude wonders why "clever chaps like engineers" cannot find a less "clumsy" solution, but the limitations of modern technology actually produce old-fashioned pride in manual work: "Every cobbler to his last, what?" (505). Both war vehicles, the bomber and the torpedo boat, require inhuman accommodation: the gunner pod resembles a dog cage; the shallow boat has no seats and makes everyone sick at first; it has a "vicious shape," the machine gun looking through a screen "with its single empty forward-staring eye" (493). The crew's eventual loss confirms the suicidal derangement of such technology, just as the following description of the airplane registers the more general incoherence of the machine age: "It looked like a Pullman coach run upslanted aground into the skeleton of the first floor of an incomplete skyscraper" (486–7).

One peacetime sphere for high-technology products requiring the advantages of total administration and heavy capital investment turned out to be the movies. "Turnabout" seems prescient about its own appeal to the movies when it pictures combat scenes. As the torpedo boat approaches its target, for instance, Bogard notices on its side "the painted flag increase like a moving picture of a locomotive taken from between the rails" (503). A moment later, a similar effect: "High above them the freighter seemed to be spinning on her heel like a trick picture in the movies" (504). One wonders if that "single empty forward-staring eye" behind the "screen" might not be a camera already filming. The coordination of so many specialized groups in planning, shooting, cutting, and releasing a movie might recall recent war efforts, both of them faces of the administered capitalist state.⁴ (See Benjamin.)

But as Horkheimer and Adorno observe, movies wage war in the deeper sense of training the masses to accept their conscription into an army of exploited laborers. The budding scriptwriter Barton Fink intuits this when he finds himself at a USO dance during the war and needs to defend his civilian status against the hostility of the soldiers. Pointing to his head, he says, "This is my uniform. This is how I serve my country." Faulkner senses this affinity between war and the culture industry; his war story was already thinking self-critically about itself as a movie.

MGM insisted on one drastic change in Faulkner's story; I think we can detect how it provoked him to a still further reflection on the ways of the culture industry. Irving Thalberg as head of the studio had urged his director (and brother-in-law) Howard Hawks to use Faulkner's original script as written: "You're not going to muddy it up by changing it?" (Kawin 1977, 76). Hawks reassured him, but soon learned that MGM had a complication on its hands; Joan Crawford needed a project immediately (since she was contracted to appear in several films a year), and the studio decided "Turnabout"

might be made to accommodate her. Faulkner, then, was presented with the task of writing in a substantial role, with romantic subplot, for a female star.

The script Faulkner produced ingeniously made the problem of the woman's place in the movie the very question to be entertained.⁵ The first scene shows three children at play, Ronnie, Claude, and Ann. Ronnie complains about the girl's tagging along, but Ann protests that "I have just as much right here as you have." Claude relents, but only if "she doesn't muddy the water."

In several important ways, Ann's presence does muddy the water. She needs to be related to the soldierly trio of "Turn-about," so Faulkner makes her Ronnie's sister and constructs a romance plot around her and Claude, who now lives with the Boyce Smiths as a ward. She must be made an object of desire, so Ann becomes Claude's fiancée, gathers in a stray kiss or two from her newly affectionate brother, Ronnie, and falls in love with Bogard, who marries her in the last scene after Ronnie and Claude have completed a suicide mission. Although one can feel Hollywood conventions reshaping Faulkner's story, one can also see his imagination resisting too slick a repackaging.

The simple presence of Ann may be read as the transformative force of the cinema itself in Faulkner's narrative. That is, Joan Crawford *is* the movie. I think Faulkner proved a quick study of the star-vehicle system; he must have understood that the female romantic lead exists to be desired as object by the male audience, and to be identified with as desiring subject by female spectators. Since movies require mass audiences comprised of both genders, the task of the successful commercial film involves satisfying both desires with the same narrative of images. For those occupying the masculine position among the viewers, the pleasure of the movie arises from experiencing the desire to know, to see. Given the West's cultural pre constructions, as Teresa de Lauretis has put it, this position may be related to the quest of Oedipus. The

Oedipal narrative solves the Sphinx's riddle with the answer "man"; it rests on the social reality of patriarchy in which woman functions as sign and value of exchange according to the incest prohibition that founds social relations.

In cinema as well, then, woman properly represents the fulfillment of the narrative promise (made, as we know, to the little boy), and that representation works to support the male status of the mythical subject. The female position, produced as the end result of narrativization, is the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image in which the film . . . "comes together." (142)

For the female spectator, however, identification must be doubled. The viewer's engaged subjectivity cannot identify herself as object, and so must occupy the "masculine" position simultaneously. It is the distinctive formal opportunity of cinema that it offers these simultaneous positions for the spectator: "the look of the camera and the image on the screen, the subject and the object of the gaze" (142).

Because we are still dealing with writing and not the movie itself, we cannot follow the camera's gaze, but Faulkner's script does suggest Ann's constitution as the product and intersection of these contrary forces. Ann as object materializes within the semi-incest plot Faulkner imports from *The Sound and the Fury*. As Sedgwick might predict, Ann mediates the bonds between Ronnie and Claude. They're constantly tussling in childhood, playing "Beaver" (the same lookout game they play in the short story), and generally discharging homosocial current through Ann. Her lack of a proper place occasions a relentless exercise of male property rights; the two, quite daftly, keep entrusting her to each other for safekeeping (because "girls have no sense").

Faulkner's script, then, locates the place of woman in film as the image of exchange and value within the Oedipal logic of patriarchal narrative. There really is no place for Ann in the story, but when asked to, Faulkner found her as the repressed subject of patriarchy. (When Faulkner was told there was to be a part for Joan Crawford in the film, he reportedly said, "I

don't seem to remember a girl in the story" [Blotner 1984, 307].) The echoes of *The Sound and the Fury* remind us of Caddy's exclusion from the scopic tyranny of that other Oedipal narrative, and we might recall that that "lost woman" was (according to Faulkner's 1946 Appendix to the book) first to marry a motion picture magnate in Hollywood, and then to find her way to a Nazi staff sergeant's arms. Joan Crawford understood she was intruding, moreover; she tearfully regretted that Hawks could not talk the studio out of defacing Faulkner's great story.

Good soldiers both, however, director and star agreed to make the best of it. So Crawford asked that at least Faulkner write some of that "clipped" dialogue for her. Did. Joan got to talk like the boys, and her stylistic enfranchisement marks the other valence of her doubleness in the script. For Ann defies her objectification in the Oedipal narrative – at least until the script's final images of resolution. Scandalously, and indispensably from the standpoint of the movie's need to activate female desire, Ann decides to sleep with Claude despite not loving him and without expecting to marry him. Claude and Ann agree that "weddings are as dead as peace" (FMS 193), but that does not stop Ann from taking Claude to her bedroom, all the while insisting that what they are doing is "not love" (190). At one point, she explains to her brother why she will not marry Claude: "But not yet. Ronnie. Not right now. Let me wait until I . . . until I can . . . until I can stop" (178). This is as far as Ann can go, but the moment amounts to a successful negation of male plans for her.

Ann muddies the clarity of patriarchal privilege over her body and affections: Claude cheerfully explains that Ronnie is "the same as my brother. I'm going to marry his sister, that is" (139). A landlady for the three cadets' menage (Ann has joined the Wacs and lives with them) observes that "they was like one family. You couldn't hardly have knowed which were the brother and which the fiancée" (173). Faulkner's brilliant solution to making a place for Ann involves capacitating her to

strike a blow at the masculine frame. When she withholds her love from Claude, or later dissembles to him about her love for Bogard, Ann is refusing to comply with the Oedipal logic of narrative itself. The questor Claude ends blinded like Oedipus, but emphatically not in possession of tragic insight: "He couldn't even see it when it came to kill him. He couldn't even say, now I've got one second more!" (254).

Feminist cinema ought "to enact the contradiction of female desire, and of women as social subjects, in the terms of narrative; to perform its figures of movement and closure, image and gaze" (de Lauretis 156). Faulkner's screenplay does not manage this effect; instead, it illustrates, albeit with some self-consciousness, the will to closure and coming together demanded of the Hollywood formula romance. The script closes with a series of one-shot dissolves, from newspaper notices of the boat crew's death, to Bogard's military citation, to hospital, travel, and wedding scenes. All of these cauterize the injuries inflicted throughout by Ann's presence. They lead to the final shot, in which Bogard now utters his antiwar lines to the cooing Ann, who "draws his head down to her breast" and murmurs "Hush – hush" (*FMS* 255). Only when woman refinds her place in marriage may she reassume the mantle of Sphinx/Jocasta and hush criticism of the social order, the fate this film succumbs to as it makes its way through the assembly line of the culture industry.

By reading so closely one of Faulkner's contributions to both the commercial short-story market and commercial cinema, I have tried to suggest the capacities for reflection and resistance he brought to his work. In a number of isolated pieces of scholarship, Faulkner critics have begun to appreciate the impingements of commercialization on his writing.⁶ My approach means to distinguish Faulkner's productive engagement with mass cultural forms from reductionist dismissals of his pandering to market expectations in order to make money. To segregate any writer's serious art fiction totally from his or her writing for commercial uses, or even from

an awareness of market pressures, is to participate uncritically in a myth advanced by modernist aesthetics.

Andreas Huyssen points out that the legendary autonomy of the modernist work “is always the result of a resistance, an abstention, and a suppression – resistance to the seductive lure of mass culture, abstention from the pleasure of trying to please a larger audience, suppression of everything that might be threatening to the rigorous demands of being modern and at the edge of time” (55). Such a modernist aesthetic betrays itself as a “theory of modernization displaced to the aesthetic realm” (57). To be at “the edge of time,” to repel a modernized world, is to confront the “revolt of the masses” as a prime force of social transformation. Huyssen observes that in “the age of nascent socialism *and* the first major women’s movement in Europe, the masses knocking at the gate were also women, knocking at the gate of a male-dominated culture” (47). The expression of liberatory aspirations in mass cultural forms like popular romance, short fiction, theater, and ultimately the movies leads high culture to associate mass culture with the feminine, to try to subordinate it as woman, according to Huyssen. We might link Charlie Meadows’s rage, Ann’s amoral indulgence, Faulkner’s critique of militarism, even Horkheimer and Adorno’s identification of socially repressive qualities in bourgeois art all as allied indications of the threats posed by the masses – women, working stiffs, maverick soldiers.

If we valorize only the elite works (or portions of works) that suppress mass culture, we fail to maintain sufficient analytical purchase upon the ideology of modernist autonomy. Huyssen argues that Adorno well knew the *dialectical* relation between modernism and mass culture; he quotes Adorno in a letter to Benjamin: “Both [modernist art and mass culture] bear the scars of capitalism, both contain elements of change. Both are torn halves of freedom to which, however, they do not add up” (58). As for mass culture, the longings for enfranchisement and respect apparent in our examples of

worker and woman ultimately collapse under the weight of suicidal rage or submissive acceptance. Capitalist interests come to saturate mass culture. For its part, elitist modernism retreats in the cultural sphere from the specter of social transformation inherent in the emancipatory advances of modernization. At the same time, the uncompromising modernist work does attempt a salutary negation of modernization's ills: rampant and brutal authoritarianism, the commodification and debasement endemic to the culture industry.⁷

In concluding, I call attention to a story Faulkner wrote in 1931 that explicitly considers the relation between high and low culture, between modernist and commercial writing. "Artist at Home," which appeared in *Story* (August 1933), irreverently debunks such literary segregation and predicts Faulkner's own more complex negotiation of mutually dependent spheres. A novelist, Roger Howes, and his wife, Anne, move to the Virginia countryside from New York City after he sells his first book. Secluding himself in order to write, Howes lets his mail pile up in town but suffers a stream of starving Greenwich Village artist friends who want to consult him about their work. Anne disapprovingly tolerates these invasions until she falls in love with one especially forlorn young poet, John Blair. With Roger's apparent permission, the two pursue their relation, until Howes finally reasserts his mastery at about the same time Blair renounces homewrecking.

"Artist at Home" comically deflates the pretensions and hypocrisy of professional writers. Roger proves a cold-blooded exploiter of his own domestic complications; he passively encourages his wife's dalliance because he sees it will provide him with material for the story he's had trouble writing. The rustic narrator observes ironically that Roger's retreat to his study leads to a "bull market in typewriting, you might say" (CS 639). Since Roger has begun his career as "an advertisement writer" (627), commercial savvy directs his writing. Even the narrator notices that a simple affair is pretty ordinary stuff – which "can be seen in any movie" (636). What makes

the story really “good” is Blair’s effort to secure Howes’s consent to a socially advanced solution to their problem.

Blair affiliates himself with the literary and moral avant-garde. He is a struggling poet, so fine and deprived a sensibility that, as Anne reports to her husband: “He’s had nothing, nothing. The only thing he remembers of his mother is the taste of sherbet on Sunday afternoon. He says my mouth tastes like that. He says my mouth is his mother” (640). Fortunately, our narrator does not have to figure out what to make of this; the three prove too much for him, to whom this all looks like a much simpler question of fornication and adultery. Blair tries to spur Anne’s exploration of new moralities, but at first she complains that he patronizes her: “Freedom. Equality. In words of one syllable, because it seems that, being a woman, I don’t want freedom and don’t know what equality means” (634). When the sad poet renounces his love, standing in the rain outside her house all night, and later dies of consumption, the myth of the scandalous, suffering, antibourgeois avant-garde poet is complete.

Such high-minded artists make their pilgrimages to Howes, paradoxically, because they want the key to the market. Anne notices that Blair never asks whether a poem is good, only “Will this sell?” The poet shows his work to the successful novelist as if he is “flinging caviar at an elephant” (633). But Howes believes that a little more success in the literary marketplace might be just what the elitist poet needs – to make him proud enough or mad enough to write something with “entail” in it (632). Blair’s alienated submission to the market leads to modest success when he derives a love poem from his affair with Anne and sells it to “the magazines that don’t have any pictures” (643). Howes’s own artistic use of the affair leads to a dispute with Anne, to whom he tries to present a fur coat bought on the proceeds, and who denounces her husband’s pillaging of life “to dress me in the skins of little slain beasts” (645).

In “Artist at Home” Faulkner pays back Sherwood Ander-

son for his fictionalization of the young Mississippi poet in "A Meeting South," and also for Anderson's begrudging advocacy of Faulkner's first novel at his publisher's. (Anderson supposedly agreed to recommend it if he did not have to read it.) So Faulkner wittily constructs a story about the cannibalization of life out of his own experiences with Anderson and his wife (Elizabeth Prall, whom Faulkner had worked with in New York City). More important, however, the story invents a third position for the writer. Beside the market-wise and parasitical novelist and the pretentious elitist poet, between mass culture and high modernism, if you will, Faulkner opens up the position of the narrator. That narrator is characterized by his voice, unmistakably Southern and rural, and by his tone, bemused and skeptical. In the force of its colloquial irony, in its devotion to the acceptance of local ways and the community's indigenous vitality, it assumes a perspective from which both modernization and modernism might be criticized. I close with the merest suggestion that such a position grows increasingly central to the Faulkner of the 1930s. In the voices of Cash and Darl Bundren, Quentin Compson and his father, V. K. Ratliff, even the narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!* – voices otherwise so various and distinct, the modernist of Yoknapatawpha via Hollywood positions his fiction between the forces of modernization and modernism.

NOTES

- 1 Blotner (1974) reports that when an associate cleaned out Faulkner's desk after his last extended stay in Hollywood he found several empty bottles and "one of the legal-size lined yellow pads Faulkner used. The top sheet was filled with characters in Faulkner's tiny hand. It was the beginning of a whole series of formula phrases – 'Boy meets girl . . . Boy sues girl' – which went on for pages" (1175–6). Besides mocking the monotonous predictability of studio romance films, Faulkner's pad also gibes at Hollywood's subjection of love stories to commercial, contractual rule.
- 2 Besides the other essays in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (hereafter *DE*), see especially Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* for a consideration of the relation between the work of art and the social reality framing it.

- 3 Horkheimer and Adorno do not consider all popular art to fall under the rubric of mass culture. Folk art, in being various and local, opposes standardized products of the culture industry.
- 4 In Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), a female veteran of ambulance service during the war finally finds on a Hollywood lot what she's been missing: "And Henry's sister has never been so happy since Verdun, because she has six trucks and 15 horses to look after and she says that the motion picture profession is the nearest thing to war that she has struck since the Armistice" (216).
- 5 This version of the screenplay, the second, contains the greater part of what Faulkner contributed to the adaptation project. For a third version, he was assigned an assistant scriptwriter, Dwight Taylor; subsequent major additions were made by two other writers. Faulkner eventually received credit for "Story and Dialogue." With Hawks, too, there were always significant departures even from the shooting script because he encouraged actors to improvise lines. I want to make it clear that I am not discussing the film itself as produced, which appeared as *Today We Live* (MGM 1933).
- 6 See Donaldson regarding Faulkner's reflection on the expectations of the *Saturday Evening Post* reader; Porter (1981) on Faulkner's general efforts to convert the "reified" consumer of fiction into an active, critical participant; Lester on the pressure to neaten and better commodify *The Sound and the Fury* in the Appendix; Urgo on cinematic technique in *Absalom, Absalom!*; Matthews on Faulkner's critical reflection on the short story market; the articles by Fiedler and Jones already mentioned; Godden and Rhodes on Faulkner's awareness of popular works like Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*; and portions of all the contributions to Fowler and Abadie's *Faulkner and Popular Culture*.
- 7 In substantially different ways, Kenner and Bleikasten offer defenses of the modernist work's autonomy.