

Faulkner and the World Culture of the Global South

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I begin my discussion of the relationship between William Faulkner and the category of the “global South” with a word about terminology. The first observation worth making about the current state of American studies is that a new vocabulary for naming and studying what we used to call “the third world” has emerged in the last twenty years or so, representing a battery of interesting alternatives for us to consider. Why these vocabularies, arising primarily from the social sciences and from mid-twentieth-century postcolonial critical traditions, are of significance to students of literature is evident when one considers the continuing importance of nation-based literary history. Given that the notion of the nation is still the main way we categorize literature, what happens when we think *across* nations and national categories? This is the question that the so-called turn to the “transnational” in American studies over the past decade has proposed. In what follows, I wish to consider Faulkner in the context of one of the new critical terms that include transnationalism, globalization, and the “world culture of the global South.”

Doing so, I think, allows us to read Faulkner as a different kind of regionalist: the kind who crosses national boundaries majestically even as he stays firmly rooted within his own bounded territory of Yoknapatawpha County. Like other of his prominent US modernist contemporaries—William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, Langston Hughes perhaps most visibly, all of whom had family connections to the Caribbean and Latin America—Faulkner participated in transnational crossings without actually much traveling. As Deborah Cohn points out in her illuminating discussion of Faulkner’s Cold War-era travels, even after he received the Nobel Prize and began traveling as a goodwill ambassador for the US State Department, Faulkner was “ever the reluctant traveler, and generally quite uncomfortable with the public role foisted upon him.” She goes on to explain that the “sublimation of Faulkner the regionalist

into Faulkner the nationalist” with an internationalist impact occurred in other ways.¹

The emphasis in literary studies on the trans-Atlantic aspects of modernism has typically prevented critics from seeing the connections between modernisms and modernists *in the Americas*, keeping northern and southern Americas oddly separated from each other and from shared political and cultural events in the hemisphere. In particular, the Eurocentric focus in American literary studies has tended to obscure the numerous ways that Faulkner’s connection with the issues of coloniality and postcoloniality also marks much Latin American literature of the pre- and post-World War II years and thus link Faulkner to that other South, the global South—especially Latin America and its cultural history. By contrast, Latin American writers have often been very clear about their Faulknerian connection. Chief among the themes Faulkner addresses that make his fictions of such moment to Latin America are those having to do with subject formation in relation to racial and social ideologies and the frightening pressures emerging from the colonized world as it begins to throw off its colonial burden.

1

The idea of the global South first emerged in the postwar era from the fact that, with few exceptions, practically all the world’s industrially developed countries lay to the north of the so-called developing countries. According to sociologist Saskia Sassen, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the term “global South” refers to a new phase of global capital.² For Sassen, the global South designates primarily the territories that have been subjected to a post-Keynesian financial logic of land grabs, to the imposition of debt as a disciplining regime, to the massive extraction of mineral and human value, and to the massive expulsion of persons from middle-class status into abject poverty. The key word here is “expulsion.” The underdevelopment of countries at a peripheral remove from the core of metropolitan economic power did not just happen—underdevelopment occurred as the result of active forces shaping regional societies. For this reason, it is fair to say that various southern economies and cultures share comparable experiences of marginalization and unequal access to the resources of globalization that differentiate them from fully developed and hegemonic cultures in their respective locations.

I wish to add one more idea to this mix: dependency theory, which, as philosopher Eduardo Mendieta has argued, “provided the fundamental conceptual framework within which Latin American underdevelopment

and dependency could be understood” in a world system built on relations of impoverishment and enrichment.³ Born from a critique of theories of modernization, dependency theory proposed that it is the manner of the integration of countries at the periphery into the world system of economic power that perpetuates their dependence. The US sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in refining the theory has called the process of dependency the “world-system.”⁴ When allied to the emergence of dependency and world-system theory, then, the concept of the global South offers a new direction for understanding the relations between the underdeveloped periphery and the developed societies of the metropolitan core. More than merely a geographical marker, the global South refers to the process of “growing immiseration of governments and economies . . . [that] launches a new phase of global migration and people trafficking, strategies which function both as survival mechanisms and profit-making activities.”⁵ The term does not imply that all developing countries are similar and can therefore be lumped together in one category. What it does usefully suggest is that although developing countries range across the spectrum in every economic, social, and political attribute one can imagine, they nevertheless share a set of vulnerabilities and challenges. These vulnerabilities and challenges constitute an identifiable category of shared sociopolitical realities and fates that makes the notion of the global South more than an empty abstraction.

2

What does all this have to do with Faulkner and the history of the American novel that he helped so powerfully to shape? In the context of issues concerning the mid-twentieth-century era of decolonization and the emergence of a postcolonial global South, Faulkner’s southern reach is of great importance. Focusing attention on the modernizing processes of the US South and of the southern portions of the Americas, Faulkner helped initiate the transnational and globalizing themes that are of such concern to humanities and social science scholars today. He did so by focusing on the dependency of the South on the processes of modernization and by shaping his fiction as a formal response to and expression of those processes of dependency.

As Susan Willis has accurately noted, “what makes dependency theory so useful for literary analysis is that it defines the historical contradictions of domination in terms which can then be related to the form and language of the literary text.”⁶ This is the crucial point from Willis’s analysis: dependency theory as formalized by the idea of the global South allows us to see how the economic and racial politics of our time are enmeshed

with *the form and language* of the literary texts that describe the modern world.

I take Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) as my primary textual instance of these relations among history, form, and literary language. I also discuss *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) in terms of the representation of historical contradictions of domination and in relation to the form and language of the literary text. *Light in August* (1932) also provides an excellent example for the purpose of my argument, albeit I am concerned mainly with *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

Absalom, Absalom! is the novel in which Faulkner most dramatically situates the history of US cultural and narrative forms in the context of the larger histories of the hemispheric Americas. Consider the powerful conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!* There Shreve (Shrevlin) McCannon, Quentin Compson's Canadian roommate at Harvard, insinuates himself into Quentin's final desperate attempt at self-creation, his efforts to forge a Southern heritage with which he can live. It is 1910, the moment of the emergence of the "modernist" era. We find Quentin attempting to construct his modern Southern self by looking back in time through his reconstruction of the story of Thomas Sutpen's rise and fall. Quentin seeks the validation of history and historical narrative. Shreve wants to mythologize that narrative. Quentin is struggling with the ways that white Southern identity is overdetermined as myth and history. In what amounts for Quentin to a life-and-death effort to achieve the peace of understanding, for Shreve what is at stake is mainly the aesthetic satisfaction of a completed story.

Their shared storytelling emphasizes how Quentin's sense of self arises in part through a defense of the South against the stereotypes of the South that Shreve marshals in trying to understand the stories that he hears from Quentin. And in the midst of the most dramatic moment in this most dramatic of novels, just as we think we begin to understand Sutpen's motivations as a Southerner when he is turned away as a child from the big house, the story veers even further south, to the south of the South: toward Haiti and the Caribbean and the marginal sea that Matthew Pratt Guterl has allusively called "the American Mediterranean." The circum-Caribbean represented for some members of the slave-owning "master class . . . the *habitus* and *communitas* of New World slaveholders" that linked them to "institutions, cultures, and 'structures of feeling' that were not contained by the nation-state."⁷ Sutpen's master plan will be redefined in the context of these larger, transnational structures of feeling.

One of the most striking features of the Sutpen saga in *Absalom* is its insistently trans-American reach: the novel's imaginary geography

extends both northward to Canada and southward to the Caribbean. It is the Americas broadly speaking, then, not just the southern parts of the US, that constitute Faulkner's literary and cultural "region." In turn, the perspectives and claims of this larger hemispheric territory construct Sutpen as a symbolic "American" figure of national rather than strictly regional—Southern—import.

For this reason, I think it is important to ask what happens if we pay attention to these inter-American connections. How does our recognition of these connections affect our understanding of American (literary) modernisms and, hence, of contemporary literary production in the Americas? And especially, what emerges from a view of Faulkner in relation to the global South?

3

Haiti, the first locale in the Americas to receive African slaves (in 1517), was the first to set the example of African slave revolt and revolution and liberty (in 1791) and independence from France (in 1804). This is the history that Faulkner, notoriously, gets wrong. What Faulkner gets right, however, is that, in Haiti, Sutpen experiences a social world where race does not constitute an absolute category of psychological identity or ethical performance, where one might indeed elect to identify, or act, as if race were not a constitutive, essential category. This is what the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* calls a "speculative antagonism" between white and black people.⁸ Similarly, in *The Sound and the Fury* Quentin speculates that "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among."⁹ That "speculation" is a parallel intuitive insight to the social quality of apparently essential racial forms. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Haiti serves as the site of the possible insight that it is not the truth of race antagonism (or of class conflict for that matter) that is at issue in the elaboration of an identity. Rather, it is the enactment of identity by an act of ethical commitment and subjective assignment, of a strategic *design* upon race and class difference, that is the key to it all.

Sutpen's experience prior to his voyage to Haiti had been that both Virginian mountain and Tidewater cultures were awesomely static and dichotomized in their construction and enactment of categories of difference based on race and class. He finds Haitian colonial society also structured on difference but enacting that difference differently. In fact, Haiti offers the possibility of a more intricate expression of difference and the understanding of difference. For Sutpen, his venture into the world of the Caribbean is like stepping into an alternate universe. In

this alternate world, the contingencies of Caribbean history, with its ebb and flow of successive European dominant cultures—including those regarded as suspect from the Anglo-Saxon perspective, namely the Mediterranean cultures of Spain and to a lesser extent of France and Portugal—allow something Sutpen has never imagined: the possibility that *gradations* of white and black might exist between the absolute binaries of the US racial chromograph.

From the seventeenth century on, the racial chromograph in Latin (Spanish, Portuguese, and French) America had been a much more complex thing than in North America.¹⁰ Over sixty different castes had been chronicled by writers, philosophers, painters, and historians of the region.¹¹ In both Afro- and Hispano-Caribbean colonial societies of the period, the category of the racially mixed *mulatto* (African and European) and the many other gradations of mixed-race *mestizaje* (American Indian and European), problematic as they remain for both Afro- and Hispano-Caribbean colonial society, represented historically a class of racialized identity that was neither black nor white but distinct, even if determined in the last instance by its racial pedigree.

No such distinction holds in the context of US Southern racism, where one drop of African blood made one entirely black, as later Sutpen to his peril will decisively understand. What baffles Sutpen during his Haitian experience, then, is that Haitian colonial society acts *as if* the divisions between races were precise, yet all the while *living the experiential blur between the two*. At least in some instances, notably in the legitimation of the mixed-blood mulatto through the legalisms of marriage and property rights, Haitian colonial society, for all of its real limitations, allowed for the complicated experiential reality of racial difference. To his lifelong sorrow, Sutpen will continue to experience the effects of the long history of English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Native American, and African relations on the island, relations that remove questions of class and race from the simple binary configurations of black and white or rich and poor on the mainland.

The clear and distinct dichotomy between racial and class motivations figured in the “boy-symbol at the door” (210) episode is decisively shattered for Sutpen in Haiti, especially after he learns that he has been deceived into thinking that his first wife’s mother “*had been a Spanish woman*” when in fact she “*was part negro*” (283). In the aftermath of the discovery that his Haitian wife, Eulalia Bon, is a mulatto, Sutpen rejects her and his child by her, Charles Bon, because of their racial identity. However, if in the figure of Charles Bon we have the most obvious instance of the *racial continuum* that disrupts the unproblematic purity of whiteness, Bon’s son by an “eighth part negro mistress” (80), Charles

Etienne de Saint Valery Bon, with his “sixteenth part” black blood makes the point even more starkly. He emphasizes “the tension surrounding the various shades of color found in Mississippi reality and the community’s insistence on trying to push these shades back into black and white,” as Hosam M. Aboul-Ela has correctly noted.¹² The shock of this reality will reverberate backward and forward in time in Sutpen’s story, with dreadful consequences for all.

Sutpen’s rejection of Eulalia and Charles Bon on the basis of their racial identity is the paradigmatic moment of Faulknerian fiction. It represents the foundational instance of a scene that is played out over and over again not just in *Absalom, Absalom!* but also in *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, and all the major novels. It points to racial hybridity as what John T. Matthews has identified as the “open secret of southern racism.”¹³ It exists not only in the alternate universes of other Americas but in Yoknapatawpha as well. The secret of racial hybridity, like the “unspoken assumptions” that Cleanth Brooks once described as undergirding the false basis of Southern community, defines and disrupts the core of white supremacy.¹⁴ This disruption caused by the racial polarities and “speculative antagonisms” of the slave-owning South will ultimately destroy Sutpen and his design.

4

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner is acutely conscious of the ramifications of this open secret and its implications. But this awareness is explicit in other novels as well, particularly so in his earlier masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury*, and in *Light in August*. Both novels offer exemplary instances of the formation of the racial subject in reactive structures of mutual codependence, the hallmark of Sutpen’s experience in the global South.

The Sound and the Fury is particularly significant in this regard, especially so if we join together aspects of the novel that, until very recently in the history of American literary studies, usually have not been linked: its experiments with narrative form on the one hand and the investigation of racial formation on the other. And it is worth asking both why they have not typically been linked and what happens to our understanding of Faulkner’s novelistic experiments when we do link them, as does, for example, Edouard Glissant in *Faulkner, Mississippi*.¹⁵

We may get at these questions first by examining the poetics of genre and the power of generic hybridity in Faulknerian narrative forms. Such an examination yields insight into how differing aesthetics as well as differing conceptions of racial formation are linked to the American novel

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in its modern forms. What is more, it shows as well how the processes of modernization and globalization in the American global South formally reshape the novel. In the American social and cultural context, race has traditionally referred to the social and legal patterns of hierarchy and domination characterizing the relations between groups of blacks and whites.

Certainly Faulkner's novels powerfully represent the ways that this racial dynamic has shaped modern American life. Less obviously, however, it is also the case that *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Light in August*, and other Faulkner novels gesture toward a more complicated racial narrative. This narrative posits race and racialization as a doing, a communal ongoing system of processes that, as Paula M. L. Moya and Hazel Markus have convincingly argued in the introduction to their immensely significant work, *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, "always involves creating groups based on perceived physical and behavioral characteristics, associating differential power and privilege with these characteristics, and then justifying the resulting inequalities."¹⁶ In these novels, the *multiracial* realities characteristic of the racialization of ethnicity in the United States are represented as an active *doing* that creates social structures and discourses that articulate a dialogical narrative of American social life based on multiplicity, heterogeneity, and difference, all of which then become rigidly hierarchical states of social and political fact. Unlike the processes of class formation, which do allow for the transformation of the classed subject from a position of relative powerlessness and limited agency into a fully active social agent, the process of racial doing does not. Wealth, social agency, and social standing are always fully liable to the color of subjectivity. A working man in Faulkner's South may acquire wealth and power, as Sutpen so effectively does. A black man may do so only to the degree that his identity as a person of color is effectively mitigated.

In *The Sound and the Fury* this matter of a multiracial doing emerges in each of the four sections of the novel. It appears, however, in a diffuse manner, sometimes thematically in its depiction of the ways that transnational circuits of migration, circulation, and intercultural exchange between the global North and South brought about by diasporic history and labor migration shape American modernity. In other instances, narrative form itself works to further the representation of the racial structures of the global South.

Implausibly as it may seem, the complex quality of this contact with the global South emerges most unambiguously in the Jason section of the novel, "April Sixth, 1928," replete as it is with a vile sort of dark comedic satire, focused mainly on Jason's ugly perceptions of race and

sexuality. The celebrated experiments with stream of consciousness, spatial/temporal dislocations, decentered focalizations, and other modernist techniques in other sections of *The Sound and the Fury* give way here to more traditional realist narrative, but with a difference. An elegant experiment with a form of satire that verges on the Menippean, Jason's narrative offsets in its own right the more self-consciously avant-garde modernist techniques of the Benjy and Quentin chapters with what we may describe as a formal parody, an image, of realist narrative. The Jason section of the narrative, like Menippean satire, attacks attitudes of mind rather than the specific individuals who hold those points of view: "Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds," as Northrop Frye puts it in *Anatomy of Criticism*.¹⁷

That the Jason section speaks from the vocal vantage point of the Menippean satirist makes his narrative all the more deliciously parodic and ironic. For here Faulkner uses narrative voice rather than narrative structure to modernize the form of traditional realism, blending the form of the critique of social ills with the Menippean critique of the intellect that rationalizes those ills. Jason's celebrated unreliability as a narrator stems from this doubling of narrative modes. He scorns everyone around him who holds what he presumes to be insipidly simple understandings of the real social world. And yet in the end all of his scorn redounds on him with an ironic and comic vengeance. Moreover, this blending of generic forms—satire, irony, comic and realistic narrative—underscores Mikhail Bakhtin's proposition in "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" that a narrative structured in parody ceases to be that form—sonnet, elegy, sermon, or epic, as the case may be—and becomes instead the image of a form.¹⁸ For this reason, Menippean satire plays a special role in Bakhtin's theory of the novel. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin treats Menippean satire as one of the classical "seriocomic" genres that are united by a "carnival sense of the world," wherein "carnival is the past millennia's way of sensing the world as one great communal performance" and is "opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change."¹⁹

From Jason's perspective, pedants, bigots, cranks, and parvenus abound in the world around him, especially in the high comedic and carnivalesque scenes of his encounter with the carny showmen, with one of whom Caddy's daughter, Quentin, absconds with the money that Jason has stolen from her. From the perspective of Menippean satire, however, Jason's failed attempt to retrieve either Quentin or the doubly stolen money renders him the comic buffoon of the tale. This blend of

parody, satire, and irony produces a grotesque realism and is the vehicle with which Faulkner drives his narrative of racism and desire in the context of the global South.

As in classic Menippean satire, the butt of the ridicule is as much a social structure and its enabling ideological attitudes as any individual person or point of view. Here, Jason's grotesque realism is structurally not unlike the "speculative antagonism"—mediating between real and imaginary forms of racial formation—that, as we have seen, guides formations of race and racism in *Absalom, Absalom!* and governs the enactment of race in Faulkner's novels generally. So while Jason is indeed the object of satire, the force of the ridicule is not muted by his personal idiosyncrasies so much as those idiosyncrasies channel the prevailing ideas of Yoknapatawpha and the South generally.

Even though composed predominantly in the first-person realist mode, Jason's section cannot avoid the disruptions of time and space that we get in the Benjy and Quentin sections of *The Sound and the Fury*. Yet Jason seems the character most in sync with the modernist present, as a schemer and cotton speculator on "April Sixth, 1928," a year and a half before the stock market crash of October 1929. Jason's narrative is a low comedy of sustained lack of self-knowledge. He complains that "fellows . . . sit up there in New York and trim the sucker gamblers" who do not have "inside information" (116) about the speculative financial futures markets, underscoring his sense of Yoknapatawpha as the site of an internal colonialism in which the South is colonized by the North, within the global economies. His sense of divestment from this economy, his distance from his own family, and his sadistic sense of entitlement to racial superiority are all evidence in different registers of his bitter working understanding of how contrivance and privilege govern his local world's participation in global economic exchanges about to be played out by the crash of 1929.

The point of the scenes in the country store where Jason works as a clerk is directly counter to the ethos of "white labor" (115) and agrarian industry that he scorns. Instead, while scheming to profit from "those eastern jews" by speculating with the money he has embezzled from his mother and his sister, he nevertheless fumes at the thought that it has "come to a pretty pass when any dam foreigner that cant make a living in the country where God put him, can come to this one and take money right out of an American's pockets" (116).

It is worth noting that a version of this blend of the satiric, ironic, and high comedic modes of Jason's story unexpectedly characterizes parts of Quentin's narrative too, "June Second, 1910." The thematic link between the global South and the grotesque realism of the Menippean satire of Jason's narrative affects the extended scene of Quentin's comically inept

attempts to evade the company of "a little dirty child with eyes like a toy bear's and two patent-leather pigtails" (76) on the day of his suicide in Cambridge. In these scenes, as Quentin ironically observes, the global South penetrates deep into the heart of America, "Land of the kike home of the wop." Like Jason's "eastern jews," these "foreigners," immigrants who now indiscriminately populate New England—"Them furriners. I cant tell one from another" (79), says a bakery shopkeeper—stand in as the racial other. Here, the "furriners" are the "obverse reflection of the white people" they live among (53), without whom the certainty of white identity is shaken.

Quentin's view of blacks as the obverse reflection of white people exemplifies the process of racialization, the doing of race, that in Sutpen's story in *Absalom, Absalom!* was named "speculative antagonism." Here, in *The Sound and the Fury*, the obverse reflection and speculative antagonism extend to the Latin cultures of the Mediterranean and southern Europe—Spanish, French, and Italian in particular—transposed to the Americas. After Quentin wanders the countryside with the little Italian child, repeatedly fails to get rid of her, and is finally assaulted by the child's brother, Julio, who assumes the worst from Quentin's ambiguous demeanor toward the little girl, the full circle joining satire and comedy to tragedy is completed.

Encompassed within the circle are the fundamental themes of *The Sound and the Fury*: racial, ethnic, national, and sexual identity. When the credibility of Julio's suspicions about Quentin's intentions toward the child is challenged and dismissed because he is one of "them darn furriners," Julio counters by insisting "I American. . . . I gotta da pape" (87). He proposes, in other words, that his trustworthiness and whiteness are underwritten by the documentation of his citizenship. In defense of Julio's suspicions of Quentin and his passionate guardianship of his sister's honor, it is worth noting that Quentin's last glimpse of the child is the narrative transition to thoughts of Caddy, virginity and sexuality, and his own ambiguous desires: "so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see" (89). As is almost always the case in *The Sound and the Fury*, contact with the global South is pervasive, disruptive, and unavoidable. It forms the unexpected core of the Compson story.

in other novels as well, particularly in *Light in August*, where the racial subject is formed explicitly in a reactive structure of mutual codependence, the hallmark of Sutpen's experience in Haiti and clearly discernible in Quentin's passage into the racialized immigrant spaces of early twentieth-century New England. In *Light in August* racial confusion also figures prominently, especially in Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden's shared relations to another site of the American global South: Texas, with its history of crossed relationship to Mexico. Joanna Burden's "halfbrother," Calvin, is part Mexican and "dark like father's mother's people and like his mother," while Joe Christmas's mother, Milly Hines, had claimed (according to her father, Doc Hines) that "the fellow with the circus" who has fathered her baby "was a Mexican."²⁰ In the Mexican racialized subjectivity that figures in Joe Christmas's and Joanna Burden's respective racial histories, shaded in Joanna's case with "Huguenot stock" (241)—that is, Mediterranean Latin French ancestry—Faulkner's incessant observation of the complexity of racial hybridity in the Americas emerges as a sign of this relation. Thus, in *Light in August*, Joanna Burden, whose namesake, Juana, was her father's Mexican wife, accedes to her eventual sorrow with her father's racial view that the black race is the "white race's doom and curse for its sins" (252). Describing the merciless image of this doom to Joe Christmas, Joanna says:

"I seemed to see [negroes] for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross. I saw all the little babies that would ever be in the world, the ones not yet even born—a long line of them with their arms spread, on the black crosses." (253)

Sorrowfully, implacably, the babies envisioned here by Joanna all bear the marks of their own defining racially crossed fate. The crossing relates in Joanna's case to what Joe Christmas early on in their affair thinks of as her "dual personality" (234–35), her security in pleasure and strength of awareness as a woman. The doubling, however, is particularly true of the centrally crossed sacrificial figure of the novel, Joe Christmas. His father, unnamed but identified by his mother, Milly Hines, as "a Mexican" (374), bequeaths to Joe Christmas the *mestizo* double ambiguity of being neither black nor white essentially but born of the crossed

ancestries of the Latin world. In fact, Joe Christmas's identity as a "white nigger" (344), that is, as someone who obscurely inhabits the color spectrum between white and black, stands on the far side of Sutpen's refusal to acknowledge his own mixed-race son, Charles Bon, by his Haitian wife, Eulalia. These figures "threatening white supremacy" (249) and the constructed nature of racial and class identity live and suffer the consequences of their actions. Their fates reflect what Edouard Glissant describes as the "contradictory atavistic" nature of the "composite cultures" created with European colonialism: "What is Yoknapatawpha? A composite culture that suffers from wanting to become an atavistic one and suffers in not being able to achieve that goal" (*Faulkner, Mississippi*, 115).

6

Even if Thomas Sutpen had embraced his mulatto son, Charles Bon, and his grandson, Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon, finding atavistic homogeneity across generations and racial divides, all still would not have been well in Yoknapatawpha County. For *Absalom, Absalom!* is not just a narrative of the family romance gone south. Nor is Faulkner's novel simply an American imperialist representation of the Caribbean in which the foreign-born son, Charles Bon, plays the role of the Caribbean homeless son, desiring to naturalize but prevented from doing so and thus being legally assimilated into the US body politic.

Affiliation is a much more complicated affair than either of those alternate designs in Sutpen's story might allow, as Quentin and Shreve come to understand. For in Faulkner, the family, and with it the nation-state in all of its romantic certitude, is very much representative of a doomed order or design, one marked by rejection, vengeance, and fratricide. The problem of this American novel is ultimately the difficulty of accepting the existence of others, aliens, strangers within the self. All of which makes *Absalom, Absalom!* a timely and difficult novel. For if *Absalom* is a novel about the failure of self-sufficiency, it is also a novel about the failure of romantic individualism's denial of the role of the life of strangers in the self. One additional result of Faulkner's thematic foray into the global South, then, is, unexpectedly, a formally generic one, resulting in a blend of historical fiction, Menippean satire, and literary realism in Faulkner's representation of the fate of racial identity in the South.

To (re)admit strangers, especially racial strangers, into constructions of both individual and communal selves, Faulkner's novels have to negotiate the relationship between what is narrated and what is

unsayable, especially as they attempt to establish historical veracity for their accounts of the fate of the American nation. As a result of this negotiation, literary realism comes to acknowledge the roles of fantasy, the uncanny (the *unheimlich*), the marvelous, and the imaginary in historical reality as integral aspects of the internal makeup of American history.

In his celebrated essay "The Marvelous Real in America," the prologue to his 1949 novel, *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*), Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier offers an alternate but related explanation for the nature of American narrative and American reality. Carpentier claims that in the Americas a modern perception of reality resulted from a unique fusion of the beliefs and superstitions of different cultural groups that included the European conqueror, his Euro-American criollo (creole) and Westernized mestizo descendants, the native peoples of the Americas, and the descendants of Africans carried into bondage in the New World.

Historically, the shared experiences and the misconceptions arising from the often conflicted contact among these groups colored the accounts of America's discovery and colonization by both native and European chroniclers. The early European chroniclers in the Americas not only brought with them erroneous preconceptions and utopian images of the New World; they also brought patterns for their narratives, particularly the *libros de caballerías* (books of chivalry), which related fantastic and incredible feats realized by fictional heroes. Little distinction was made between fact and fiction within the traditions of European Renaissance historiography and rhetoric.

Similarly, by relying on the oral storytelling traditions of their ancestors' fables and myths as the primary source for their history, native chroniclers also combined truth and fantasy. For these reasons having to do with the experience of reality in the Americas and the consequent attempt to narrate it, Carpentier says in his essay, a new narrative mode emerged in the New World as an attempt to adequate the real and the marvelous, resulting in a mode he called *lo real maravilloso*, the marvelous real. In the Americas the reality of history is so strange as to appear fictional. "After all," concludes Carpentier, "what is the entire history of America if not the chronicle of the marvelous real?"²¹

Thinking proleptically, one may find a great deal of common ground between the role of *lo real maravilloso* (magical realism) in the narratives of the American global South and in Faulkner. The basis for that common ground is their shared concern with the social and cultural legacies of colonialism, slavery, and political dependency in the Americas. As distinct as the outcome of each of these American experiences has been

in the various regions of the American hemisphere, those differences nevertheless share identifiable genetic traits.

In his attempts to explain the fissures within American histories and their historiographical patterns, Faulkner too, like Carpentier, found that discursive hybridity—in this case a blending of history and the real, fantasy and the imaginary—unavoidably forms the warp and woof of New World narratives, extending north and south of the border between Latin and Anglo America. The South defined by this border, however, is not an exotic counterpoint lacking real contact with the world of historical significance. On the contrary, Faulkner's global South extends across this imaginary divide of the Americas, acknowledging their real historical kinship and difference.

This geography is one reason Glissant, thinking hemispherically, claims in an essay entitled "The Novel of the Americas" that he can identify "themes common to the concerns of those whom we classify as American writers."²² Glissant concludes that time and space in the American novel are consistently rent, shattered, and torn out of shape, requiring different forms of representational style to reshape them into a properly American form. "This is why," concludes Glissant, "realism—that is the logical and rational attitude toward the visible world—more than anywhere else would in our case betray the true meaning of things" (145). When we put Faulkner in the context of the global South, his realism turns into something very much akin to magical realism. This is precisely the context in which Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and the other great novelists of mid-twentieth-century Latin America encounter him.

As we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is clear that a new paradigm for global and local ways of studying culture and literature must be created. This new *poesis* of comparative study is the basis of what has been termed the "transnational turn" in American literary studies. Its intent is not simply to revise the paradigm of American exceptionalism but to offer deeper understanding of the profound interrelations binding the new world cultures of the Americas. Fundamental to an understanding of the relational basis of this new study of the Americas is a new sense of the dynamics of how knowledge is generated and human resources used, and a recognition of the rich reservoir of knowledge that exists in languages and cultures across the Americas that have in the past not been deemed worthy of study or comparison. The aim of critical work of this kind of comparative American studies is to ensure that the various regions that we may call the American global South rise on their own rich heritage in a world of equals. In the case of

Faulkner, this approach offers the possibility of understanding him not simply as a writer of the American South but also as a chronicler of the world culture of the global South.

NOTES

1. Deborah Cohn, "The Unlikely Patriot: Faulkner as Cold Warrior and Goodwill Ambassador for the US Department of State" (paper presented at the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, University of Mississippi, June 8, 2012), 1, 2.
2. Saskia Sassen, "A Savage Sorting of Winners and Losers: Contemporary Versions of Primitive Accumulation," *Globalizations* 7.1-2 (2010): 24.
3. Eduardo Mendieta, introduction to *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, by Enrique D. Dussel, ed. and trans. Mendieta (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), xxi.
4. Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vol. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
5. Sassen, 32.
6. Susan Willis, "Aesthetics of the Rural Slum: Contradictions and Dependency in 'The Bear,'" *Social Text* 2 (1979): 82.
7. Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1.
8. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* The Corrected Text (New York: Random House, 1986), 186. Text hereafter cited parenthetically.
9. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, 1st ed., ed. David Minter (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 53. Text hereafter cited parenthetically.
10. See Illona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
11. See Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
12. Hosam M. Aboul-Ela, *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátegui Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 156.
13. John T. Matthews, "This Race Which Is Not One: The 'More Inextricable Compositeness' of William Faulkner's South," in Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, eds., *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 218.
14. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 52.
15. Edouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, trans. Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999). Text hereafter cited parenthetically.
16. Paula M. L. Moya and Hazel Markus, "An Introduction," in Moya and Markus, eds., *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), x.
17. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 309.

18. M. M. Bakhtin, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 51.
19. M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 160.
20. William Faulkner, *Light in August: The Corrected Text* (New York: Random House, 1990), 248, 374. Text hereafter cited parenthetically.
21. Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America" (1949), in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, trans. Tanya Huntington and Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 88.
22. Edouard Glissant, "The Novel of the Americas," in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 144. Text hereafter cited parenthetically.