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Faulkner scholarship is one of the largest critical enterprises currently at work. Because of its size and scope, accessing that scholarship has become difficult for scholars, students, and general readers alike.

This is the personal but never just personal question I asked all of the contributors to ponder as they thought about their essays for this Companion. In responding to it, they have aligned their work, roughly, within one of two groups: Taken together, all ten essays aspire to be a composite though necessarily incomplete "profession" of Faulkner studies today, by circulating around the following concerns: What is at stake in reading Faulkner? How does the apparently private act of reading function in the broader dynamic of cultural reproduction and revision? What from the perspective of the s does it mean to call Faulkner a modernist? What largely European alignment of forms and concerns is thus asserted? How is this alignment reaccented when we contrast Faulknerian practice with other fictional practices of the same period? Moreland candidly inquires into the relations among the three central activities he himself performs when he is thinking Faulkner: He then seeks, speculatively rather than insistently, to reconceive these activities as dimensions of texts themselves: They thus leave in their reader a sense of malaise - "a critical dissatisfaction with what the culture in general or any of us as individuals alone already knows how to say. This stereotypical opposition organizes our most widely shared narrative of the "great writer" - such as Fitzgerald or Faulkner - ensnared by "Hollywood commercialism. Rather, it managed, by reflecting wittily on its own manner of rehearsing social coordinates, to distinguish its uncoerced behavior from the "culture industry" norms it necessarily encoded. Matthews pursues this argument as part of a larger project of reconceiving the ways in which the aesthetic practice of high modernism encounters mass-market cultural forms spawned by twentieth-century modernization. We have wanted too often to polarize this encounter. We are just learning - thanks to essays like this one - to chart a more complex dynamic of submission and resistance. He then gathers together the rare European novelists - a dozen in all - whose work has achieved, in his view, an equivalent mastery and reach. Modernists all, these writers nevertheless lack the unifying commitment to realism that permits us to join nineteenth-century writers as divergent as Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoy, and James. Bleikasten concludes with a modernist pairing as compelling as it is unexpected: Kafka and Faulkner, both "children" of Dostoevsky, compassionate masters of the uncanny, of mesmerizing tales that are simultaneously transparent and opaque. Eulalia Bon "is" one kind of person in the former culture, another kind in the latter, and Saldivar adroitly discusses Absalom, Absalom! Systemic violence against blacks lived side by side with intimate transferential projections on them. He could narrate this steady exodus of blacks from their homeland only by inverting both its direction and its racial focus. On this reading, Quentin Compson alert throughout his deathday to every nuance of black behavior in Cambridge experiences an exile displaced detail by detail from its black origin. Lester goes on to collect the various other "absences" in the text around the overdetermined figure of Caddy - sister, mistress, mother, mammy - concluding that *The Sound and the Fury* like its writer could encounter this historical event only in the form of loss and dispossession. A text usually celebrated for its achieved psychological intensity is here seen as shaped decisively by its racial positioning, and the historical testimony it offers becomes eloquent in its very evasions. Rather, Wittenberg demonstrates race to be invisible in another sense. That is, and this is searingly true of *Light in August*, race may function as a wholly constructed, conceptual phenomenon; melanin may have nothing to do with it. The damaged child, potentially revolutionary, makes his way past his psychic wound and eventually "hears" the voice he requires - objective, impersonal, final to sanction his design. He joins the father rather than slaying him, ensuring that, even though actual sons and fathers succeed each other and die off in time, the structure of the father - what Lacan calls the "Symbolic Father" - retains its privileged authority. Wadlington sees Faulkner addressing both as achieved diagnosis and as unwitting complicity one of the cardinal ills of our century: Wadlington shows that the private act of reading is inevitably inflected by the stance of others: Likewise, the domain of the private marks our experience of the public. For the most important projects we conceive are unrealizable without the troublemaking yet empowering participation of others. How might a reader most profit from this Companion to William

Faulkner If the volume is successful, its uses will exceed my predictions. Nevertheless, a certain number of Faulknerian inquiries are here explicitly enabled, and these may be identified at the outset. Nowadays it has become impossible to conceive a totality that is not potential, conjectural, and plural" He is surely the supreme American novelist to write himself out of modernism in the s as decisively as he had written himself into it in the s. We tend with unavoidable imprecision to call postmodern those writers who are creatively suspicious of modernism, and several contributors open up the possibilities of a postmodernist practice. Both are torn halves of freedom to which, however, they do not add up" Huysse Saldivar shows Absalom, Absalom! Lester and Porter likewise insert Faulkner within larger social dynamics than the writer himself is likely to have contemplated: It is difficult not to oppose these terms - autonomy and situatedness - yet many essays in this volume suggest that subjectivity itself is but a reaccenting of culturally proffered or imposed models of being. Whether the focus on race be a comparative study of U. More than his white male peers, he seems to have been wounded by race, and he risked his work more than they did on the representation of racial turmoil. It was a wager he knew to be unwinnable, one whose parameters exceeded his self-knowledge and whose pursuit would necessarily deprive him of mastery. First, his work reflects or represents certain realities as in much reading, especially of "readerly" texts. What does all this have to do with modernism? The three functions I have suggested for literature assume different relations to one another in different social and historical contexts and in different kinds of texts. The American literature of the later nineteenth century that is often called realist literature seems to emphasize most the task of representing reality, although certainly it does also criticize and take part in those realities it represents not least by rearticulating - as it restates - common sense. I think modernist literature tends to adopt a more emphatically and self-consciously critical role. And much of the literature called postmodernist, contemporary, postwar, multicultural, or postcolonial tends to place more stress on the ongoing, problematic relationship between the work and the social contexts of its production, reception, and circulation. But the social criticism elaborated in his work becomes more interesting if we consider how this critical function and modernist periodization remain closely related to a more representational function and realist discourse, and also to a more participatory function of transference, negotiation, and change, in a more obviously multicultural, multitemporal or nonsynchronous social context. Instead of simply emerging from the shed confirmed as a white man, however, Joe enters the dark shed and feels his own confusion and fear as "a terrible haste. His reaction is unexpected and desperate, but it recalls and focuses the larger social dynamic: Their white manhood depends on that domination. And at his first news of "the temporary and abject helplessness" suggested to him by menstruation, the idea that "the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled" could be "doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth," Christmas only "got over it, recovered" by going out and shooting a sheep: But not to me. Not in my life and my love" In a more modernist novel like Light in August, however, such behavior begins to function less as an odd exception than as a critically articulated example of the social rule, with that rule viewed here from the therefore more alienated subject position of a disenchanting artist or impotently ironic social critic. Not just the occasional outrage but the entire culture - even its language - begins to seem "monstrous and paradoxical and wrong": Or, more specifically in the case of Faulkner as a white Southerner, to a history of defeat, poverty, and disillusionment. Or, as Joe says vaguely, "something," which may suggest a more accurate sense of the depressive, uncommunicative, atomized tendency of much modernist thought, as if that "something" cannot be named or thought without the most wrenching dislocations and fragmentations, as suggested in many modernist styles. Like Christmas with the sheep, the town in Light in August finally reacts to such apparently unthinkable, unnameable disturbances with an archaic ritual violence toward Christmas himself, "in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. They are symptoms of a nostalgia or archaism patently out of sync with the modernist present. The cultural currents he criticizes are too pervasive for him to challenge effectively, too pervasive even for him to escape. It thereby represents the difficulties and limitations of its critique, the difficulty, for example, of militarily, legally, or moralistically eliminating such cultural currents either from the human subjects these currents allow to dominate others or from the human subjects these currents not only dominate but also largely constitute in their own subjectivities. Such critique, then, cannot simply replace, outflank, undercut, or frame representation. One might say that this work is

realistic about critique, or critical of critique in much the same way that realism is most effectively critical of romanticism, whether in literary or literary critical discourse. Ellison sees other modernist writers like Hemingway evading such social issues by means of a "superstitious" attention to literary experimentation and technique. Faulkner himself was certainly interested in formal experimentation and technique, but the effect of his experiments tends less to control than to provoke disturbances of whatever perspective tries to control his subject matter. After sacrificing the sheep, and after striking and leaving Bobbie and vomiting the first time he learns she is menstruating, Joe does manage to approach her again and to talk with her in bed "about her body as if no one had ever done this before, with her or with anyone else" LA Bobbie does not, however, hear this statement critically or differently or as if for the first time, its meaning to be considered and discussed between these two relative outsiders to this society. She can only think of it as a fact, an identity to be either recognized as true or denied as false: "I don't believe it" Prevailing social constructions of race and prostitution will continue to prove almost irresistible for their thinking both about each other and even about themselves as two victims of that same thinking. There are profound social and psychological problems here, problems that disturb the flow of almost every sentence, and there is no comfortable position from which to view these problems, or not for long. Judgment here is not enough; it is not social change, it is not even pure. The subject positions of innocent social insider or moralistic social judge usually offered by realism to its readers, for example, as well as the more modernist subject positions of disenchanting artistic or ironic social critic, are all pulled into the social and historical soup. They are shown to be largely circumscribed and constituted by that social context, whether as insider or outsider, but this impasse, this contradiction between critique and complicity, may at the same time be what leads some modernist work toward a renewed sense of being engaged in and moved by that same increasingly complex and changing context. This social background begins to function more clearly neither as a stable foundation of social customs or moral beliefs - certainly not one to which we might realistically yearn for a return - nor as an oppressive or meaningless social context acting systematically and independently of our own critical positions and yearnings for escape. It is a context instead in which characters, narrators, readers, writers, teachers, and students are already inevitably and even movingly engaged, an ongoing cultural conversation and activity, marked by powerful currents but also by persistent disturbances, differences, transferences, renegotiations, reconfigurations, and change. The disenchanting artistic or ironic social critic in Faulkner is never quite allowed to leave - nor ever quite wants to leave - the social field of the action. He it is usually a he becomes an embroiled character, like Hightower in *Light in August* or Mr. Compson, Shreve, or Quentin in *Absalom Absalom!* As a character he learns not only that this modernist disenchantment and irony are of limited social power and usefulness, but also that his own disenchantment and irony are much less impersonal and disinterested than he has wanted to think. As a character he is less determined and more emotionally affected than he has wanted to think. What this character tends to think virtually unthinkable, others are somehow able to think, act, even sometimes to say. Whereas his own history threatens to fly apart, other strange and different histories seem somehow to be still actively under way. There are other reasons, however, to take that risk. Focusing on the death of his grandfather in the Civil War, he has offered his congregation, "instead of the crucified shape of pity and love, a swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse" We, too, may well read such stories with "bafflement and hunger and eagerness. Byron is drawn not away from Lena, nor to scapegoat or dominate Lena as a threat to his sense of his own masculinity, but toward Lena, as if to learn how she thinks and acts what so many like himself have thought unthinkable, unbearable, unacceptable. What such conditions as virginity and unwed motherhood mean is never allowed here to resolve itself into unquestionable social judgment and fact, however, nor does the narration undercut or frame such representations in favor of a coherent criticism. This last chapter is narrated between an entirely new character and his wife as the two of them make love in bed. Bunch, "Ain't you ashamed" [LA, "The furniture dealer could not see Byron, he says, "but I knew about how I would have been standing and feeling if I was him. And that would have been with my head bowed, waiting for the Judge to say, Take him out of here and hang him quick" 7 " Perhaps Byron remembers what Mrs.

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If we divide light from night, we give up the lightness of our mixture. We put ourselves into watertight compartments, break ourselves up into parts, cut ourselves in two. This metanarrative has obtained mythical proportions, especially in the South. Within this paradigm, women are imprisoned in one of two cells and are unable to function as rounded, diverse human beings. William Faulkner, in his novel *As I Lay Dying*, depicts the God-fearing Cora in opposition to Addie, the transgressor against the totally virtuous woman myth. In perhaps more palatable words, matrimony is usually arranged so that men serve as heads of household while women serve as homemakers and nurturers of children. Although these roles have undergone various changes in recent years, two facets of this role remain intact: Because of this essential, biological invention, women retain a power which men attempt, through societal constructs and usually successfully, to subvert. That is, if they are to have any control over the reproductive process, men must somehow subvert the power advantage females possess as the givers and nurturers of life. Female sexuality, then, becomes their target. In other words, female sexuality contains within it the essence of feminine power and it is therefore the biggest threat to the male social order. The logic is simple. Women have the power to give life. Women have the edict to nurture that life once it is created. Consequently, when a man has sex with a woman, he gives her the opportunity to assert her power. To remedy this imbalance of power, patriarchal societies construct narratives which box women into one of two categories. First, women may become mothers. Jill Bergman explains this aspect of the metanarrative as it played out in the post-Civil War era: Motherhood, in both the North and the South, became linked, paradoxically, with chastity and served as a means of containing and denying female sexuality. The attempt to suppress birth control information, then, complements the more insidious and less overt effort to contain and suppress female sexuality, properly channeling it only to procreation. Now motherhood becomes not an icon of female power, but a threat, a type of ammunition which allows men to usurp the balance of power within marriage and society. Faulkner understands and depicts the magnitude of this threat to women in *As I Lay Dying*. The Bundren marriage, like most in the patriarchal grand recits, succumbs to male dominance. Anse asserts his sexual desires and reproductive power over Addie. Addie has no choice but to play her assigned role. The second role available to women in the master narrative of the patriarchy is that of the evil seductress. If women dare to enjoy sex outside marriage, they are labeled promiscuous and they pay the price for their sexuality by becoming social outcasts. Toni Morrison depicts the plight of such a woman in *Sula*. Consequently, the split personality of the Mythic Female is created. Weinstein clarifies this notion, telling us that women Typically [. Both trajectories keep them imprisoned within patriarchal narratives of womanhood the intoxicating woman the male has intercourse with but cannot control and does not marry, on the one hand, or the repressed woman who keeps intact his line of descent and denatures herself in the process, on the other. Addie and Cora; Sula and Nel The difficulty, of course, with such a narrative is that life consists of more than two choices. Many women desire numerous roles and adventures in life. As a female living in the s, Addie has few options for economic survival. She may live out her days as a spinster school teacher, a role and a job which she despises, or she may marry. Thus, Addie chooses a marriage with Anse, but this is not a choice Addie is enthused about. And you live there alone, doing for yourself, do you? Addie latches onto Anse as her ticket out of poverty and her fare away from her role as teacher. Addie suffers the plight of women who do not fit comfortably into the mold of good wife and mother. So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. Not even by Anse in the nights. Only after the consequences of sexual union occur i. Unlike Addie, however, Cora embraces the role patriarchy thrusts upon her. Instead, she cherishes it. Cora cannot understand that Addie remains unbearably miserable in these prescribed roles. The more Cora insists that the Mythic Female is the only role worthy of women, the more Addie punctuates her denial of that role. She is

blamed, ridiculed, and punished. She travels alone, attends college, and lives as a single woman with no children. Sula simply revels in the company of men and in the freedom of her own life. Nel, on the other hand, acts as a contrast to Sula. Marrying shortly after her high school years, Nel becomes a conventional wife and mother of three children. But, any tension within the camaraderie between Nel and Sula is a long time coming. The two experience a childhood friendship that consists of both tragedy and joy. They also move through puberty and adolescence together, each drawing from the relationship what she lacks in herself alone. Upon her wedding day, Nel gains a husband and loses her best friend at least she loses the physical proximity of that friend. When Nel regains even a portion of her Self, she is free to enjoy sex with her husband because she abandons the notion that the sex act is her wifely duty. Nel begins to chip away at the dualistic mold of the Mythic Female. Despite the strides Nel and Sula make in severing their bonds to the Mythic Female, the community of the Bottom remains devoted to the metanarrative. In doing so, they achieve two aims. First, they place Sula and Nel within their construct of the Mythic Female, albeit on either end of the binary opposition. Second, they confirm their own roles as a community of individuals within the patriarchal master narrative. In other words, by labeling Sula the evil seductress, the people of the Bottom deepen their commitment to the idea of the Mythic Female. They further define themselves as part of this narrative by aligning themselves with the good role they project onto Nel. Thus, the Mythic Female is perpetuated. However, on a personal, individual level, i. Morrison depicts Sula as an independent woman who seldom lets the labels others place on her affect her decisions regarding how she will lead her life. Conventional Nel, however, allows these labels to decide the composition of her lifestyle. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze. During her sojourn through bereavement, Nel believes she misses her husband and wifedom. Unable to play the role of the Mythic Female, Nel feels lost. Because Nel and Sula had not an ordinary relationship, but a revolutionary one, Nel and Sula rewrite their personal narratives rounding out their personalities, pushing them beyond the confines of a dualistic mode of operation. Despite what the community has to say about them, Nel and Sula find their Selves. And thus, through the death of her best friend, Nel rediscovers the Self which she lost long ago. The Apocalypse Through their pairs of characters, Addie and Cora and Sula and Nel, Faulkner and Morrison use similar techniques to convey similar meanings. But Faulkner stops a good distance from allowing Addie success. Sula, on the other hand, takes the truly revolutionary step by not only questioning the narrative of the Mythic Female, but also by openly transgressing that narrative and writing her own story. Sula grabs the reins of her life, and happily usurps the prescribed narrative by living life her own way. By doing so, Sula guides the metanarrative closer to real change and viable choices for women. Instead, they must do as Sula and Nel did they must kill the Mythic Female so that the female Self might live. Works Cited Basu, Biman. The Journal of Southern Culture. State University of New York Press, University of Missouri Press, As I Lay Dying. Cornell University Press, Chelsea House Publishers, A Journal of English Language and Literature. What Else But Love? The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison. Columbia University Press,

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