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Philip M. Weinstein

Swarthmore College, pweinst1@swarthmore.edu

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The Land's Turn

PHILIP WEINSTEIN

Faulkner and Ecology: the topic may seem a bit willful, an attempt to align “our man” with some contemporary non-Faulknerian preoccupation. The more I reflected, however, the more appropriate this topic became. Not only because Faulkner’s brooding imagination appears, itself, to be ecologically oriented, but also because “ecology” is hardly a recent concern. Probably derived from the Greek term *oikonomia*—home management, or “economy”—“ecology” involves the traffic between particular (“home-based”) needs and the larger, always limited, resources available for meeting those needs. Like economy, ecology assumes scarcity, and therefore a reasoned deployment of limited social goods and natural resources. Concern for ecology is older than recorded history itself—is a staple of oral cultures—and the “ecological” element of Faulkner’s work attaches to his most atavistic convictions. The “ecological” is the predis-cursive in Faulkner’s work that rebukes the endless spewing of speech.¹ It is no accident that the “ecological” lodges in that which does not speak—in the big woods that resist man’s talky invasion, in the raging river that punishes any attempt to cross it, in the mule that symbolizes the very stubbornness of inertia. Put otherwise, the “ecological” in Faulkner refers to a territory of human norms premised on scarcity and shaped to a noncapitalist paradigm.²

Older than history: all oral societies managed to achieve their fundamental goal—survival—only by respecting ecological values. In his study of African societies, British historian Basil Davidson notes that, throughout the 1960s–1980s, liberated, postcolonial native regimes sought to imitate the prestigious economic models of their departing conquerors (British, French, Portuguese). Such models—based on a post-Enlightenment middle-class and a technological infrastructure permitting capitalistic progress—proved disastrous in Africa. As Davidson characterizes the pre-colonial practices that were *not* followed, a full-fledged ecological philosophy emerges into view. He writes: “Each of these ... societies, from lineage group to clan to cluster of clans, had to shape its behavior to fit its environment, its possible resources in food and shelter, its scope for political development... The rules had to be explanatory so that people ... would understand why survival depended upon following them... Therefore, they had to be the fruit of painstaking observation and analysis of soils and seasons and all the manifest diversities of nature, including human nature. In short, they had to be severely reasonable ... the very reverse of the blind dictates of superstition that nineteenth-century Europeans supposed to reign supreme on the ‘dark continent.’”³ The all-important goal of these noncapitalist cultures, generation after generation, was sustainability, not progress.

Older than history: oral cultures envisage history quite differently than literate ones do. With respect to Christianity this difference proved decisive, for what invading Christian colonizers could regard African natives and not see a people at least 1500 years behind the revealed truth: primitives, not yet aware of the good news that Christ brought so long ago? John Mbiti has shown that many African languages articulate temporality itself in ways tellingly different

from the languages of the progressive West. Most African verb tenses, he shows, focus on the present, the immediate past, and the immediate future; the other tenses speak of the more distant (but still remembered) past and, beyond that, the sacred departed past (the realm of the spirits). *No verbs exist for an abstract future years away*: life is grasped, instead, as a concrete phenomenon moving past one, backwards, from the near future into the present, then to the recent past and finally to the distant past. The seasons, likewise, are demarcated not as abstracted months on an abstracted calendar, but as activity-filled periods—of planting or harvesting or building—that make up the concrete reality of the passing year.⁴

What has this to do with Faulkner? Ask the trees, the river, the horses, and the mules: if they could speak, they could tell you. And they would never say, as Thomas Sutpen does, “You see, I had a design in my mind... . To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these.”⁵ “Design ... acquire”: no nonwestern culture ever committed itself to such abstract conceptualizing, such insistent mapping of future time and space. Sutpen’s “design” is as singular in its pursuit as aboriginal men’s behavior was communal, shaped according to long-engrained norms.⁶ And shaped at a level deeper than conscious thought or speech: the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes such prediscursive shaping of individual behavior as *habitus*. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* dissolves the oppositions between individual motive and social limitation, free and determined, that tend to polarize Western liberal thought. Instead, *habitus* involves recurring objective conditions which, over time, individuals have unthinkingly absorbed into their own reckoning, turning such reckoning into active dispositions. Bourdieu writes: “Because the dispositions ... inculcated by objective conditions ... engender aspirations and practices ... compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded ... as *unthinkable*.”⁷ Boiled down, as Faulkner might say, to six or eight words, viable *habitus* ensures successful ecological practice. Individuals seek what can be achieved within the available resources.

Bourdieu’s natives act normatively (but *not* predictably: they are still free) within the flexible frame of their *habitus*, moved by dispositions deeper than conscious choices. Bourdieu describes these dispositions as “second natures.” “The ‘unconscious,’” he goes on to claim, “is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of *habitus*: ‘in each of us ... there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves.’” (79).⁸ Such thinking is far from Freudian individualism: the unconscious is our forgotten social being, not our repressed personal desires. The unconscious part of ourselves, the part rooted deeper than choice, the part unthinkingly attached to yesterday’s man and yesterday’s world: Bourdieu’s *habitus*, that inertial, long-gathering resistance to the new, coils at the heart of Faulkner’s ecological imagination.

One’s image of Faulkner does not reduce to the reactive traditionalist this model might suggest. Rather, the oldest strata in him, so to speak, is ecological: that inertial sense of things

that, scandalized by the “abruption” of the new, seeks to escape, or to rebuke, such bewildering incursions. His Yoknapatawpha County thus shapes up as a precarious ecosystem itself established only by the inveigling and uprooting of a native population, and thereafter menaced, recurrently, by further crises, incursions, these driven by long-inculcated convictions and practices of opposing races, classes, and regions.⁹ Put otherwise, Faulkner’s work achieves its gravity because the wounds to body and spirit it records seem more stubbornly rooted, less open to therapy, than the more individualist dramas of a Fitzgerald or Hemingway. Whole ways of life are opposed and under attack. The resonance of these troubles seems to intimate the wounded land itself—the land that’s “going to turn and destroy us all someday” (AA 7)—a kind of injury that goes deeper, and lasts longer, than mere individual pain. What makes this drama intractable is that the agents committing and receiving the damage are motivated by forces and orientations located beneath thought. Outrage is Faulkner’s emotional signature because his protagonists act in accordance with unthinking cultural training. His great work dramatizes habitus against habitus, an agon waged between the yesterday’s men predominating and inveterate in the men of today. To find these yesterday’s men he needed not Jay Gatsby but the mountain man Thomas Sutpen—not the tomorrow-ridden world of urban climbing but the yesterday-suffused world of a rural culture.

Habitus: cultural training that over the course of generations shapes individuals deeper than spoken discourse. Even Joe Christmas realizes “that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act.”¹⁰ If it took generations of cultural training for Colonel Sartoris to find it normal to fire that gun upon unarmed Nathaniel and Calvin Burden, it took, no less, generations of cultural training for Nathaniel and Calvin Burden to find it normal to place themselves in front of Sartoris’s gun. Yoknapatawpha County serves as the site, thus, of long-brooded scenarios of oppositional training confronting each other, contesting each other, and (with few mediating positions available) destroying each other. Habitus against habitus, both inalterable. Before turning to this violence in *Absalom, Absalom!*, let me sketch out the collision of opposing habituses in Faulkner’s work. For if viable habitus just *means* a culture of subjects moving efficiently through familiar pathways of space and time, the Faulknerian canvas spectacularly refuses to stage precisely this. Rather than narrate normative movement, Faulkner attends to subject motion gone dysfunctional, incorrigibly awry, and heading toward either of two extremes: slow (too slow, intolerably slow) or fast (too fast, suicidally fast).

Slow, too slow: consider the ode to the mule in *Flags in the Dust*. “Steadfast to the land ... impervious to conditions ... [embodying] sheer and vindictive patience ... misanthropic ... misunderstood ... moved neither by reason, flattery, nor promise of reward,”¹¹ the mule emerges as a mute signpost of long-ingrained, precapitalist Southern realities: daily and disfiguring labor upon the land, a patience wrought into him by immemorial repetitions, a gathered stubbornness of identity that nothing can deflect, that we recognize best when, desiring to get ahead, we try to hurry him up. A liminal creature, deeply inert, he straddles the line between sleep and waking, stasis and motion, as though he incarnated the inconceivable slowness of natural process itself. Immune to temptation, he is eternally what he is, even if this is other than what we want him to be, seeming to symbolize the gritty precapitalist South, and to rebuke every gadget inventable that might signal progress, getting ahead, rising.

Change mule for horse, and a more complex pattern emerges, since Faulkner's horses are both too slow and too fast. (The latter trait emerges unforgettably in the spotted horses no one is going to domesticate, a speed that intoxicates and disorients the peasants motionlessly regarding them.) Jewel's horse, however, reveals both more-than-human speed and more-than-human resistance to human control over that speed. "Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs, with lowered head."¹² A similar man-horse tension recurs in *Light in August*: Joe Christmas desperately beating McEachern's horse, trying to fly to Bobbie: "The stick still fell; as the progress of the horse slowed the speed of the stick increased in exact ratio.... Yet still the rider leaned forward in the arrested saddle, in the attitude of terrific speed" (LA 210). Silhouetted here is nature's inertial resistance to furious human purpose, frantic human design. If we change horse for dog, we get the haunting scene of Houston's dog blocking Mink's attempt to put Houston's corpse away, appearing and reappearing (despite Mink's ever more vicious attacks upon it) to thwart Mink's project.¹³ You can't get away with this, such animal behavior silently says. Or in Sutpen language: this is a design that's not going to work, it goes against the grain of inertial nature itself. In such scenes everything hostile to the puny human figure's insistence on *imposing his will* seems to coalesce into the figures of mule, horse, and dog.¹⁴

Faulkner critics have long been attentive to Faulkner's brooding landscape, likewise silently resistant to human project. Most spectacularly, there is the raging river of "Old Man" and *As I Lay Dying*. It is antagonistic to human design; you can't submit yourself to that water and remain yourself. "The clotting which is you" runs the risk of dissolving "into the myriad original motion" (AILD 110). About such nonhuman implacability Doc Peabody reflects: "That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent" (30). The inalterable self-sameness of the river appears here as more elemental than human project, more powerful than the *projectedness* of human project, as if the way that a reality (any reality) has long endured as itself counts for more than the way any character may press it to alter. Such atavistic self-insistence recalls Freud's proposal of an instinct older than the pleasure principle, beyond the pleasure principle: "*It seems, then,*" Freud writes, "*that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things ... [thus expressing] the inertia inherent in organic life.*"¹⁵ Instinct would be that in us that is prior to our identity and utterly unteachable. In this light we might reflect on the unparalleled *stubbornness* of Faulkner's characters, the assumption in his plots that whatever you are, deep down, elementally—at the level of "*central I-Am's private own*" (AA 112)—that's what you're going to be, all the way, to confrontation, annihilation, Gethsemane and crucifixion. Faulkner's mixed-race tragedies refuse the end run attempted in the plot of *passing*, as though such a progressive way of sidestepping race trouble amounted to a refusal to grant the trouble its genuine, long-gathered, all-destabilizing gravity.

This inertial stance appears recurrently in Faulkner's blacks, where it has a range of registers. "Too slow" is how Jason Compson reads such blacks, all blacks, as he scornfully muses: "like Roskus the only mistake he ever made was he got careless one day and died."¹⁶ The text doesn't "forget" such scorn, though, and later Jason's own frantic motion makes him come a cropper. His head pounding with pain, he seeks to persuade one of the black boys in

Mottstown to drive him back to Jefferson: “ ‘Is you do one wants to go to Jefferson?’ he [the boy] said. ‘Yes,’ Jason said. ‘What’ll you charge me?’ ‘Fo dollars.’ ‘Give you two.’ ‘Can’t go fer no less’n fo’” (313).

Quentin sees similar black imperturbability, and while it is similarly out of his reach (he is no less frantic than Jason), he at least has the wit to admire it. “Unimpatient” is his term for characterizing the unhurried black man on the mule, as the modern train rushes Quentin toward Jefferson. “Unimpatient”: the term implies an ecological capacity to retain one’s long-acquired stance toward the world despite the speed-insistent technologies of modern capitalism, to manage—when “patient” is no longer viable given the ubiquitous pressure—to not get caught in “impatient” but rather to find one’s way past the newfangled obstacles, back into a patience that is now “unimpatience.” Faulkner’s poor whites sometimes manage “unimpatience” as well—witness Armstid and Winterbottom’s traditional jockeying over the cultivator in *Light in August*, or the Bundrens’ implacable delivery of Addie’s body to the earth awaiting it (no matter the obstacles).¹⁷ However complicated by private motives, these events unfold according to the inertial rhythms of shared habitus.

A willingness to rest within the dimensions of one’s long-inculcated and confirmed identity: it is no accident this traditional virtue is mainly observed in Faulkner by its breach. Habitus enters his fictional world as rebuke, as resistance to change, as prejudice, but rarely as viable norm. Habitus does not prosper: Faulkner’s protagonists typically shatter, and are shattered by, habitus. Yet his fiction is not drawn to just any iconoclastic character. In fact, Faulkner’s most resonant twentieth-century habitus-destroyer—Flem Snopes—is represented almost wholly through the lenses of others. Could it be because this figure, expertly at ease with the moves required for acquisition and progress, this rural capitalist, is simply outside the field of long-brooded pieties (of habituses) Faulkner seems to require of his subjects when he chooses to go in deep? Is Flem kept representationally at arm’s length because, deep down, he has no long-matured, socially inculcated “central I-Am’s private own,” and is thus immune to the outraging of such a center?

By contrast, when Lucas Beauchamp engages in his own Flem-like form of legerdemain, outwitting the whites who would outwit him, he is swiftly brought back into line, receiving from the earth an ecological rebuke: “the entire overhang sloughed. It drummed on the hollow kettle ... and boiled about his feet and, as he leaped backward and tripped and fell, about his body too, hurling clods and dirt at him, striking a final blow squarely in the face with something larger than a clod ... a sort of final admonitory pat from the spirit of darkness and solitude, the old earth, perhaps the old ancestors themselves.”¹⁸ The moving earth reveals the gold coin that will catalyze Lucas’s later efforts to rise, but that “admonitory pat” seems to say, in earth talk, “beware: if there is buried treasure here, it means to stay buried.” Lucas eventually realizes, after one too many trials, that “to find that money aint for me” (101). The very phrasing is redolent of a speechless inertial order rebuking the human desire for labor-free upward mobility.

Slow, too slow: elements of ecological stasis appear as the rooted resistance to violently imposed change; they serve to silhouette the abruptness of fast, too fast. The shattering that occurs when events of break-neck speed burst upon traditional practices is virtually the

hallmark of Faulknerian narrative. Remove the violence of the too-fast airplane and there is not only no Bayard Sartoris or *Pylon*, there is no William Faulkner coming back to a now-understood-as-terminally-too-slow Oxford, Mississippi. You can no more imagine his work prior to the modern technology of car and airplane than you can imagine it later in the postmodern technology of virtual reality. In the former there would be only inertial slowness and the chicanery that abuses it (he might have become a minor Balzac), in the latter there would be only inhuman speed and the dizzy subject-morphing that accompanies it (he might resemble a DeLillo). Instead his moment is vintage early twentieth-century modernism. He still knows (imaginatively knows) the mind's dependence upon the ecological rhythms of a culture's habitus, but he knows these sanity-producing rhythms only as under assault.

Flight in Faulkner is incandescent because its speed is unmanageable. For Bayard, for the pilots in *Pylon*, flight means the ecstatic risking—wrecking—of identity. In early Faulkner the speed of a car can be equally destructive: “She [Temple] sat and watched rigidly and quietly as Gowan, apparently looking straight ahead, drove into the tree at twenty miles an hour. The car struck, bounded back, then drove into the tree again and turned onto its side. She felt herself flying through the air.... She scrambled to her feet, her head reverted, and saw [the two men] step into the road, the one in a suit of tight black and a straw hat.... Still running her bones turned to water and she fell flat on her face, still running.”¹⁹

Too fast: Faulkner is not only drawn to scenes of uncontrollable speed, but his writerly identity emerges as one who can *write* speed, the speed of the mind hurtling into moments for which it has no preparation. Benjy's bellowing registers the anguish of being moment-by-moment unprepared, and in this he is echoed by Quentin's “*Wait I'll get used to it in a minute wait just a minute I'll get*” (115). Stream-of-consciousness technique appears (first in Joyce, later in Faulkner) as that use of language appropriate for the velocity of modern life: ungrammatical, fragmented, sharp edged, hurtling into the past before it is even fully thought. Stream-of-consciousness revises the prose of realism in order to bring it up to technological speed.

Such speed in Faulkner issues into wreckage, violence. Think of Joe Christmas careening into Bobbie's room: “He opened the door. He was running now; that is, as a man might run far ahead of himself and his knowing in the act of stopping stock still. The waitress sat at on the bed.... She sat with her face lowered, not even looking at the door when it opened.... And in the same instant he saw the second man. He had never seen the man before. But he did not realise this now” (214). Not just that he gets badly beaten about thirty seconds after this passage, but beaten by a man he has never seen. Other examples of violent shock in Faulkner will occur to every reader, the common element being that his characters never do get used to it.

Too fast, too slow: the shattering of expectation (appropriate subject-motion through space and time) is everywhere in Faulkner. “*Wait!*” Shreve cries out in *Absalom!*—echoing the distress of all first readers of that novel who cannot catch up to its speed. More, Faulkner's dilemmas don't “come right” even if you do wait. Too fast is forever too fast, no mediating reforms are on the way, and “go slow now” is slower than anyone seeking reform can accommodate.²⁰ The race dilemma Faulkner confronted would never come right by way of any slowness he could envisage, just as the inane racial advice offered to Charles Bon's son by

Grandfather Compson avails nothing: “and your grandfather speaking the lame vain words, the specious and empty fallacies which we call comfort, thinking *Better that he were dead, better that he had never lived*” (AA 166). Such inalterable wrongness, such culturally mandated disaster, is virtually Sophoclean in its gravity. What’s wrong in Faulkner is *really* wrong. I turn now to *Absalom, Absalom!* as the Faulknerian canvas that plays out this agon on the grandest scale.

There are at least six different settings in *Absalom, Absalom!*—this is the Faulkner novel that does most with its settings—but I shall focus on the ecological charge of only two of these (West Virginia and New Orleans) as they impact a third, Jefferson. As Shreve implies through his refusal to let Quentin call Sutpen’s mountain home West Virginia, there was no West Virginia in the early 1800s. This territory becomes West Virginia when, on the eve of Civil War, it repudiated slavery—at least in part because it had no cotton or tobacco crops dependent on slavery—and declared its separateness. The political and economic concerns motivating this separation are inseparable from ecological factors: an entire society organizing itself differently here, with different work rhythms, different landscapes to manage and thus different crops, as well as a different structure of class and race formations that inculcate subject norms. There are no aristocrats in *Absalom*’s West Virginia, no blacks, no insistently defined property rights.²¹ It is a sort of rough Eden, this fantasied mountain territory in which a little boy grows up, innocent of difference. The others he sees surrounding him are of his essential kind—maybe stronger, maybe better clothed, but still versions of his potential self—a commonality of roles and behaviors that function as habitus: “Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say ‘This is mine’ was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong or energetic enough to take and keep, and only that crazy man would go to the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for powder or whiskey” (179).

I say “fantasied” because Faulkner goes beyond sociological sobriety here, imagining a culture somehow free of money itself, in which there simply do not exist the alienations and abstractions Marx aligns with all Western societies premised on money and private property. As always with successful habitus, the culture’s daily realities regulate a learned normative traffic between subjects and other subjects—norms absorbed into the body’s unthinking practices. A man stepping into a ring with others in order to test his physical mettle is one of those practices, and surely Sutpen’s wrestling with his slaves is as much an act of mountain nostalgia as it is a demonic assault upon Southern pieties. But of course the point is that in the South it *is* an assault—the South where the black slave body is variously dreamed of, despised, and beaten, but never publicly embraced or intimately abused like white bodies.

Sutpen leaves the mountain, but the mountain does not leave him. It is “yesterday’s man” who enters that ring, an entry he seems to propose (as often with Sutpen) more in blankness than in malice. Likewise, his outrageous proposal to Rosa later simply spills out of him; it is hardly calculated, despite Shreve’s insistence, to blast Rosa out of his orbit (he needs her cooperation if he is to get his legitimate son). Rather than acting like a demon here, he appears (as with Ellen after the wrestling match) surprised, bemused, blank: his gestures have spurred

responses he never intended. Is it too much to speculate that we see in him not Mr. Compson's figure of agile resourcefulness ("*Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*" [35]), but rather the reverse, a blank and disoriented vertigo born of too much traveling, of conflicting habituses? He is no less bewildered in Grandfather Compson's office in 1865, wondering what mistake he made. Grandfather Compson thunders at him: "Didn't the very affinity and instinct for misfortune of a man who had spent that much time in a monastery even, let alone one who had lived that many years as you lived them, tell you better than that?" (213). Put otherwise, how could you *not* have learned not to do what you did? Have you no sense of what is appropriate, what goes with what, what follows what? These are the questions one poses to a man deprived of what we call common sense, a man without habitus, though in this case it's a man with too many habituses (as he had too many sons): one habitus that says you get in the ring with men you want to master, another habitus that says you refuse to acknowledge the very existence of your own son if he carries a speck of black blood. Nothing in Sutpen seems native any longer, can be taken for granted, nothing that might appear instinctive (no residual feeling for Bon's distress, for example). His jostling habituses lose their regional viability, yet continue to shape him at a level deeper than choice, directing his moves rather than clarifying his mind.

Demonic, Rosa calls him, but she ends her chapter with a more revealing description of his disorder: "*Because he was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow. He was the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment cast by the fierce demoniac lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse ... clinging, trying to cling with vain unsubstantial hands to what he hoped would hold him, save him, arrest him*" (139). Terminally maladaptive, Sutpen has traveled too much. Absorbing the ecological norms of incompatible cultures, he remains baffled, beneath and beyond the tactics available to consciousness. His colliding allegiances cancel each other out, and the mountain boy who trusted his hands as the gauge for measuring whatever was true about life ends his own life utterly confused by the mess he has made with his "vain unsubstantial hands."

If West Virginia encountering the Tidewater is a disaster, even worse is New Orleans transposed upon Northern Mississippi: the ecological nightmare of Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon's "environed blood."²² Born in a New Orleans in which he "could neither have heard nor yet recognised the term 'nigger', who even had no word for it in the tongue he knew who had been born and grown up in a padded silken vacuum ... where pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent and the rose-colored candle shades" (AA 161), this child is seized by Clytie and transported—without explanation or even a shared language—to a Northern Mississippi where the space he inhabits has altered seismically, beyond assimilation:

(the rags of the silk and broadcloth in which he had arrived, the harsh jeans and homespun which the two women bought and made for him, he accepting them with no thanks, no comment, accepting his garret room with no thanks, no comment, asking for and making no alteration in its spartan arrangements that they knew of until that second year when he was fourteen and one of them, Clytie or Judith, found hidden beneath his mattress the shard of broken mirror: and who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief he might have spent before it, examining

himself in the delicate and outgrown tatters in which he perhaps could not even remember himself, with quiet and incredulous incomprehension)... (162)

Recognizing yourself in a mirror: Jacques Lacan has bewitched a generation of critics into seeing, in this mirror scene, the founding institution of (Western) culture within the not-yet-subject. The infant sees in the mirror a radiant image, centered and mobile, of who he-is-to-be. The image proposes an unattained imaginary wholeness that spurs the infant into the social framework he would make his own. The mother's eyes confirm the infant's desire and launch the forward-moving progress through time that, for Lacan, is simultaneously alienation and "maturity." Either way, the physics of the scene organizes space as a mirroring frame in which the infant projects his desire-fueled image of himself-to-be. The drama is projective, individualistic; its motor is orientational, its aim patriarchal. In Lacan's argument about the mirror stage, the structure of a culture's liberal norms is being encountered, identified, and pursued.

Bon's son's mirror operates in reverse. It shows him the chasm between what he was and what he is, each stance underwritten by generations of cultural training. Every present item of clothing reads as the betrayal of a former item of clothing. His New Orleans-furnished body has been intolerably displaced by his Mississippi-furnished body, none of this his own choice. As in Lacan, this is an identity-launching moment, but it inaugurates not a centering but an implosion. Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon materializes as a culturally incoherent being, torn between here and there, now and then. He has no ecological model that might resolve this ideological tearing. The habituses of Puritan Northern Mississippi and Catholic New Orleans, the jagged racist present and the harmonious race-neutral past, share him equally and without possibility of mediation. He joins these incompatible orientations in the form of crucifixion.

Identity, as always in Faulkner, operates as social coding that shapes the body; and Bon's son's body is marked by contradictory social scriptings that permit no erasures. One needs an infrared light to read the black man in this white man, but he makes it easy by guaranteeing, through premeditated acts of violence, that he be recognized as impossibly both, at once. Performing white and black codes to fiendishly intelligible effects, a cultural semiotician before the term was coined, Charles Etienne chooses for a wife exactly the kind of black woman that white and black alike will decode (for opposed reasons) as scandalous. Alert to every nuance of the cultural codes that entrap him, he naturalizes nothing, learns nothing. Time cannot heal him, nor space accommodate him, nor mores fit him; his clothes are irreparably wrong before they become bloodied as well. He does not so much communicate through language as strike through gesture. Time, space, mores, clothes, and language permit the functioning of cultural habitus only so long an organizing culture can impose its norms. By contrast, *Absalom, Absalom!* reveals, for its characters who cross cultural boundaries, an impossible living space, an ecological disaster. As with Sutpen, yesterday's child rages inside Charles Etienne, lodged speechlessly in the most intimate physical assumptions of his New Orleans childhood, these at war with the most intimate physical assumptions of his Mississippi adulthood.

"A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks," Byron Bunch muses in *Light in August*. "But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay

quiet in one place and dont try to hold him, that he cant escape from” (75). The dead, I suggest, may be as influential in Faulkner’s fictional world as they are in any African oral culture. Hugh Kenner once remarked that, to produce his crucial effects, Faulkner needed a multi-generational history;²³ and I take this to mean that Faulkner has an ecological imagination, attuned to long-inculcated traditions about how individuals move in space and time. That which is impersonal, inertial, group-formed—the heavy weight of time-soaked norms (however prejudicial)—trumps the individualist projects of today and tomorrow. Yet Yoknapatawpha County offers no positive alternative to change, no viable backwater of peaceful continuities. Traversed by speed and violence, riddled by brutal tensions of race, class, gender, and region, it is a microcosm of American (indeed, hemispheric) troubles, not a sanctuary of escape from them. Surely the ideas of sanctuary and immunity loom so large in Faulkner’s work precisely because he was unable to secure them.

Faulknerian ecology, I conclude, means something grimmer than the benign causes we currently group together under the notion of ecology. Rather, it points to his atavistic sense for the inertial, for impersonal forces immune to individual will and likely at any moment to torpedo the progressive reach of individual projects. “Breathing is a sight-draft dated yesterday,” Will Varner notes in *The Hamlet*,²⁴ that which surrounds us predates and outweighs our designs. Such imminent shattering catalyzes Faulkner’s imagination, highlights the pathos of his dreams of peace. He is a writer of would-be habituses, subverted might-have-beens. His most compelling psychological territory is that of unhealing wounds; his most radiant pain is that of the inability to forget. As Rider puts it eloquently, “Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit” (GDM 120).

Faulkner’s work is marked by an irrepressible yet doomed desire to “quit thinking,” to find a sanctuary beyond the reach of thought, to escape. Three related terms for this hopeless quest are immunity, insanity, and intoxication. His most memorable characters long for immunity, and it cannot be accidental that three of his protagonists—Benjy Compson, Ike Snopes, and Jim Bond—live out their insanity as a subjective space spared the outrages endured by the sane. Faulkner himself, we know, sought hopelessly and ritualistically to drink himself into oblivion—that form of return-to-infancy forgetting (clothes removed, bottle at his mouth) that ends with a bursting head, a cotton tongue, renewed consciousness, and more tormenting memories. We are the lucky ones finally, not he, that his projected escapes failed, and that only in the act of writing itself—“in the raging and incredulous recounting (which enables man to bear with living”) (AA 130)—was he able, not to elude his demons, and even less to face them down, but rather to engage them through words, and live to tell it. In his tragic work a dark ecology prevails. The rebuke is delivered. The wounded land itself turns and destroys: it is the land’s turn. In the wake of such disaster nothing gets righted, but everything, finally, gets written.

NOTES

1. Prediscursive, yes, but likewise historically fueled: the pell-mell progressive upheavals that characterize capitalism rouse what I am calling Faulkner’s ecological rebuke, in the name of inertial, sanity-confirming routines.
2. Stephen Toulmin has argued at length that the Cartesian model underlying Western

modernity is anti-ecological. In its rigid separation of human from natural domains—of the realm of freedom and spirit from that of law and matter—this Cartesian model conceptualizes the material world as an unrelated, objective realm passively awaiting subjective mapping and control. By contrast, ecological thinking begins by positing human subjects as irrevocably immersed within shared biological and physiological networks: such subjects sustain themselves only by sustaining these contextual networks. See “The Far Side of Modernity” in Toulmin’s *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

3. Davidson, *The Black Man’s Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Random House, 1992), 80–81.

4. See John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), especially chapters 1–2. It is no accident that ecological thought attaches so powerfully to the realities of time passing. Preliterate societies foregrounded what modern (capitalist) societies have been learning the hard way: that the survival of life systems is inseparable from an acceptance of the processes of death and renewal wrought into the very meaning of survival. As many of the papers in this volume attest, Faulkner’s characters’ dreams of monumentality and immortality are incompatible with the ecological trajectory of all living (and dying) things. Such biological change is not only normal but seems to be hard wired into the systems subtending organic life.

5. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 212. Subsequent citation from *Absalom* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

6. However foreign to the norms of Jefferson, Mississippi—as well as to the norms of the mountain culture where he grew up—Sutpen’s design remains, of course, normative to the hilt. He takes it wholesale from the Tidewater practices that damaged him earlier, and he never thereafter calls its “normality” into question. For this reason, preapproved and unchallenged, it shapes his later behavior in the manner of habitus.

7. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 77. *Habitus* resembles *ideology* enough for the reader to wonder why I use the one term rather than the other. The reason is that, within Western liberal discourse (descending from Marx and amended by Althusser), *ideology* is a negatively charged term that tends to assume a subject’s illusory take upon the real. The tonic aspect of *habitus*, however, is its positivity, its rootedness in the social imaginary. *Habitus* denotes socially inculcated, unthinkingly appropriate modes of individual behavior, rather than the mystified stances that a power system proffers, as *ideology*, for complicit subjective consumption. Put otherwise, *habitus* belongs to a non-Western vocabulary of social trust, even as *ideology* belongs to a Western vocabulary of social suspicion. That said, it is all too easy for Western critics to oversimplify *habitus* and imagine non-Western societies as possessing a seamless social order that has in fact never existed.

8. Drawing on the same notion of unthinking incorporation of past attitudes (physical as well as mental), Henry Bergson writes: “The past collects in the fibers of the body as it does in the mind and determines the way we walk and dance as well as the way we think” (*Matter and Memory* [1896], cited in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1914*

[Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983], 41).

9. Edouard Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi* (trans. Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999]) launched a more extensive investigation of the American South within the larger history of the hemispheric South—a history replete with colonial invasions, the rise and fall of the slave trade, and the commercial pathways linking Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean that enabled this traffic. It is increasingly clear that any polarity pitting the American South against the American North both reduces the South's complexity and furthers the illusion of U.S. history as “exceptional.”

10. Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 255. Subsequent citation from *Light in August* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

11. Faulkner, *Flags in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1973), 267–68.

12. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, in *Faulkner's Novels: 1930–1935*. (New York: Library of America, 1985), 9. Subsequent citation from *As I Lay Dying* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

13. For recent commentary on Mink's dog as symptomatic of Faulkner's natural world, see Theresa Towner, “Unsurprised Flesh: Color, Race, and Identity in Faulkner's Fiction,” in *Faulkner and the Natural World: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1996*, ed. Donald Kartiganer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 49–50.

14. It should be clear that I am describing, not a metatextual reality, but rather a discursive structure operative in Faulkner's work. As such, his work participates in a (romantic) genre in which, however assaulted and abused, inhuman nature remains an implicitly moralized force, capable of erupting irresistibly in human affairs and revealing their “puniness.”

15. Quoted from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 612.

16. Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 251. Subsequent citation from *The Sound and the Fury* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

17. As these examples make clear, Faulknerian “inertia” is never just a phenomenon of “nature”: it is shaped by differential social groups who have managed over time to sustain the viable conventions I have been calling habitus. Such long-gathered conventions regulating race and class interaction are inherently precarious, vulnerable to the “abruption” of colonial and capitalist forces that may be released (as in the cases of Sutpen and Flem Snopes) by the entry of a single all-disturbing figure.

18. Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, in *Faulkner's Novels: 1942–1954*. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 29–30. Subsequent citation from *Go Down, Moses* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

19. Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, in *Faulkner's Novels: 1930–1935*. (New York: Library of America, 1985), 205. Subsequent citation from *Sanctuary* refers to this edition; page numbers will be indicated, parenthetically, after the citation.

20. “Go slow now” is of course Faulkner's notorious phrase of the early 1950s,

admonishing blacks not to pursue their civil rights at a pace swifter than their actual deserving. For unpacking and dissent, see Charles D. Peavy, *Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question* (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1971).

21. As Charles Sydnor puts it in *The Development of Southern Sectionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), “Most of the opponents of slavery lived west of the Blue Ridge Mountains—a land where there were few slaves, a land whose white inhabitants believed that they had been abused and misgoverned time and again by the politically dominant east. Most of the defenders lived in the Tidewater and Piedmont, where there were more blacks than whites” (228). Thanks to John Matthews for this reference.

22. The following argument about Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon draws substantially on my essay “Cant Matter/Must Matter,” in *Look Away: The U.S. South in New World Studies*, ed. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), as well as, slightly altered, in my forthcoming study entitled *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*.

23. See Hugh Kenner, *A Home-Made World* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 205–6.

24. Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, in *William Faulkner, Novels 1936–1940* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 1019.