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The View From Somewhere

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As he neared his eighth decade, Carl Jung pondered how old age affected his intellectual concerns. His writing at that stage of life, Jung concluded, had to reflect without reservation "the particular fatal tissue in which one finds oneself embedded."

Jung's words resonate for me (though I am no Jungian). He speaks of a responsibility to one's own current "embeddedness." His writing, he decides, can no longer be about free flights of the mind. I take Jung's striking phrase—"the particular fatal tissue"—to intimate not a melancholy death shadow, but rather an awareness that all human tissue is "fatal": it is "fated" not to last forever. Everyone's human tissue lasts for only a certain time, and this essay is about being and seeing in time.

The View from Nowhere is the title of Thomas Nagel's influential 1986 study of the quest for objectivity in philosophic endeavors. Nagel grants that each of us sees from somewhere, yet he explores why we might still pursue a view from nowhere. He develops an intermediate argument: that, as finite subjects, we cannot escape the condition of seeing the world from our particular insertion in it. Yet, in tension with that stance and in an effort to keep it from self-indulgence, he claims that what we see *is* the world—not all of it, but some of it, as others can also show it to be. Nagel then reflects on Descartes's quest for knowledge, claiming that "Descartes's God is a personification of the fit between ourselves and the world for which we have no explanation but which is necessary for thought to yield knowledge." We have to assume what we cannot prove, because without proceeding on the premise of some fit between subjective claim and the world itself, we can't proceed at all.

As a literary humanist, I'm willing to settle for less. In fact, I'll defend the position that the philosopher and scientist find troubling: the view from somewhere, a view incurably open to bias and

limitation. I want to argue for the value of what one sees from one's embedded position. As Nietzsche argued over a century ago in *The Genealogy of Morals,* all seeing is embedded, local, perspectival. He claims that to posit a "timeless knowing subject'"—one who sees from nowhere—is to "demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction."

Before attending to some contemporary currents of impatience with this stance, let me briefly open up its dimensions. "The view from somewhere" assumes a locus in space, time, and subjectivity. It is someone's view, a phenomenological engagement with the world as a lifeworld with other subjects living in it. More, it assumes that value and responsibility, as such, demand an "I" that sees. Finally, the interests—biases—of this seeing "I" are also exactly what make such seeing interesting. In the Humanities—and this seems so perverse to scientists—interest*ed* and interest*ing* come together not as mutually disqualifying but as mutually interlocking, and working out the play between them guides much of our teaching and writing. Modernism in particular explores the vicissitudes of the "I." Some of modernism's greatest works engage the "I" as still precious yet no longer reliable: no longer realism's "I" as viable and capable of development, not yet postmodernism's "I" as a linguistic pretense that should be tossed into the waste basket. At Swarthmore College, I launch my seminar on modernism with Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling,* a text unable to access Abraham's "I" (who *is* Abraham?) yet insistent that what matters most in a life—the leaps that define it, like Abraham's—proceeds not by dialectical laws but as personal risk, a risk even unto death. Meditating on Kierkegaard, Derrida writes, "It is from the site of my death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility. In this sense only a mortal can be responsible." Our "fatal tissue" both grounds and limits what we can know and be answerable for. Some things, like dying, no one else can do for us. As we continually tell our students, no one else (no computer either) can do their reading and thinking for them. In every paper and exam, every question and answer, they perform as an "I."

To defend such an "I" may seem strange, since on a number of fronts the "I" has been found not only wanting but engorged and dangerous. Within the academy the overentitled "I" has been powerfully identified as (often covertly) male, white, and imperial. This is the "I" that underlies Gatsby's and Sutpen's dreams, an "I" of limitless potential, an "I" that believes—on a hubristic God model—that it is self-conceived, self-generative, owing to nothing and no one. At its worst, this "I" leads reactionary politicians to reject even the remnants of a welfare state. It is no wonder that, from deconstruction through gender, Marxist, postcolonial, and cultural studies, the "I" has been subjected to withering scrutiny. Surely we don't want *this* "I," but can the Humanities afford to bypass the "I" altogether?

Two dualities come to mind as models for thinking with and against the "I": subjective versus objective and qualitative versus quantitative. That second pair operates more narrowly, in today's technological world, as analogic versus digital. I do not propose that one pole of these binaries (the subjective/qualitative/analogical pole) should win out, whatever that might mean, but rather that the Humanities should not allow this side to be lost, to be defined down to the level of trivial or unnecessary because unreliable, or seen as a boutique indulgence that financially strapped institutions have no business continuing to honor. There are forces out there prepared to characterize these values (and the kinds of study that attend to them) as a too-costly holdover from an earlier day. We need to challenge those characterizations. But before I consider the crisis in the Humanities, I want to reflect briefly on two current developments within the Humanities that seek to bypass the "I": a new technology-enabled Victorian project, and Franco Moretti's project of distant reading.

According to the *New York Times,* the new Victorianists take as their point of departure Walter Houghton's massive study of 1957, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870.* They find Houghton's work impressive, but they question his willingness to generalize the attitudes of millions of people from his perusal of only several hundred texts. As one of the professors of the Victorian project told the

paper, "You could read 3 books and say the Victorians were really obsessed with evil, or you could read 30 books, or 300 books; but you didn't read 10,000 books." Now, though, vast digital archives make it possible to "conduct a comprehensive survey of Victorian writing," one that will be able to access everything published during the period, including the authors no one has ever heard of (a group that vastly outnumbers the ones we know about). As I read about this project, I found it suggestive that the interviewed professor used the verbal phrase "could read" twice (for 3 books or 30 or 300) but changed it to "didn't read" for 10,000 books, because the unstated point is that you couldn't read 10,000 books: no mere "I" could. Questioned about the viability of "close reading" given such a vast new archive, an interviewed Victorianist hastened to claim, "Close reading will become even more crucial in a world in which we can, potentially, read every word of Victorian writing ever published." The key word of escape here is "potentially." No single "I" could do a close reading of 10,000 books. "The particular fatal tissue in which one finds oneself embedded" makes it impossible.

No less ambitious is Franco Moretti's project of "distant reading." A cultural sociologist by training, Moretti—who is a superb close reader when he wants to be—has long fretted over the myopic view such readings produce. Ten thousand novels is for him chicken feed; he speaks of some 30,000 nineteenth-century British novels (mind you, only British and only nineteenth-century). As to the exact global number, "no one really knows, no one has read them, no one ever will....Reading 'more' is always a good thing, but not the solution." Close reading—always dubious for Moretti—is now glaringly so: "You invest so much in individual texts *only if* you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense."

Note that a condition experienced by all human beings in passing time—that each of us can read (even the magisterial Houghton) only a risibly small portion of what has been published—has now been turned into a problem, a problem for which Moretti wants a solution. In the slender book that grew out of his initial essay—

Graphs, Maps, Trees—Moretti begins to lay out his model. And it would be churlish not to admire the sheer chutzpah of the model. Advancing where others fear to tread, Moretti tries out three non-subjective approaches. First, he uses graphs to chart some 44 subgenres of British fiction from 1700 to 1900, each flourishing for about a generation (some thirty years), and he claims from this graph that there is no such thing as *the* novel: "the novel is the system of its genres." Next he goes to "maps," arguing—globally—for the reconfiguration of Western genres as they enter non-Western territories. Drawing on Fredric Jameson, Moretti concludes that the alteration in form that such Western genres undergo "reveals the direct, almost tangible relationship between social conflict and literary form. Reveals form as a diagram of forces; or perhaps, even, as *nothing but force*." Finally, Moretti draws on Darwinian genealogical trees to propose that "if languages evolve by diverging, why not literatures too?" He concludes that although his enterprise is just getting off the ground, it will provide "the definition of those larger patterns that are [specific novels'] necessary precondition."

I am in awe of Moretti's ambition. He sees world literature as a quantitative problem to be solved, and he is out to solve it. At the same time, what is a bit appalling in his enterprise is its Faustian disregard for our "fatal tissue" in its "embedded" state. Drawing on hundreds of co-contributors, having to take their word for their characterization of each of his multiple subgenres, Moretti moves from his diverse global data to assert that—though we can't yet prove this—it all adds up to a system at once scientific (the Darwinian model), impersonal (graphs needed, not subjective readings), and necessary (form as "nothing but force"). Omitted from this account —and not accidentally—is the "I": the finite, subjective view from somewhere, that of the poor professor who has only read a few hundred of the novels of the period he teaches (certainly fewer than Houghton had read). Omitted as well are the strenuous creative moves of the novelists themselves: the men and women who made thousands of decisions about the novels they were intently crafting, men and women who, while registering the impress of their cultural

setting in ways they would never fully grasp, nevertheless produced works of stunning unpredictability. Kenneth Burke claimed, seventy-five years ago, that in talking responsibly about literature, we needed to think of it as symbolic action. We needed to see the work of art as something that pushes back in its own ways, that strategically dramatizes its particular say. From this view, the work becomes something whose formal moves amount to much more than a compelled response to "nothing but force."

Let us leave aside other debatable claims Moretti makes: that we who do close readings of selected texts do so because we believe "very few of them really matter," or that a model for how languages develop (where there are no individual originators) might serve as a model for how literatures develop (where there is nothing but individual originators). Instead, we might reflect on the sheer overreach of the project: its bid to say something authoritative about global novelistic production. I'd like to juxtapose this ambition against a casual remark made to me a few months ago by a distinguished colleague. He mentioned how, in undertaking an inventory of his research library of books and articles, he came upon a drawer crammed full of essays that he had gathered together ten years earlier—gathered and then misplaced and forgotten. He had chosen these essays carefully, intending to read them with equal care. I, of course, asked, "So have you read them now?" "Of course not!" he responded. "I have a current drawer bigger than this to read. Getting to the fresh ones will be hard enough." I take that moment to be emblematic of a dirty little secret that most of us may harbor within. We are familiar with that drawer of unread articles—the ones we're going to get to as soon as the papers are graded, not to mention those new books we've circled in the *PMLA* ads, a subset of which we actually order, a smaller subset of which we may actually find time to read. The ratio of read to unread not only begins as scandalous for the anxious graduate student, but it remains scandalous throughout our careers, if it does not grow more so. Merely finite beings with other calls on us all the time, what we have not read radically outpaces what we manage to read. This ratio becomes even more lopsided if we factor in rereading:

actually developing a responsible grasp upon the new materials, their formal and conceptual stakes.

If we develop greater authority in our later years—a debatable assumption—it is not because of the quantity of readings we have managed to get through, but rather because of the quality of thinking and feeling that we have brought to our reading experience. We tell our students that they will be assessed on the basis not of what they have not read (the nightmare of every doctoral candidate), but on the basis of what they have read—and sifted and brought to responsible articulation. I believe the same is true of professors, who stand or fall by the quality of their arguments about the works they know best and care about most. In all of this the dimensions of the "I"—subjective take, quality of analysis, analogical thinking—remain prominent.

The arguments of Moretti and the new Victorianists are small beer compared to the attack being mounted against the Humanities by increasingly militant technocrats. We hear many variations on the same utilitarian question: what do the Humanities accomplish? How can they show to a skeptical public that they actually accomplish what they claim to? The model for assessment is instrumental and progressive: lay out your basic goals, identify your strategies for achieving them, show that you have done so. This is a model shaped by and for corporate undertakings; many people in power want it to be the model for liberal education as well.

We might think about how such an instrumental model envisages the four-year trajectory of students moving through a liberal arts college. Students, on this corporate model, are to identify early on what they want to achieve; curricular pathways are to lead as effectively as possible to their achieving those goals. Not knowing what you want to achieve or not viewing the four years as a curricular paradigm for arriving at a set goal is likely to strike the corporate mind as indecisive and wasteful. So-called boutique institutions like Swarthmore may still encourage intellectual wandering, but it is outdated, ineffective, and costly—not likely to survive the next dispensation. Life is a serious business, and, to many, such an education does not seem serious.

At heart, this is an argument about the "I" in time. The undergraduate "I" must learn to become productive and economically self-supporting; the role of the liberal arts institution is to produce productive students. They become the college's "product"; they are to see themselves as producers of products. Time—those four years—tends to lose its liberal quality, becoming instead the medium for focused achievement. College tends to become the proving ground of demonstrable competences.

The phenomenological reality of young men and women in process—a reality saturated in unpredictable individual false starts, discoveries, and commitments—now ceases to be a norm and starts to be a problem. Less pertinent to the institutional mission are qualitative questions such as, What kinds of intellectual work do I like and dislike? What kinds of attention am I good at paying? What questions about life do I find valuable and compelling? What is this huge set that we call the world really like—its past, its present, its possible futures? What is at stake (about me, about the world) in my pursuit of knowledge? Quantity is in play in all of these questions, but none of them is ultimately about the quantifiable.

Here is a small example of what I mean. My college recently accepted a handsome offer from a major corporation to develop a protocol for demonstrably successful teaching. If we succeeded, the corporation might market this protocol elsewhere in the world. The English department was charged to carry out this experiment in pedagogy, and eventually we came up with quantified documents and procedures that would test the progress of our first-year students in their writing. We'd do this by comparing their first paper with a later one, attending always (on a range of 1 to 7) to the same criteria: viable thesis topic, use of evidence, consideration of opposing arguments, questions of style, management of grammar and syntax, and so on. In early December, unable to put it off any longer, I carried out this experiment on my freshman seminar. The results were appalling. Not that many of my twelve students didn't improve in a number of the areas under evaluation. Rather, the qualitative dimensions of the three-month scene of reading, discussing, and writing

that we had all undergone—its phenomenological reality—simply disappeared. In its place was a set of weightless numbers, telling no one anything worth knowing, though superficially pointing on paper to progress. And I thought: the complicated and painful struggle that we engage in with each of our students, trying to teach them how to read and write better; the pitfalls and recalcitrance and individually tailored moves that go into this enterprise: none of this gets into the data. No one depending on the data will have a clue about the existential intricacy of working with students' writing: the fact that students arrive at college with a set of stubbornly established habits of reading and writing, the fact that we rarely make much progress in a single course, the fact that many of these students will graduate with reading and writing skills only marginally better (if at all) than what they came in with.

The data sought by the corporation appeal less because of what they attest to than because they are data: quantified, abstracted, nonsubjective, impossible to argue with. In her provocative book entitled *Poetic Justice,* Martha Nussbaum pursues some of the problems that arise when abstract quantification replaces attention to individual qualities. What you lose most is the awareness of personal life dramas. Nussbaum draws on fiction, especially on Dickens's *Hard Times,* as her model for dramatizing (and thus passing on to the reader) the subjective reality of being human. Nussbaum quotes an exchange in that novel between the quantitatively educated Louisa Gradgrind and her even more quantitatively indoctrinated mother, now gravely ill and in bed. "Are you in pain, dear mother?" Louisa asks. "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," says Mrs. Gradgrind, "but I couldn't positively say that I have it." The view from somewhere: literature as about locating where the pain is.

I want to return to my third pairing, the opposition between digital and analogic, as a metaphor for thinking generally about the uses of literature, and for thinking specifically about modernism and the location of pain. The words *digital* and *analogic* refer to technological procedures for converting the human voice into electronic pulses that can be transmitted and then reassembled so as to

represent that voice again. Digital goes at this more aggressively, by way of a barebones on/off model—1 versus 0. This model seems to be where the technology is headed, though there have been problems getting digital procedures to "restore" the voice itself in all its modulation, timbre, and nuance. No doubt, within the technological frame, these bugs will be worked out. But what about the larger, analogical frame of literature more broadly—home of the human voice?

How much of our teaching is devoted to pressing upon students the modulation, timbre, and nuance of the human voice—that of the writers they are trying to understand, that of their own voices in the papers they exhaustively write, and that we exhaustedly read and assess? The phenomenology of the voice—carrier of the lifeworld—is almost magical territory for many teachers of literature: it is not for nothing that some of us make our students memorize lines of poetry. At stake is an inarticulate belief in a sort of primordial mimesis: that the creative arrangement of words imitates something real and important about the world, something outside the words, yet faithfully communicated by their artful arrangement. In a late essay entitled "On the Mimetic Faculty," Walter Benjamin tried to think his way into such "nonsensuous similarity"; he could not accept a Saussurian world of total linguistic arbitrariness. I suspect many of us are caught somewhere between these two extremes. We might call them the poles of enchantment and critique.

Enchantment occurs in the trips we take as readers riding on the back of artfully arranged words. We trust the words as carriers of an experience not our own, yet one that we are, in reading, coming to make our own. Critique, by contrast, would be our quite reasonable reluctance to go where the words want to take us—critique inspired by our Saussurian awareness that cultural coding saturates these words, privileging some entities over others, passing the verbal arrangement off as natural and innocent, when it cannot be natural and is never innocent. We would find it inexcusable to teach literature at college and omit the pole of critique. But to omit the pole of enchantment might be to incur even greater loss.

Modernism as a set of texts and contemporary criticism as a set of procedures are, both of them, widely understood to operate under the banner of critique. Modernist texts signal critique most aggressively by their sheer difficulty. A poem by T. S. Eliot, a novel by Joyce or Faulkner: these fairly swiftly tell our students that their habitual reading practices will not serve them well. Pound's imperative—make it new!—has to mean (whatever else it means) that familiar ways of making it are irreparably compromised by social complicities. If you recognize yourself too easily in the mirror provided by art, it is not you as you might liberatingly become, but you caught up in the lure of misrecognition, still bound to Lacanian or Althusserian misprisions. No less, as Rita Felski has recently argued, the array of critical procedures we have arduously learned in the past forty years —and passed on to our students—is indictment saturated, a virtual feast of ascetic critique. Such arguments tell us, in Frost's phrase, that we are wrong to the light. Or, as Nietzsche puts it in *The Genealogy of Morals*, "the ascetic treats life as a wrong road on which one must finally walk back to the point where it begins."

The late Eve Sedgwick meditated powerfully on this divide between the Yes of enchantment and the No of critique. Following Paul Ricoeur, she saw Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as godfathers of the hermeneutics of suspicion that has dominated so much modernist literature and contemporary criticism. Sedgwick used another pair of names to identify my two poles: reparative readings and paranoid readings. She wondered if it is possible, at this late date, to begin to develop reparative readings. Can we reimagine that reading literature makes something good happen? Can we get past the project, canonical now for several decades, of "exposing and problematizing hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject"? In the name of females, gays and lesbians, blacks, the poor, and any number of marginalized others, the academy has specialized in going after the violences concealed in the Western narrative of liberalism. It has been a hard target to resist, and perhaps one reason Sedgwick could not say how we might produce reparative readings is that her brilliant career was founded on paranoid ones.

Could a modernist canon survive a new critical stance devoted to ways of saying Yes? Has it ever been willing to relinquish its commitment to *épater le bourgeois*? Felski's new book, *The Uses of Literature,* argues for the ways that literature as a whole produces recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. Felski's emphasis on the positivity of literature—what it *does* for readers—is welcome after so many decades of paranoid reading. Yet it seems to me that modernism remains resistant to any poetics of uplift, to any easy pleasures. If that is so—if a foundational stance of antifoundational modernism is the bringing home of bad news—are there reparative values that we may nevertheless find in modernism? The question is profound and important. Literature is about life in time. It seems to me no accident that, stricken with what she knew to be terminal cancer, Sedgwick posed precisely these questions. She was asking not so much what literature was *for,* but rather how our professional engagement with it might become a way of being *for* literature—this as a step (I believe) toward being *for* life, before she would be leaving it. Not life as it may become after the revolution, but life as it already is, in its actual texture and tones, its meanness and its promise.

I'll close this essay by attending briefly to two modernist fictions, asking what (at a modest level) does the view from somewhere (in each novel) let us see, and how might such seeing be called reparative?

First, *Ulysses*: here is Bloom helping a blind stripling cross a Dublin street (in "Lestrygonians") and thinking these thoughts:

> Stains on his coat. Slobbers his food, I suppose. Tastes all different for him. Have to be spoonfed first. Like a child's hand his hand. Like Milly's was. Sensitive. Sizing me up I daresay from my hand. Wonder if he has a name. Van. Keep his cane clear of the horse's legs tired drudge gets his doze. That's right. Clear. Behind a bull: in front of a horse.
>
> —Thanks, sir.
>
> Knows I'm a man. Voice....Poor young fellow! How on earth did he know that van was there? Must have felt it. See things in

their foreheads perhaps. Kind of sense of volume. Weight. Would he feel it if something was removed? Feel a gap. Queer idea of Dublin he must have, tapping his way round by the stones. Could he walk in a beeline if he hadn't that cane?...Look at all the things they can learn to do. Read with their fingers. Tune pianos. Or we are surprised they have any brains....

Sense of smell must be stronger too. Smells on all sides, bunched together. Each street different smell. Each person too ....Tastes? They say you can't taste wines with your eyes shut or a cold in the head. Also smoke in the dark they say get no pleasure.

And with a woman, for instance. More shameless not seeing....Must be strange not to see her. Kind of a form in his mind's eye. The voice, temperatures: when he touches her with his fingers must almost see the lines, the curves. His hands on her hair, for instance. Say it was black, for instance....Then passing over her white skin. Different feel perhaps. Feeling of white.

The view from somewhere: but Bloom's is a view that two centuries of realist fiction would never have taken to be novel worthy. Bloom is doing virtually nothing, and in realism you can't get the author's attention by doing nothing. In probing the stances that fuel paranoid reading, Sedgwick stresses paranoia's anxiety about time—its need to anticipate coming bad news, to have suspected all along that bad news was coming. Hostile to surprise, paranoia has no room for Bloom's unhurried chance encounters. Sedgwick further notes that paranoia functions as strong theory: it powerfully reconfigures the contours of what is encountered into the contours of what was anticipated. Deconstruction was in this sense an exemplary model of paranoid reading. But *Ulysses* unfolds in a manner refreshingly free of strong theory. Much of it remains open to what is coming down the road, remains curious, uninsistent. Bloom is perhaps the least insistent protagonist in Western fiction.

What is valuable about this swatch of text, this view from somewhere? First, it quietly conveys the quickness of Bloom's sensory experience. He registers the stains on the stripling's coat, the trust in

his hand, the strategic positioning of his cane, the stripling's capacity to read Bloom's gender from a brief earlier remark—the stripling's way of practicing his everyday life. Bloom's actual sensory responses are only the beginning; these serve as analogical bridges to further memories and speculations. The blind man's trusting hand reminds him of his daughter Milly's trusting hand in childhood, and Bloom goes on to speculate on the larger phenomenological existence of the being before him: how, blinded, he might negotiate Dublin's material obstacles, how he might make up for the lack of sight by an intenser deployment of other senses, how he might make love, how not seeing his partner might provide an erotic charge, how hands on her skin might yield the feeling of white. Finally, the passage, by locating itself in Bloom's mind, reminds us of the intersubjective life silently throbbing everywhere and all the time. You might say, Why do we need to be reminded of this, how could we forget it? And I would answer (I hope not just for myself) that the qualitative dimensions of the silent lifeworld of others is exactly what we are always forgetting. As for reparative: this modest scene restores something of the dignity of everyday experience itself, a dignity that cultural manifestos and indictments fail to notice or see no reason to acknowledge. It is a dignity for which modernist literature is rarely credited, yet Woolf no less than Joyce writes it into phenomenological reality—Clarissa, Peter, Septimus, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay...

I want to conclude by considering Faulkner, a writer who specializes—unlike Joyce—in delivering bad news. Is there any way his attention to heartbreaking social ills might be seen, nevertheless, as reparative? *Light in August* is a dark, brooding novel about the tragedy of race in America. Yet it enacts a reparative drama that only a close reading can reveal. Most readers finish this novel with a sense of the inevitable murder and crucifixion of the light-skinned Joe Christmas. If he is meant to recall Christ, it can only be in his sacrificial undoing: he embodies no salvational alternative. Outside the logic of salvation, however, *Light in August* continuously suggests an alternative reading to the fatal one imposed by the Jefferson community. In ways that resonate with other modernist narratives, this novel

intimates—to its reader—a different drama that the novel in its unfolding cannot represent on its canvas. Even as Jefferson's pell-mell rush to judgment is unblinkingly narrated, *Light in August* interrogates each premise that would support that judgment. By way of its procedures, the novel calls into question what the bulk of its characters would not dream of calling into question. Murdered and castrated as a "nigger/murderer/rapist," Joe Christmas, the novel shows us from "inside," has not murdered or raped anyone. No less, *Light in August* keeps its readers in permanent doubt as to Joe's racial identity.

As the novel nears conclusion, even though Christmas has outwitted his pursuers, he chooses to turn himself in: *"I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs,"* he thinks. Finally he manages to get recognized and caught. To narrate this event, Faulkner has an anonymous townsman speak to other townsmen as follows:

> He don't look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him. It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set out to get married. He had got clean away for a whole week....Then yesterday morning he come into Mottstown in broad daylight, on a Saturday with the town full of folks. He went into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him....They shaved him and cut his hair and he paid them and walked out and right into a store and bought a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat....And then he walked the streets in broad daylight, like he owned the town, walking back and forth with people passing him a dozen times and not knowing it, until Halliday saw him and ran up and grabbed him and said, 'Aint your name Christmas?' and the nigger said that it was. He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and

> dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too.

A culture's racist vocabulary speaks here, with energetic conviction. In this vernacular, "niggers" are all too likely—it is their default position—to be rapist-murderers who skulk and hide in the woods. They are typically dirty as well, and recognizable as such. Yet how differently Faulkner stages Christmas's surrender! With exquisite irony, Christmas bestrides the town as though he owned it. A white barbershop, a new shirt and tie and hat, an unhurried parading through Mottstown as he waits to be recognized: his moves eloquently counter white expectations, point for point. He does not say a word. His performance says it for him: "I look like you, perhaps better than you. I am clean, tall, and self-possessed. I enter and exit your segregated spaces—your barbershops and stores—and you do not see my difference. You do not see it because it does not exist. It takes you forever to catch up to me." I have invented this silent speech, yet something like it roils inside this mob of enraged whites. Confusedly they register his insult and grasp that he is mocking the racial conventions that underwrite their sanity. "The Negro-in-America is a form of insanity which overtakes white men," James Baldwin once wrote. *Light in August* is the first of Faulkner's novels to express the consequences of that insanity.

Reparative: any reader of this novel who pays attention grasps with increasing power what racism sounds like, how it operates, how far from the truth of things it is, and more: *what the truth of things is.* We read *Light in August* as a silent repairing of what the characters on its canvas have been taught by their culture to inflict on each other. The modernist brilliance of the novel lodges in its refusal to correct, at the level of speech and event, what Faulkner knew remained grievously uncorrected in Southern life. But it is his artful shaping of the reader's take on the novel's tragic mistakes that constitutes the form and value of its view from somewhere. To think of such form as shaped by "nothing but force"—as narrative moves blindly dictated by social insistence—is to miss the tension between

inner and outer, possibility and imposition, depth and surface, that *Light in August* so intricately sustains. Kenneth Burke had a term for the qualitative richness of such a phenomenological practice. He called it symbolic action: the "dancing of an attitude."

Neither quantitative nor digital analysis will reveal such a dancing attitude; no algorithm exists for seeing or saying it. I cannot prove that it is there—reproducible by all fair-minded readers of the novels—any more than I can prove what difference it makes for readers to discern and respond to such a dance. Moreover, others might legitimately quarrel with my description of Joyce and Faulkner's moves. I grant that my interpretation is interested; I have tried to make it interesting. Seeking to remain faithful to the "particular fatal tissue" in which I now find my life and thought embedded, I can only offer my view from somewhere.