

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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October 23, 2023. Faulkner (4).

review

- ▶ kin and care-kin: what do blood ties mean?
 - ▶ why is the novel confusing about this?
- ▶ Addie: “ ” / “just words” (173, 176)
 - ▶ “He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack” (172)
 - ▶ “And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it” (173)
 - ▶ triptych with Cora and Whitfield: sin and salvation?
- ▶ “I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land” (174)

the river in words

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again. (141)

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I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ. (148)

“Log, fiddlesticks,” Cora said. “It was the hand of God.” (153)

“tour de force”

Sometimes technique charges in and takes command of the dream before the writer himself can get his hands on it. That is *tour de force* and the finished work is simply a matter of fitting bricks neatly together, since the writer knows probably every single word right to the end before he puts the first one down. This happened with *As I Lay Dying*....

I simply imagined a group of people and subjected them to the simple universal natural catastrophes which are flood and fire with a simple natural motive to give direction to their progress.

Faulkner, interviewed by Jean Stein, *Paris Review* 12 (Spring 1956).

the hand of God...???

“It’s been there a long time, that ere bridge,” Quick says.

“The Lord has kept it there, you mean,” Uncle Billy says. “I dont know ere a man that’s touched hammer to it in twenty-five years. (88)

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“We’re doing the best we can,” the father said. Then he told a long tale about how they had to wait for the wagon to come back and how the bridge was washed away and how they went eight miles to another bridge and it was gone too so they came back and swum the ford and the mules got drowned and how they got another team and found that the road was washed out and they had to come clean around by Mottson, and then the one with the cement came back and told him to shut up. (204)

global Faulkner

Faulkner thus helped a primitive and rural world that until then had seemed to demand a codified and descriptive realism to achieve novelistic modernity: in his hands, a violent, tribal civilization, impressed with the mark of biblical mythologies, opposed in every respect to urban modernity...became the privileged object of one of the most daring exercises in style of the century.

Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), 337.

global Faulkner (2)

mi maestro William Faulkner

Gabriel García Márquez, “La soledad de América Latina,” Nobel Prize lecture, 1982, nobelprize.org.

Faulkner's technique dazzled me....For a Latin American writer, reading his books at the time I did was very useful, because they provided a valuable set of techniques for describing a reality that, in a certain sense, had a great deal in common with Faulkner's reality, that of the South of the United States.

Mario Vargas Llosa in 1989, qtd. in Casanova, 344.

disenchanted or enchanted?

[Whitfield:] It was His hand that bore me safely above the flood, that fended from me the dangers of the waters. My horse was frightened, and my own heart failed me as the logs and the uprooted trees bore down upon my littleness. (178)

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“He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me.”.... Then I [Cora] realised that she [Addie] did not mean God. (168)

Faulkner: magic realist?

[Peabody:] That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all hang on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent: shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image. (45)

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A car comes over the hill....It runs along the roadside in low gear, the outside wheels in the ditch, and passes us and goes on. (228)

Against the sky ahead the massed telephone lines run (229)

The music was playing in the house. It was one of them graphophones. It was natural as a music-band. (235)

Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. (254)

town and country

Them country people. (243)

- ▶ Consider MacGowan's chapter (241–48). What role does unequal social standing play in this scene? How does the narrative represent this inequality? What interpretation of the effects of the urban-rural hierarchy does the chapter imply?

Lester's historicist reading

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As I Lay Dying offers a condensed allegory of the hazards of an upheaval that moved people to unfamiliar social terrains. (Lester, 35)

The river crossing, with all its hyperbolic challenges, demarcates the symbolic boundary that separates country from town. (39)

It is the Bundrens who are in the process of being severed from the earth and from the security of a familiar and viable way of life by social, political, and economic transformations typically figured in Faulkner, as here, in terms of natural forces. (41)

how it feels

[Moseley:] He said the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet's hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. (203)

Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles.... "Why aint I a town boy, pa?" I said. (66)

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traps of class

Later he told me, “I aint got no people. So that wont be no worry to you. I dont reckon you can say the same.”

“No. I have people. In Jefferson.”

His face fell a little. “Well, I got a little property. I’m forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me.” (171)

what we don't see

When we pass the negroes their heads turn suddenly with that expression of shock and instinctive outrage. "Great God," one says; "what they got in that wagon?"

Jewel whirls. "Son of a bitches," he says...It is as though Jewel had gone blind for the moment, for it is the white man toward whom he whirls. (229)

"Thinks because he's a goddamn town fellow," Jewel says. (229)

We mount again while the heads turn with that expression which we know; save Jewel. (231)

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Unable to grasp any basis for kinship or common cause, these historically distinct social formations, coming together in new channels of contact, engage in conflict rather than form an alliance to better their status in the emergent social order. (Lester, 47)

discussion: the end

- ▶ What significant tensions or contradictions are resolved by the ending? What isn't resolved?

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bananas (260), teeth (260), graphophones (261), Mrs Bundren (261)

“better so for him”

Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying
light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams. (254)

But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life.
(261)

“I thought you would have told me,” he said. “I never thought you
wouldn’t have.” (237)

Cash's judgment

Folks seem to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it waws for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a courthouse with and others dont have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy courthouse, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse. (234)

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint.... It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it. (233)

But I aint sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. (238)

next

- ▶ Sayers, at least through chap. 6 (whodunit?)
- ▶ Chesterton, “A Defence of Detective Stories” (Canvas)
- ▶ Commonplacing: group B. Choose a passage that points beyond the murder mystery to a larger social contradiction.