

WORLD WAR I, LITERARY MODERNISM, AND THE U.S. SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

DAVID A. DAVIS: World War I, Literary Modernism, and the U.S. South
(Under the direction of Fred Hobson)

This dissertation analyzes the relationship between social history and the geographic spread of modernism. Many critics have noted the irony that writers from the South—the nation’s poorest and most illiterate region in the first half of the twentieth century—cultivated an unexpected literary flowering between World War I and World War II. I argue that World War I acted as a pivotal catalytic event, ending the post-Reconstruction South’s self-imposed intellectual isolation and allowing for the diffusion of modern American and European social, cultural, and economic practices into the region, thus shifting the region’s economic base from agriculture to industry and moving the region’s intellectual superstructure from regionalism to modernism.

In five chapters I examine the representation of World War I in modernist texts by southern and non-southern writers. The first two chapters analyze changes in the demographic and economic foundation of southern culture, connecting the war as a vehicle for interregional cultural exchange to William Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay* and short stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald and tracing the emergence of mechanization and industrialization in Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground* and Faulkner’s *Flags in the Dust*. The three subsequent chapters examine the effects of infrastructural change on major elements of southern society, exploring the effects of war-time patriotism on sectional ideology in William Alexander Percy’s *Lanterns on the Levee* and Donald Davidson’s *The Tall Men*, analyzing the war’s impact on the struggle for civil rights in Walter White’s *The Fire in the Flint* and Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem*, and discussing the representation of southern womanhood in post-World War I southern women’s fiction.

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DEDICATION

For Kris and the boys.

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INTRODUCTION

“How You Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm?”: World War I and the Emergence of Literary Modernism in the U.S. South

“World War I changed everything,” said Robert Penn Warren, “It was a great shock to the whole country, but the war broke open a frozen culture like the southern world” (“Mad for Poetry” 29). When America entered the war in 1916, the U.S. South was indeed a frozen culture. While the world’s developed countries established strong economic and political ties based on mutual cooperation, free-market economics, and exploitation of colonial holdings, the South remained socially stagnant. Clinging to an outdated dominant ideology that valorized the Lost Cause, an outdated set of economic practices that exhausted the land, and a static system of social structures that marginalized women and blacks, the South at the beginning of the twentieth century had become essentially isolated from the rest of the country and the rest of the world. In effect, despite New South boosterism, the South was a domestic colony of the United States that produced cotton and poverty. Not surprisingly, the South in the early twentieth century, which H. L. Mencken called the Sahara of the Bozart, produced relatively little art and contributed less to the nation’s intellectual superstructure. But by 1950, many writers and intellectuals either born in or living in the South commanded international attention, including, for example, three of the most influential modernist writers—

William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Richard Wright—all of whom had been born in Mississippi between 1897 and 1909.

These three writers illustrate the problem of southern modernism: namely, how did southern writers become modernists? Representing different races, genders, and classes, they appear to share only two common characteristics, time and place, which suggests a possible theory. Yet one could argue that each of these individuals intuitively or spontaneously developed modernist sensibilities, but that position would not account for the dozens of other writers from the South who contributed to the movement sometimes called the Southern Renaissance. The mass aggregate of writers and intellectuals from the South who rose to prominence by the mid-twentieth century suggests that a broader cultural dynamic may better explain the emergence of modernist writing by southerners. In the same vein, one could argue that the work produced by southerners during this period represents not necessarily some abstract reified “Modernism” but, instead, a suppressed southern intellectualism that, largely because of poverty and regional exclusion by the northern press, had not been capable of expression earlier. While there is much merit to this position in many respects, especially since it allows that not all southerners between 1864 and 1914 were intellectually bereft, it does not account for the crucial fact that southern modernists were engaged with the same problems, themes, motifs, and techniques as their northern and European contemporaries. The connections between southern modernism and transatlantic modernism strongly suggest that they were responses to similar circumstances. And this point raises another possible explanation for modernism in the South, namely, that it represents a wave of abstracted intellectualism detached from everyday life, so the actual circumstances of

time and place are irrelevant. This position comes back to the problem of southern modernism: specifically, how is it possible for the most isolated, most impoverished, most illiterate region in an otherwise developed nation to generate a massive intellectual superstructure in an extremely short period of time?

A number of critics have addressed this question already. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. says that “after the First World War, the South did begin to produce memorable literature, stories and poems of great moral and spiritual intensity, of tremendous intellectual depth” (*Writers of the Modern South* 6). Rubin notes that the emergence of modernist literature by southerners coincides with the end of World War I, but he does not necessarily see a causative relationship between the two events. His position essentially establishes the conventional wisdom on the emergence of southern modernism. John M. Bradbury suggests that World War I caused southerners to “reassess” their values, (7-8) and Michael O’Brien says that “modernism undoubtedly came to the South between the world wars, but its success was not thoroughgoing” (xvii). Lewis P. Simpson describes southern modernism as a “culture of alienation” resulting from a “large expression of discontent with the emphasis modern societies place on machines and consumption as a debasement of the humanity of man” (*The Dispossessed Garden* 65). Richard King, meanwhile, dates the emergence of the modern southern intellectual superstructure later, after 1930, when “the writers and intellectuals of the South were engaged in an attempt to come to terms not only with the inherited values of the Southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past” (14). Daniel Singal argues that the New South Creed, which he describes as a fusion of “Cavalier mythology onto the framework of Victorian belief in morality and industrial progress,” acted as a

superstructural barrier, “effectively block[ing] the arrival of intellectual Modernism in the region through the First World War” (9). But Singal, like Rubin and the others, does not mean to suggest that the war caused southern modernism.

In fact, most critics, while noting the unusual proliferation of writers in the South in the 1920s and 1930s, are hesitant to offer any theories about why so many writers emerged in the same time and place. Thomas Daniel Young, for example, says “most literary historians and critics would agree that there is no clear sociological explanation for the Southern Renaissance” (“Southern Renaissance” 262). Other critics, however, have implied that social forces may be somewhat responsible for the emergence of southern modernism. In *Writing the South*, Richard Gray, speaking specifically in reference to Allen Tate, invokes William Ogburn’s theory of social change—that changes in material culture push ahead of changes in non-material culture—to explain Tate’s sense of disharmony between his idealized vision of the South and his realized experience of the South (124-125). Although Gray does not develop this idea thoroughly, I believe that his basic idea of the relationship between social change in the South and southern modernism deserves further exploration. Fred Hobson also suggests that a sociological cause or combination of causes could have led to the eruption of southern writing in the 1920s and 1930s, and he compares the Southern Renaissance of the twentieth century to the New England Renaissance of the nineteenth century, which he attributes to “a transition from a largely agrarian economy to an emerging industrial one, thus the threat to an older way of life and a looking backward, with a mixture of pride and shame, at what had come before” (“New South” 249). Hobson’s rubric implies the

same dynamic as the theory of social change Gray references, in which changes in material culture lead to changes in intellectual culture.

Meanwhile, approaches to the study of the intellectual culture of the U.S. South have changed somewhat. Most of the studies of southern literary modernism written between the 1960s and the 1990s focus on the work of white male writers, with an occasional reference to a white female writer, usually Ellen Glasgow or Eudora Welty. There are two problems with this approach to literary criticism. First, it prohibits the consideration of voices outside the cultural mainstream, thus producing an artificially-homogenous intellectual discourse. Second, and more problematic in my opinion, is a less obvious issue. Studying a particular intellectual superstructure outside the context of its cultural infrastructure—the everyday practice of its time and place—can yield conclusions that fall into the dominant ideology fallacy, the notion that the hegemonic entity in a social structure—in this case white males—creates and controls the ideology of the subordinate entities.¹ While on the surface this position may seem apparent, it is actually more accurate to hold that subordinate or marginalized groups define dominant ideologies as much as hegemonic entities. In truth, ideology or intellectual superstructure or, in this case, modernism, rests on a foundation rooted in time and place, dependent on the means and modes of production and the specific circumstances and practices of social structure. In *Inventing Southern Literature*, Michael Kreyling insightfully observes that many critics have taken the erroneous position that “it is not so much southern literature that changes in collision with history but history that is subtly changed in collision with southern literature” (ix). In order to understand the emergence of an intellectual

¹ For more on this idea, see Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Hill, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*.

superstructure, look first at the infrastructure and then at the superstructure, not the other way around. This does not mean that superstructure has no impact on infrastructure, which is absolutely not the case, but, like deep-water currents, significant change originates primarily from below.

In *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, Marvin Harris posits the theory of infrastructural determinism, which helps to explain how the process of superstructural change happens. Many anthropologists and sociologists influenced by structural Marxism, including Harris, divide the elements of a social system into three categories: infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. Infrastructure includes the means and modes of production and reproduction, including technology, demography, and population. Changes in infrastructure include the introduction of new technology, such as mechanization, or shifts in population, such as the Great Migration. Structure includes the institutions that organize, maintain, and regulate production and reproduction, such as family structure, division of labor, economic practices, political organization, class and race stratification, and gender roles. Changes in structure include the conversion of manual agriculture to mechanized agriculture and the entry of women into the labor force. Superstructure includes the intellectual production of a social system, including art, music, literature, philosophy, science, and religion. Southern modernism is itself an example of a change in superstructure. According to Harris's theory, in any sociocultural system, infrastructure determines structure and structure determines infrastructure.²

The reasoning for this position rests on the tangibility of infrastructure, the material element of culture:

² For a more detailed explanation of this theory, see Harris, *Cultural Materialism*, 51-54.

Unlike ideas, patterns of production and reproduction cannot be made to appear and disappear by a mere act of will. Since they are grounded in nature they can only be changed by altering the balance between nature and culture, and this can only be done by the expenditure of energy. Thought changes nothing outside the head unless it is accompanied by the movements of the body or its parts. It seems reasonable, therefore, to search for the beginnings of the causal chains affecting sociocultural evolution in the complex of energy-expending body activities that affect the balance between the size of each human population, the amount of energy devoted to production, and the supply of life-sustaining resources. (58)

In complex, highly-developed societies, the connections between nature and culture may seem remote, but the U.S. South in the early twentieth century was, in many respects, a transitional culture, poised between relatively primitive agricultural technology and advanced industrial technology.

Sociocultural systems, like the U.S. South, are organic, dynamic entities, constantly in a state of evolutionary change, and change does not always originate from the infrastructure. But, Harris contends, “certain kinds of infrastructural changes are likely to be propagated and amplified, resulting in positive feedback throughout the structural and superstructural sectors, with a consequent alteration of the system’s fundamental characteristics.” (71) These infrastructural changes most likely to be amplified include new technologies that increase production and patterns of demographic migration that cause contact between members of sociocultural systems. Still, this does not mean that change does not begin at the structural or superstructural levels; instead, it means that changes at these levels are likely to have less relative impact on the total sociocultural system than infrastructural change. This also does not mean that structural and superstructural changes are merely insignificant reactions to infrastructural changes. In fact, structure and superstructure are the means through which infrastructurally-

determined change occurs, and structural and superstructural conditions greatly influence the rate and degree of infrastructural change. A superstructural ideology, for example, that vilified northerners essentially prevented significant infrastructural change in the South prior to World War I.

After the war, however, that superstructural ideology, the Cult of the Lost Cause, dissipated substantially, and a new superstructure emerged, southern modernism. But the initial change that resulted in southern modernism occurred at the infrastructural level as a direct result of America's entry into World War I. As America mobilized for total war for the first time in the twentieth century, essential resources of labor and material located in the South were required to support the national army. Because the South's climate best suited year-round training, most soldiers in the American Expeditionary Force trained at newly-constructed camps in the South, such as Fort Gordon or Fort Bragg, bringing northerners and southerners into contact on a large scale for the first time since the end of the Civil War. Meanwhile, labor shortages in northern factories lured more than a million white and black workers to the North. The relative shortage of men in a traditionally male dominated social system allowed women significantly greater personal agency. The population shift of northerners into the South and southerners into the North allowed for the diffusion of new social, political, and economic practices into the region. Because of proximity to resources and access to low-wage labor, factories that produced textiles, steel, refined petroleum, and consumer goods began to appear in the traditionally agricultural South. More significantly, the shortage of war-time labor and the encroachment of new technology caused many southern landowners to invest in agricultural machinery, thus initiating a process that displaced and dispossessed the

region's vast unskilled labor force and shifting the region's economic base from agrarianism to agricultural-industrial manufacturing. These two infrastructural changes during the war—population contact and mechanical technology—caused a shift in the southern sociocultural system that, among other changes, produced the necessary conditions for modernism in the South.

In *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, Arthur Marwick outlines the many types of changes that take place within a society as a result of total war, many of which have no direct connection to combat. He includes changes in social geography, economic practice, social structure, social cohesion, material conditions, and intellectual and artistic ideas (12). He argues, in effect, that total war causes fundamental social changes beyond the actual events on the battlefield. This is a relevant point because the war's direct effects on the South in terms of conscription, casualties, and material losses were relatively small and because the actual combat took place entirely in Europe, thousands of miles from the South. So the changes that took place in southern society as a result of World War I are drastically different in terms of kind and degree from the changes that took place in English, French, German, and Belgian society, but the changes share the same source and have many of the same ramifications. The fact that social changes as a result of war extend beyond the actual site of combat helps to explain why so many similar social and artistic revolutions took place on both sides of the Atlantic during and after the war. In other words, the discussion of World War I and modernist literature cannot and should not be limited to works written by combatants set on the battlefield, such as Wilfred Owen, Ernest Hemingway, Henri Barbusse, and Erich Maria Remarque. Instead, the broad scope of social change during total war affected base social

institutions that necessarily altered intellectual superstructure by altering the perspective of both the society's artists and the artist's audience within the society. This phenomenon explains why many of the most significant modernist literary works produced as a consequence of World War I were written by non-combatants, such as Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. Marwick, presciently, notes that many of the works that do represent World War I, even works written by victorious combatants, do not portray warfare gloriously. He explains that works depicting World War I share a common theme. "Any future war," he says, "will destroy mankind.... But the indictment was not just of war, but of industrial civilization itself" (86). In other words, industrialism created the conditions of its own destruction.

While World War I initiated modernism's infiltration into the U.S. South, modernism in Europe and the U.S. North preceded the war, so the war itself is not responsible for the creation of the modernist superstructure, rather the war and modernism are both by-products of the advance of mechanical technology. David Harvey underscores this point in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, arguing that "the modernism that emerged before the First World War was more of a reaction to the new conditions of production (the machine, the factory, urbanization), circulation (the new systems of transport and communications), and consumption (the rise of mass markets, advertising, mass fashion) than it was a pioneer in the production of such changes"(23). In geographic terms, modernism emerged first in the places with a sufficient density of mechanization to change the nature of everyday life, initially in major cities in Europe then in the northeastern United States. The superstructural apparatus of modernism is not, in truth, a coherent, unified movement, rather it is a loose grouping of intellectual responses to a

significant infrastructural change: inorganic modes of production. At an intellectual level, man's capacity to create machines for mass production spawned a reevaluation of man's relationships to nature, to man, and to God. As modern infrastructure spread so spread the modernist superstructure. Modris Eksteins argues in *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* that modernism originated in Vienna, Paris, London, and Berlin in the late nineteenth century—the cities with the necessary conditions of industrialization and urbanization coupled with the sufficient condition of intellectual population—generating a wave of avant-garde art prior to the war. But he contends that modernism spread and flourished primarily as a consequence of the war, which made real in the imagination of many artists the tremendous capacity for machines to create and to destroy. By the end of the war, modern infrastructure permeated western Europe and the eastern United States, and modernist writers, artists, and intellectuals from these regions rapidly advanced the modernist superstructure.

The exact relationship between World War I and modernism is a point of contention among literary scholars. Because of the apparent connection between time and place, many critics have concluded that the two events have a causative relationship, although not all agree which event caused the other. Yet some critics feel that the events may be either coincidental or counterbalanced. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell discusses the representation of combat by several English writers, including Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and David Jones, who adopt traditional, Georgian forms to depict mass carnage. He notes the irony that most combat poets use controlled forms while many non-combatants portraying war employ more experimental, fragmentary forms, which makes the combat poet's connection to the mainstream of

literary modernism appear tenuous. Yet, while Fussell's book incisively traces the problem of modern war in modernist literature, he focuses narrowly on the work of combatant poets, which means that his book does not render the broader social changes taking place as a result of the war that figure into modernist superstructure. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter takes a contrarian position, arguing that "far from ushering in modernism" the war actually reinforced "traditional elements" and "romantic values" (203). Winter bases his conclusion primarily on representations of death and mourning following the war and commemorations of the fallen soldiers. Considering that these types of works tend to praise the fallen, question the reason why, and appeal to forces beyond the control of man, Winter's conclusion seems valid, even obvious. But examining one type of representation inherently presents a limited perspective, which can lead to overgeneralization. In *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, Vincent Sherry reads the work of high modernists Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf in context with non-artistic documents to argue that the war changed the foundations of language, thus making a case for superstructural change based on a structural event. While Sherry makes a provocative case, the root cause for the change is both broader and deeper. In fact, both the war and modernism are manifestations of the same underlying infrastructural change, the advance of mechanization, so the connection between the war and modernism is not causative, but associative.

Three important qualifications need to be made here. First, once modernism emerged at the superstructural level a significant amount of intellectual influence and imaginative exposure took place, so in some cases intellectuals and artists associated with places that had not begun to shift infrastructurally show obvious signs of modernist

production. Pablo Neruda, a Chilean poet who lived in Spain and France after World War I, illustrates this phenomenon, and so, too, do a number of southern writers, including several included in this study, such as William Faulkner, James Weldon Johnson, and Evelyn Scott. Superstructural change can, in other words, spread by contact with superstructural change, as opposed to direct contact with infrastructural change. Second, my intention here is not categorically to reduce southern modernist literature to writing about World War I. Obviously, many, if not most, works commonly associated with southern modernism make little to no mention of the war. My argument here, instead, is to explain how the war created the conditions for modernist production by southern writers. Third, I do not mean to suggest or imply that modernism would never have reached the South if not for the war. In fact, it likely would have, but, based on the existing evidence, I can only speculate that it would have emerged more slowly and in the works of relatively fewer writers as, over time, southerners were exposed to infrastructural developments taking place elsewhere.

In the case of the U.S. South, nevertheless, the war did have a causative role in the emergence of modernist superstructure in a crucial sense, because it created the necessary conditions of infrastructural change in the region. By initiating a major population shift into and out of the region and propelling the introduction of mechanical technology into the region, the war led to the emergence of superstructural modernism. The most effective means to understanding this process in relation to southern literature is to analyze a broad range of books, which represent social change as a result of World War I, as cultural artifacts in context with the material conditions of infrastructural change. This approach rests upon a fundamental assumption about the relationship between art and

society, namely, that art has a social function. As an implicit act of communication between an individual, the artist, and the members of a society, the audience, the work of art represents the individual's interpretation of the society. Naturally, individual interpretations can be idiosyncratic, but examining numerous representations of the same time and place by artists from the same time and place reveals points of convergence that account for outlier perceptions. Breadth also accounts for two of the most common errors in southern literary scholarship: first, the tendency for some scholars to confuse southern writing with the dominant ideology, in this case white males; and, second, the tendency to draw conclusions about a major social change based on a relatively small evidentiary sampling. That does not mean that this study claims to be exhaustive or even comprehensive, rather it will draw examples from across the full spectrum of southern writers—black and white and male and female—and from all literary genres to support conclusions about the relationship between modernism and the U.S. South.

Chapter one of this dissertation describes the crucial change in southern society that led to the emergence of literary modernism, inter-regional exchange. The dominant intellectual superstructure in place between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century—the Cult of the Lost Cause—rested on the infrastructural detritus of the Old South. The subtle economic shift from slavery to sharecropping provided a more egalitarian means to exploit laborers, primarily former slaves, children of former slaves, and poor whites. In the fifty years between 1865 and 1915, the South's population remained virtually static with inter-regional contact minimized to the region's border areas. The small agricultural community paradigm discouraged significant population shift, and the abundance of inexpensive labor made technological development

unnecessary. Mules, plows, and sweat were sufficient to maintain the essential infrastructure of southern society until World War I. The war—the first to unite northerners and southerners into a national army since the end of the Civil War³—instantiated inter-regional contact on a major scale, effectively eroding the superstructural edifice of the Lost Cause and, of necessity, introducing labor-saving technology into the South. William Faulkner’s first novel, *Soldiers’ Pay*, captures the effects of this change on the region through the portrait a southern soldier dying an alienated, prototypically modernist death. The effects of inter-regional exchange are also evident in the work of non-southern writers, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos, who portray the South and southerners connecting with other Americans in a regionally-heterogeneous army.

Inter-regional exchange and the war-time labor shortage caused two key changes in the southern economic infrastructure, which is the topic of chapter two: industrialization and agricultural mechanization. The war disrupted global cotton markets, first causing cotton prices to plummet when European markets were blockaded, then causing cotton prices to skyrocket with war-time demand, then causing cotton prices to decline steadily with post-war overproduction. For the cotton-dependent South, the boom and bust cycle destabilized the region’s economic base, contributing to a shift in the region’s primary mode of production. During and after the war, a certain number of industries developed in the region—textiles, steel, and oil—and manufacturing and financial centers developed in a few key cities—Atlanta, Birmingham, Charlotte,

³ The Spanish-American War did involve at least some southern soldiers, but it did not require the raising of a national army and, compared to World War I, effected only minimal cultural change. It did, however, signal the end of American isolationism, the precursor to America’s involvement in World War I.

Houston, Nashville, and New Orleans. Industrialization and urbanization, the necessary conditions of modernism, did not displace agriculture as the dominant means and modes of production in the region, but they caused enough change to threaten the traditional southern way of life. In *Barren Ground*, Ellen Glasgow portrays a small farm accommodating war-time labor shortage by shifting to mechanization to increase production. T. S. Stribling's *Teeftallow* depicts the effects of mechanization on an isolated, bucolic southern community caught between fundamentalism and progress. In a sense, the community of Irontown in Stribling's novel is a microcosm of the region that W. J. Cash attempts to analyze holistically in *The Mind of the South*. Cash sees the South's eager conversion to industrialism partly as an expression of inter-regional antagonism. The Southern Agrarians, on the other hand, see industrialization as a threat to the region's agrarian tradition, which they defend in *I'll Take My Stand*. Faulkner explores the effects of World War I and the emergence of mechanization on the Sartoris family of Jefferson, Mississippi in *Flags in the Dust*. Unable to bear the twin burdens of southern tradition and modernist alienation, Bayard Sartoris ultimately self-destructs.

Chapter three shifts the focus from infrastructure to superstructure, specifically the ideology of the region's dominant group, white males. Not every white southern male reacted to the war in the same way as Bayard Sartoris; in fact, their reactions are far from consistent, which is frequently the case with superstructural responses to infrastructural change. The primary ideological problem for white southern males of enlistment age during World War I was nationalism. Raised by the sons and grandsons of Confederate veterans, white southern males of the 1914 generation were more likely to identify as southerners than as Americans, but the raising of a regionally-unified American army led

by a southern-born commander in chief against a foreign enemy forced many white male southerners to reconfigure both their identity and their ideology. William Alexander Percy, the scion of a patrician Mississippi family, regarded the war as an opportunity to demonstrate his fitness to the family mantle of honor. In his autobiography, *Lanterns on the Levee*, he romanticizes the war and defends the traditional southern order. But rural North Carolinian Paul Green had a completely different response to the war. Interacting with northerners, experiencing combat, and living in France hastened his ideological conversion from traditionalism to liberalism. His changing attitudes become apparent in his poems and in his anti-war play, *Johnny Johnson*. Donald Davidson, stalwart defender of agrarian principles, regarded the war as a tangible example of the destructive power of mechanization. In his long poem *The Tall Men*, he lauds the courage of the soldiers who fought face to face as their forefathers fought, but he condemns the encroachment of modernization, which, in his opinion, makes men spiritually flaccid.

Not surprisingly, black male southerners experienced the war in an entirely different way from their white counterparts, and chapter four analyzes the superstructural representation of black southern soldiers. Many civil rights leaders, including W. E. B. Du Bois, saw the war as an opportunity to make the case for black nationalism, the full realization of American citizenship for black Americans. Black soldiers in American uniforms fighting and dying for freedom and nationalism in the trenches of Europe would make an incontrovertible case for civil rights earned through carnage. With the exception of minor concessions, such as the creation of a segregated officers' training camp, however, the black experience in war time approximated the black experience in peace time; in fact, the Army modeled labor battalions, the service assignment for eighty

percent of black soldiers, after southern chain gangs. After the war, a number of black writers continued to press the case for civil rights, using military service and carnage—both in war and in peace—as recurring tropes. Victor Daly’s novel *Not Only War* describes a romantic triangle pitting a white southern soldier against a black southern soldier vying for the affection of a beautiful mixed-race woman. In the brutal no man’s land between the trenches in France, they realize their common humanity. In Walter White’s *The Fire in the Flint*, Dr. Kenneth Harper, a former combat surgeon, returns to his hometown on Georgia to open a segregated hospital. Although initially reluctant to become involved in civil rights issues, he finds himself leading an organization advancing the rights of black sharecroppers, which makes him a target of the Ku Klux Klan. White uses Harper’s lynching to make the case for freedom from racial violence, the cornerstone of black nationalism. Claude McKay, an astute observer of American race relations, portrays the problem of black nationalism in his novel *Home to Harlem*. His portrayal of Jake Brown, a black southerner who deserts a labor battalion in France, makes clear that black Americans are hybrid citizens—both same and other—and as such have no tractable claim to nationalism. Blacks, according to McKay’s representation, are subjects of the dominant ideology, which means there is no home for blacks in America.

Chapter five examines World War I’s impact on southern women’s ideology. The women’s suffrage movement capitalized on the war in more tangible ways than the civil rights movement, culminating in the 1920 passage of the nineteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote in national elections. Symbolically, the nineteenth amendment recognizes the greater social and political agency of women in the U.S., partially as a result of the war. During the war, women assumed a number of

roles traditionally reserved for men. In the South, arguably the most repressive region in the nation for women, the war-time changes were subtle, but significant. The relative absence of men in many capacities created new opportunities for women to earn their own income and to live independently. In “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” for example, Katherine Anne Porter portrays a young woman moving into a workplace normally dominated by men. Other works by women writers portray the inevitable dissolution of the cult of gynelotry as the masculine foundations of southern society weaken. Elizabeth Maddox Roberts portrays the war as a cataclysmic event for Jocelle Drake, who loses her brother and lover but gains self-reliance, in *He Sent Forth a Raven*. Ellen Glasgow makes the connection between the war and the encroachment of modernity explicit in *Vein of Iron*, the story of a Virginia family coping with the domestic uncertainty of a foreign war. The connection between social modernity and artistic modernism becomes more evident in the work of Frances Newman and Zelda Fitzgerald.

Even though the battlefields of Europe were an ocean away, World War I radically altered the human landscape of the U.S. South. Fifty years of social and intellectual isolation dissipated as southerners came into contact with other Americans on a major scale. The infrastructural changes in population and technology rippled through the structure of southern society, affecting the economy, the dominant ideology, race relations, and gender dynamics. These structural changes resulted in a new, modernist intellectual superstructure in the South. In other words, modernism came to the nation’s most illiterate and most impoverished region primarily because change came to the region. The massive scope of this change affected the entire region, uniting a diverse range of intellectuals by the common bond of time and place. Because a group as

demographically diverse as William Faulkner, Richard Wright, and Eudora Welty experienced the same social changes from different perspectives, the connection that unifies their artistic production becomes apparent, even while their representations of that change remain dramatically different. When modernity marched through the South, it caused more damage to the traditional southern social structure than Sherman.

CHAPTER ONE

“The Backward Glance”: The South’s Transition to Modernism

In December of 1918 William Faulkner, who had been a cadet in training to be a RAF pilot, returned home to his family in Oxford, Mississippi. He had left home the previous spring, after being rejected for being too small for military service when he attempted to enlist at an American Expeditionary Force recruiting station. In the meantime he lived with his friend and childhood mentor Phil Stone, who was then a student at Yale University, in New Haven, Connecticut. After Stone’s graduation, he and Faulkner faked British accents and identification papers and enlisted in a RAF unit training near Toronto, Canada.¹ Faulkner made satisfactory progress in his training, and, had the war lasted a few weeks longer, he would likely have been deployed to complete his training as an aerial observer in Britain. Regardless, he had been away for nine months, his longest absence from home up to the time, and he had lived outside the South for the first time in his life. Although Faulkner never realized his dream of soaring gallantly over the battlefield, locked in mortal combat with his airborne enemy, his experience in Connecticut and Canada during the war had a tremendous impact on his nascent career as a writer.

¹ For details about Faulkner’s experience as an RAF cadet in Canada, see Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* pages 203-230 and Michael Millgate, “William Faulkner, Cadet.”

When Faulkner returned to Oxford, he created one of his first and most enduring fictional characters, the persona that would eventually be known as “Count No-Count.” Even though he never completed training, when he got off the train he wore a British pilot’s uniform with insignia indicating that he had served overseas, and he continued to wear the uniform for several weeks after his return. He told stories of fantastic aerial acrobatics, including one tale where he claimed to have crashed an airplane into a hanger—while upside down—and he affected a slight limp.² Second lieutenant William Faulkner, who had left Oxford as Billy Falkner, apparently enjoyed the attention his uniform attracted. As a veteran of the war, at least in his imagination, and a member of a foreign military, he felt different from, and in some ways superior to, the ordinary citizens of Oxford, most of whom had never left Mississippi except to visit Memphis. Living outside the South expanded his frame of reference and being involved in the war effort broadened his range of experience, which allowed him to see his provincial home with a critical eye.

The differences Faulkner felt as a result of his experience outside the South during the war eventually led him to eschew the derivative late-Victorian poetry he had scribbled and to begin writing in a new narrative style. In the introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*, Malcolm Cowley writes:

When the war was over—the other war—William Faulkner went back to Oxford, Mississippi. . . . he was home again and not at home, or at least not able to accept the post-war world. He was writing poems, most of them worthless, and dozens of immature but violent and effective stories, while at the same time he was brooding over his own situation and the decline of

² Faulkner dramatized his experience in several early short stories, including “Landing in Luck,” “Thrift,” and “With Caution and Dispatch.” For more on Faulkner’s World War I short stories, see Duane J. MacMillan, “Fictional Facts and Factual Fiction: William Faulkner and World War I” and M. E. Bradford “The Anomaly of Faulkner’s World War I Stories.”

the South. Slowly the brooding thoughts arranged themselves into the whole interconnected pattern that would form the substance of his novels. (vii-viii)

Over time this interconnected pattern would unfold in the Yoknapatawpha metanarrative, but his first attempt to give narrative voice to his brooding takes place in Georgia, as a physically and emotionally wounded soldier returns to his family in *Soldiers' Pay* (1926). While certainly not Faulkner's finest work, this novel tangibly demonstrates World War I's impact on literary production by writers from the American South. The wounded soldier, Donald Mahon, embodies the awkward, foreign presence of modernism in the bucolic South.

The American South from Lost Cause to Lost Generation

Faulkner was not the only southerner to feel a sense of brooding and detachment toward the South following World War I. For many southern intellectuals, the war defined the South's persistent, post-Reconstruction backwardness, which generated a sense of regional self-consciousness. In the essay "The New Provincialism," Allen Tate commented that "with the war of 1914-1918, the South reentered the world—but gave a backward glance as it stepped over the border: that backward glance gave us the Southern Renaissance, a literature conscious of the past in the present" (Tate 545). In a sense, the South as a region was blissfully ignorant of its cultural stagnation until broad exposure to social and artistic advancements taking place outside the South awakened southern writers and intellectuals from their collective dogmatic slumber, precipitating a rush of new literary and intellectual production by southerners eager to contribute to the development of modernism. While the minds of the South did not whole-heartedly

embrace the massive social and cultural changes that accompanied modernism, even the staunchest defenders of traditional southern society, such as John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson, recognized that change was inevitable. The events of World War I eroded the post-Reconstruction South's social and intellectual isolation allowing for the diffusion of modern American and European social, cultural, and economic practices, leading to fundamental changes in southern society and influencing the creative work of some, if not all, contemporary southern writers of the period. Thus, the southern literature of the post-World War I period reflects the massive scale of social change as modernism swept across the South with more violence than Sherman.

Between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I other regions of the nation—particularly the Northeast and, to a lesser degree, the Midwest—developed industrial economies and large cities capable of supporting artists and intellectuals. America, meanwhile, in spite of a formally isolationist foreign policy, became a major entity in the global economic and political arenas. The consequent exchange with intellectual communities in Europe established a trans-Atlantic trade in ideas. The simultaneous influx of European immigrants into northeastern metropolitan areas infused American culture with a cosmopolitan atmosphere, and in time numerous cultural traditions blended together to yield a new, synthetic, uniquely American culture. In this milieu William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser, and Samuel Clemens (a southern expatriate living in Connecticut) dominated America's literary landscape, and their works reflect an image of America as urbanizing, industrializing, and predominately northeastern. Their writing, moreover, reflects the influence of intellectual and artistic movements taking place in Europe—such as

Darwinism, Marxism, and naturalism—that were completely absent from writing in the South.

During this same period the South stagnated. Bankrupt and reeling following the Civil War, southerners clung to antiquated agricultural practices—shifting just slightly from slavery to tenant farming as a labor source—while refusing on philosophical grounds to industrialize. The lost cause mentality that plagued the South after the war deified the agrarian society of the Antebellum South as the apotheosis of human civilization. In spite of their military defeat, southerners continued to defend this legitimating ideology, vilifying northerners as enemies, condemning northern social practices, and asserting a strong regional identity. Thus a state of antagonism existed between North and South, at least in the minds of southerners, for more than fifty years. Although a group of progressively-minded southern boosters, most notably Atlanta *Constitution* publisher Henry Grady, attempted to market the idea of a “New South”—one free of sectional animosity, racial violence, and rampant poverty—as a means of attracting northern investment in the South, the region continued to suffer from cultural lethargy.³

Literary and social critics generally agree that World War I drastically changed Europe’s cultural landscape and that it led to major cultural changes in America as well.⁴

³ For more information about the New South movement, see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed* and Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*.

⁴ For studies of World War I’s cultural impact, see Alfredo Bonadeo, *Mark of the Beast: Death and Degradation in the Literature of the Great War*; Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War*; Stanley Cooperman, *World War I and the American Novel*; Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*; Douglas Mackaman and Micheal Mays, *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity*; Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*; Trudi Tate,

The U.S. entered the war late, and, other than in a few large campaigns, American soldiers saw less combat and less suffering than their European counterparts. Regardless, some American writers, perhaps sensing the enormity of the conflict, were drawn to the battlefield. John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings, and Gertrude Stein drove ambulances during the war, and all of them wrote about their experiences. A number of American writers remained in Europe following the war, sharing in and contributing to the intellectual radicalism of the period.⁵ On the American homefront, meanwhile, a new age of economic growth exploded after the war. Factories produced consumer goods at an exponential rate, and the subsequent increase in personal income led to a massive increase in demand for consumer goods. Mainstream America, unlike Europe, became more socially conservative after the war. American intellectuals, however, incorporated the radicalism emanating from Europe with a critical aspect toward the booming American economy. American modernist writers not living in Europe thus produced such works as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922), and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), all of which interrogate the increasingly materialistic values of post-war America.⁶

World War One had a more significant effect on the South than on any other region. Before the war most white southerners still identified themselves as sons and daughters of the Confederacy, and the sons and daughters of former slaves had advanced

Modernism, History, and the First World War, and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*.

⁵ For fuller explorations of the Lost Generation of American modernist writers, see Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, Malcom Cowley, *Exile's Return*, and Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*.

⁶ For broader context on modernist American literature, see Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, Jr., *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, Marcus Klein, *Foreigners*, Linda Wagner-Martin, *The Modern American Novel, 1914-1945*, Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*.

little beyond their ancestors in spite of the efforts of various uplift movements and Booker T. Washington's plan for vocational education. The declaration of war, however, galvanized northerners and southerners against a common, foreign enemy. The raising of a national army brought northerners and southerners together in cohesive units on a large scale for the first time, much more so than during the Spanish-American War. Black southerners, meanwhile, heeded the siren call of northern industry desperate for cheap labor, thus initiating the Great Migration, the massive influx of African Americans into urban ghettos in Chicago, Detroit, and, of course, Harlem. During the war women in the South began to enter the workforce in significant numbers for the first time, and after the war women converted their newfound economic influence into political influence by gaining the right to vote. Southerners who served in the war or who traveled abroad after the war brought a new perspective to their experience of the South.⁷

All of these social changes manifested themselves in a new kind of writing by southerners. Whereas most white southern writers had previously romanticized the Old South, the literature of southern modernism tended to regard the South's history critically. The writing of white male southerners, those who had previously dominated traditional southern writing, became more experimental and innovative, even openly antagonizing the tradition of southern letters. And a number of new voices from previously marginalized segments of society, namely female southerners and African

⁷ A detailed historical analysis of these events may be found *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* by George B. Tindall. Of World War I's impact on the South, Tindall says:

Southerners emerged onto the threshold of the 1920s the experience of the war had in many ways altered and enlarged their perspectives. ...Above all, the experience of the war years brought a new realization of change, the significance of which touched most keenly the sensitive young writers of a coming revival in Southern letters. ...Some Southerners responded eagerly to change, others defensively; but most, like the rising authors, reacted with ambivalence. Whatever their response, the consciousness of change had become one of the abiding facts of the twentieth century South. (69)

American southerners, joined the mainstream of southern modernist literature. Daniel J. Singal, in *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945*, explains:

when a new generation of southern intellectuals emerged after [World War I], theirs was a task of deliberately and rapidly catching up. Modernism, they soon discovered, was an accomplished fact in most of the western world, of which the South had become a backward province. To escape that backwardness, they would have to assimilate a veritable galaxy of new ideas with unusual speed, recapitulating as they did the experience of their northern brethren during the previous half century. Far more self-conscious than the northern pioneers of modernism had been, and operating, one might say, with the script already written, they were to follow a smoother and straighter path. As a consequence, by the time the United States entered the Second World War modernism had been firmly installed as the predominant style of literary and intellectual life in the region. (9)

What makes southern modernism remarkable, and what often differentiates it from other types of modernist writing, is the startling rapidity with which it appeared. Yet, while the intellectual foundations of modernism were in place by the time southern writers began to produce literary works that reflect modernist themes, I believe it is a mistake to assume that southern writers had a “smoother and straighter path.” To do so detracts both from the quality of writing by southerners during the post-World War I period and the complexity of the issues—such as industrialization, race relations, and regional identity—that the writers addressed.

Although southern writers had contributed relatively little to American literature since the Civil War, in the wake of World War One southern writing exploded with the publication of such works as Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), the run of *The Fugitive* (1922-1925), Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground* (1925), Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s *The Time of Man* (1926), William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), Thomas Wolfe’s *Look*

Homeward, Angel (1929), and numerous other works. The outburst of literary production attracted a great deal of attention. H. L. Mencken, possibly the most influential American social critic of the time, in 1917 described the American South as “almost as sterile, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert” (136). But by the end of the 1920s his criticism no longer applied. Herschel Brickell, a New York book reviewer, rejoined in 1927 that Mencken’s “dreary desert has become an oasis,” and he pointed out the recent works of authors such as Faulkner, John Gould Fletcher, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Frances Newman, and James Branch Cabell (Brickell 289). Brickell explains that the new literary awakening in the South has its roots in a number of coinciding social changes:

Just what causes are behind the present flowering of southern talent it is not easy to discover. The industrial revolution of the last few years has broken up old patterns of life, bringing a shifting of values; much new blood has come into the section, especially in the cities, introducing a needed leaven of liberalism; dozens of southerners of the oldest stock have taken to wandering up and down the earth with the rest of America; there has been a change in the general attitude toward the Negro because of his exodus to northern and western industrial centers. (Brickell 290)

He notes that the writing emerging from the South at the time represents an extremely diverse spectrum of experiences, so he hesitates to attribute its cause to any specific change. In this he is correct, the spread of modernism across the South manifested itself in numerous ways, but what may be more important is how modernism got to the South in the first place.

This outpouring of modernist literary production in the South is especially remarkable in comparison to the bleak period that preceded it. While northern and midwestern writers in the second half of the nineteenth century advanced from the new American mythology of Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville to the critical realism of Dreiser, James, and Wharton, southern writers had failed to develop at all. Mencken’s

criticism of the South during this period in “The Sahara of the Bozart” is, in fact, valid. While southern-born writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and William Gilmore Simms had been active participants in the American publishing community before the Civil War, no new major writer from the South—with the exception of local colorist turned realist Samuel Clemens—appeared until after the turn of the century. Between 1900 and the end of World War I, a few southern writers emerged, but, significantly, most of these writers came from areas of the South bordering the North or the Midwest. Kate Chopin, for example, set her stories and her novel *The Awakening* (1899) in Louisiana, where she spent most of her married life. But by the time she began writing, she had returned to St. Louis, Missouri, her hometown, and her works blend elements of local color fiction coming from the South and naturalism coming from the Midwest. James Weldon Johnson, similarly, grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, but he lived outside the South—in Latin America and in New York City—for several years before he began writing. Largely because of their experience outside the South, these two writers incorporated elements of modern fiction in their work before most other writers living in the South. They thus act as the vanguard for the next wave of southern literary production.⁸

Considering the state of the southern economy and the consequent state of southern culture following the Civil War, the lack of artistic production by southerners does not seem surprising. Before the war, relatively little in the way of literary publishing took place in the South, but a few writers found an outlet for their works in the northern press in spite of their sectional animosity.⁹ William Gilmore Simms, for example,

⁸ For more on Chopin and Johnson, see Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin* and Robert E. Fleming, *James Weldon Johnson*.

published his historical novels of the 1830s—*Guy Rivers*, *The Yemassee*, and *The Partisan*—with the Harper firm in New York. His books, which mythologized the colonial South in a fairly innocuous way, were highly successful at the time. Likewise, Henry Timrod, the poet laureate of the Confederacy, published his only book-length collection of poems in Boston in 1859. After the war, of course, their type of work found no place outside the South, their sentiments made them unwelcome in the North, and the ravaged South had no residual publishing apparatus with which to produce their work, and no remaining market of consumers to purchase their work. Thus, any author from the South without sanction from the northern publishing industry after the war could be assured of finding no outlet for his work. While Simms and Timrod never found another northern publisher after the war, a number of other writers from the South did manage to publish a new, short-lived type of fiction with northern presses.

The New South movement spawned a number of writers who represented the defeated South in a way that attracted the interest of northern readers. Originally associated with the American West, the local color movement of the late nineteenth century found its most successful and persistent subjects in the South. Conventional wisdom suggests that America's reading public, crowded into the Northeast, sought out tales and sketches that described the exotic locations and colorful characters of the newly-stabilized Union's far reaches. The plantation South, already a memory in fact and now no longer a source of active hostility, appealed greatly to the northern imagination.¹⁰

⁹ For details about southern writers and the antebellum publishing industry, see Jay Hubbell, *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900*.

¹⁰ Extended analysis of Local Color fiction can be found in Sherrie A. Inness and Diana Royer, *Breaking Boundaries: New Perspectives on Women's Regional Writing*, Robert Rhode, *Setting in the American Short Story of Local Color*, and Claude M. Simpson, *The Local Colorists*.

Beginning with the appearance of George Washington Cable's sketch "Sieur George" in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1873, local color pieces flooded the literary marketplace, primarily through popular periodicals, such as *Harper's Monthly*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic*. By the time the movement reached its apex in the late 1880s, hundreds of stories had been published, and the genre had become trite and hackneyed, a reputation that continues to linger. Yet the demand for images of the South did allow a number of southern writers an opportunity to earn a living, including a surprisingly large number of female writers. But the most famous and enduring author of the local color movement is a man, Joel Chandler Harris. His stories of life on the southern plantation told through the voice of a former slave named Uncle Remus romanticized the Old South while implicitly advocating the emergence of the New South, a dual exercise in mythmaking that was remarkably common among local color writers.¹¹

Harris's stories are representative of what Paul Gaston calls the "New South Creed," the failed program to attract northern investment in the post-reconstruction South. Between 1876 and 1914 the South was economically and socially isolated from the rest of the nation. New South boosters attempted to market the South as a place of new opportunity, but their program eventually bogged down in a morass of contradictions:

Allegiance to both the myth of the Old South and the dream of the New South was but one of several contradictions imbedded in the New South creed. There were many others: an institutional explanation of industrial backwardness in the Old South coupled with the faith that natural resources could not help but assure industrialization in the New; an elaborate propaganda campaign to attract immigrants into the region negated by hostility toward the immigrant pool easiest to tap; a gospel of economic interdependence and reconciliation with the North as part of a

¹¹ See Joel Chandler Harris, *Legends of the Old Plantation*.

campaign for independence and domination; a lauding of freedom for the Negro in a politics of white supremacy; [and] dreams of equal treatment of allegedly unequal races in separate societies devoted to mutual progress. (Gaston 195)

The literature of the local color movement became part of the aggressive marketing campaign aimed toward the North, but the stories themselves reflect the internal contradictions within the region. Tales of contented former slaves telling stories outside their cabins and of backwoodsmen getting the best of outlanders hardly portray a region committed to reconciliation and prepared to face the challenges of converting from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

The literature produced by southern writers between 1876 and 1913 reflects the region's retarded cultural development, which was hampered by a dual process of mythmaking. On one hand, southern writers continued to defend and to romanticize the Old South, creating a moonlight-and-magnolias myth of the southern plantation primarily for consumption by northern readers. On the other hand, southern writers and the northern magazines who published their work bought into the myth of the New South, a region that was able to put its past behind it and move lockstep into the modern era. These two myths amounted to creative brainwashing; it had a soporific, mollifying effect on the southern imagination. As Wayne Mixon explains in *Southern Writers and the New South Movement, 1865-1913*, "Accompanying the paeans to the past and often written by the same hands were fulsome prophecies of the South's bright future. Marvelously, many southerners could memorialize the Old Order and at the same time tax its legacy by accepting the northern way, the industrial ethic, as standard and admitting, at least tacitly by their striving for Yankee favor, that the South had been deviant" (8). But by clinging to both myths simultaneously, southern writers were able to admit nothing explicitly. For

example, in the case of one of the most famous plantation sketches, “Marse Chan” by Thomas Nelson Page, Sam, an old plantation retainer tells an outsider—perhaps a northerner come to scout a potential investment property—the story of his gallant young master who died in the war. Page gives Sam’s voice a palpable tone of reverence, and he actually has Sam say, without a hint of irony, that the antebellum period when Sam had been Marse Chan’s slave “wuz good ole times [...] de bes’ Sam ever see!” (10). This sketch from *In Ole Virginia* published in 1887 by Charles Scribner’s Sons of New York became one of the most enduring images of the backward, self-deluding postbellum South in the northern imagination.

The most pernicious and detrimental aspect of southern postbellum mythmaking stems from the cult of the Lost Cause, the conviction in the minds of many southerners that, although the South may have been defeated on the battlefield, it was nonetheless a superior civilization. Southerners commemorated their cultural ideal for several decades after the war with constant reunions of confederate veterans, the placement of monuments to the confederacy in civic spaces, and an amazing number of publications devoted to analyzing the events of the war and advocating the South’s supremacy. In fact, one could easily argue that the bulk of literary production actually published in the South after the war concerned the lost cause. Conventional wisdom suggests that antebellum southern intellectuals were hampered in their development by defending slavery; southern intellectuals were perhaps even more engaged in defending the lost cause.¹² In

¹² In *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, Richard M. Weaver attempts to explain the mindset that produced the literature of the lost cause: “If a sense of realism and a fresh orientation were what the South after Appomattox needed, the first works to appear gave little promise of amendment. This was not unnatural, however, for when passions were aroused, the response to total condemnation is likely to be unqualified endorsement; and the charge of Northern journalism that the South was sunk in barbarism received a retort equally extreme, which was that the antebellum plantation was an

Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920, Charles Reagan Wilson explains that southerners conceived of themselves as a people chosen by God to found a new Christian nation.¹³ They used the Bible to justify slaveholding, they regarded northerners as Philistines, they glorified confederate soldiers as crusaders, and they created a savior in the form of Robert E. Lee. The evangelical aspect of this myth is important because it forced southerners, who were and still are highly-religious, to regard northerners as at least morally inferior if not actually evil. This mindset contributed greatly to the South's self-imposed cultural isolation after Reconstruction, and altering this mindset would require an enormous amount of time and exposure.

Largely because of the self-delusional practice of mythmaking, going into the twentieth century white southerners lacked a capacity for introspection, and they had an abiding fear of change. In *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash coined the phrase "savage ideal" to describe the mindset of the lost cause and its effects. "Here," he says, "under pressure of what was felt to be a matter of life and death, was that old line between what was not, etched, as it were, in fire and carried through every department of life. Here were the ideas and loyalties of the apotheosized past fused into the tightest coherence [...] In a word, here, explicitly defined in every great essential, defined in feeling down to the last detail, was what one must think and say and do" (134). The process of entrenching and reifying the values of the Old South—especially those regarding race, gender, religion, and agriculture—had the effect of stultifying creative and critical

idyll of comfort and harmony, and that the men who fought in gray constituted a blameless chivalry" (261). In his opinion, the process of mythmaking was a reactionary event, instigated by agents of the North, a vast right-wing conspiracy of its era. But I see the literature of the lost cause as an attempt at self-supplication, a way of rationalizing defeat.

¹³ Also see *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and Allan T. Nolan.

imagination in the South, which undercut the New South boosters' campaign to encourage economic development in a progressively-minded region. The American South between 1876 and 1914 was not a place that welcomed difference and change. Yankees were still enemies, blacks were still oppressed, women were still trapped on a pedestal, and intellectuals were expected to toe the party line or be silent.

While some persistent southerners continue to believe in the Lost Cause, America's involvement in World War I began the process of crumbling the invisible intellectual barrier between North and South. Since the South had resisted industrialization into the beginning of the twentieth century, the region's economy depended upon the exportation of cotton. Southerners, who sold large quantities in markets in both England and Germany, initially opposed America's entry into the war. They supported the policies of Virginia-born president Woodrow Wilson, who advocated neutrality. But they also supported his decision to enter the war actively when German submarine activity threatened both the shipment of products to Europe and American lives. The call to arms appealed to southern males' deeply embedded bellicosity as an opportunity to prove themselves in battle and thus mitigate the lingering culture of defeat. Confederate veterans, now long in the tooth, supported the newly unified American military. Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows in *God and General Longstreet* describe a scene of a quarter of a million people cheering as Confederate veterans marched through Washington carrying signs that read "send us if the boys can't do the job" (4). The atmosphere of the war, the refocusing of animosity toward a foreign enemy, the conscription of young men from all regions into a national army, and America's rampant war-time patriotism finally signaled the end of the lost cause.

America's entrance into the war heralded a major generational shift in the South. More than fifty years had passed since the end of the Civil War, and southerners with a distinct recollection of confederate nationalism—the defeated generation—were reaching old age. Their children, raised during Reconstruction and suckled on the myth of the Lost Cause, were reaching middle age. The next generation of southerners, children of the Reconstruction generation and the grandchildren of the Civil War generation, was approaching maturity early in the twentieth century when America joined World War I. Because of the temporal distance between their birth and the signing at Appomattox, this generation was less inclined to deify the Old South than their parents' and grandparents' generations. This was the generation of southerners who amalgamated with their peers from Oregon, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts to form the American generation of 1914. While regional identifiers and a sense of the past would still be extremely important to this new generation of southerners, they would be the first since secession to call themselves American and to cast a critical eye toward the history of the South. Their transition, however, was difficult and often confusing. The speaker of Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" personifies the disillusionment the members of this generation felt as they attempted to reconcile their reverence for their forefathers and their desire to rejoin the modern world.¹⁴

¹⁴ In "Ode to the Confederate Dead," Tate's speaker says:

Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
Demons out of the earth—they will not last.
Stonewall, Stonewall, and the sunken fields of hemp,
Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.
You will curse the setting sun. (44-50)

Tate portrays the speaker's ambivalence toward the South's past, symbolized by the demonic soldiers and the litany of famous battles of the Civil War, many of them Confederate defeats.

As southern intellectuals from the generation of 1914 interacted with their peers from outside the South, they began to develop a new critical temper that questioned many of the fundamental assumptions of the lost cause myth. The process of working through these questions in a creative medium is the enduring hallmark of the Southern Renaissance. But southern intellectuals of this period faced an additional slate of questions not directly associated with their region's past that also required their attention. Modernist writers in the North and in Europe were already tackling the issues of Darwinism, Marxism, and mechanization, plus the frequently unsettling implications of these topics. Their artistic explorations challenged traditional aesthetic conceptions as they attempted to represent a fragmentary worldview in various creative forms. Southern intellectuals, many of whom had been largely sheltered from such issues by their orthodox academic and religious institutions, now were exposed to these intellectual issues and these puzzling art forms, both of which challenged their deeply-inculcated values. W. J. Cash makes a pithy point about the type of confusion southerners faced when America joined the war: "the world in which they had lived was not and would not be again the old fixed, certain, familiar, and easy world they had know before 1914. Strange new ideas and faiths and systems were sweeping through the Western lands, and all the old ideas and faiths and systems were under attack, in danger, crumbling or even vanishing in places. Everywhere were doubt and change and chaos and flux and violence" (293). The challenge southern intellectuals faced as they stared into the abyss of modernism, then, was even greater than that of the other modernist intellectuals. Not only had they to contend with the burden of their history, they also had to face the inherent uncertainty of a world in flux.

Cultural studies of the American South between the turn of the century and World War II tend to make three assumptions about the Southern Renaissance.¹⁵ First, it occurred after World War I, reaching its peak in the late 1920s and maintaining momentum through the Great Depression of the 1930s and well into the 1940s. While critics tend to equivocate on when, or even if, the Renaissance ended, they regard it as a finite—and possibly isolated—episode in America’s literary history.¹⁶ Second, during this period southern writers, who had been all but invisible for many decades, with the exceptions of Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Mark Twain, suddenly dominated America’s literary landscape. The twin mountains of William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe together with the Nashville Fugitives, Richard Wright, and numerous other male and female, black and white writers from the South obscured all other writers from best-sellers lists and from prize announcements. Both the quality and the quantity of literature produced by southern writers shocked America’s publishing community, and by the 1950s literary scholars were already self-consciously examining the period, as in Louis Rubin and Robert Jacobs’s 1953 collection *Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South*. Third, critics also tend to agree that the causes for the sudden onrush of literary production by southern writers were several, related, and difficult to pinpoint. In “Why the Southern Renaissance,” for example, C. Vann Woodward explores the most commonly stated social causes for the movement, including the rise of industrialism in

¹⁵ In addition to W. J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* and Daniel J. Singal’s *The War Within*, see Michael O’Brien, *The Idea of the American South, 1920-1941*, especially chapter ten; John M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, especially chapter one; Richard Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South*, especially chapter one; Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, especially chapter one; and Lewis P. Simpson, “The Southern Writer and the Great Literary Secession.”

¹⁶ This debate is central to Walter Sullivan’s *A Requiem for the Renaissance*, for example.

the South, increasingly liberal attitudes toward race and religion, and immigration from North to South, but he eventually discounts all these explanations and concludes that the task of pinpointing a cause for the emergence of modernist writing in the South is Sisyphean.

While I am not personally fond of pushing boulders up mountains, I believe that the literary movement known as the Southern Renaissance does have a primary cause. But in attempting to explain the movement, a certain number of unique characteristics should be noted. First, most literary movements, such as the Beats or the Bloomsbury Group, take place within small communities of writers who exchange ideas and influence with each other. While the Nashville Fugitives are an example of such a writing community, they are only part of the Southern Renaissance, and they had no personal knowledge of William Faulkner, Jean Toomer, Thomas Wolfe, or Ellen Glasgow until after they were all established writers. Yet the work of all the individual writers associated with southern modernism reflects similar characteristics, which suggests that they are sharing influences from broad outside sources. Second, the writers of the Southern Renaissance do not share an artistic or social agenda. In fact, many of these writers hold political views diametrically opposed to one another; compare the socially conservative Agrarians to the Marxist liberalism of Richard Wright, for example. Third, male and female and black and white writers all contributed to the Southern Renaissance, which marks the first manifestation of race and gender equality in the South. While white male writers such as William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe received the lion's share of contemporary critical attention in the 1920s and 1930s, critics can see in retrospect that writers such as Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Jean Toomer were separately and simultaneously reacting

to many of the same social changes. Fourth, the Southern Renaissance is primarily a reactionary movement, not a revolutionary movement. Many American and European modernist writers deliberately sought ways to break from traditional literary forms, following Ezra Pound's maxim "make it new." Southern writers were heavily influenced by the ideas of the modernists, and they clearly incorporated new techniques into their work. What is primarily important is that southern writers found new influences from outside the South.

In order for new ideas to permeate the South's invisible intellectual boundaries, a massive social change was necessary. That change came in the form of World War I, which led to broad cross-cultural exposure among southerners, other Americans, and Europeans.¹⁷ This exposure precipitated a number of fundamental social changes in the South. The new patriotism, the rapidity of mechanization and industrialization, the changing dynamics of gender and race relations, and the dizzying array of new ideas infiltrating the South led to a number of southern intellectuals to openly question their culture's values. Some, such as Donald Davidson and William Alexander Percy, defended the values of the lost cause even as they recognized that the old order was fading. Others, such as Ellen Glasgow, welcomed the presence of modernism in the South as an opportunity to make much needed improvements. And others, such as

¹⁷ Sociologists who study observable social changes theorize that a three part metaframework can account for the relationship between the three main elements of a change. Briefly, they believe that structural determinants on a large scale, such as famine, war or revolution, lead to a series of processes or mechanism of social change, such as political movements, civil conflict, entrepreneurial activity, or artistic response, and the processes of social change determine the directions or consequences of the change (Haferkamp and Smelser 2). This rubric can help to explain the emergence of literary modernism in the South, if we consider that World War I acted as the structural determinant, instigating process of social change in the region that affected economic practice, traditional identity, race relations, gender dynamics, and artistic response, and that industrialism and literary modernism in the region, among other effects, resulted as a consequence of the process.

William Faulkner, had a conflicted attitude toward both the past and change, which could be equally harmful. Combined, these responses yield a panoramic image of a large, troubled region attempting to enter a new age.

This new modern incarnation of the South had less in common with the Old South and more in common with twentieth-century America. While the South struggled to assimilate mainstream American ideas and conventions—and, in fact, continues to cling to a sense of separateness—it for the most part socially consolidated with the rest of the nation during World War I. The literary movement known as the Southern Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s is actually the southern end of the modernist movement that began in Germany and France in the 1890s and that swept across Europe and the United States at the turn of the century. Therefore, the term “southern modernism,” which I prefer to use, more accurately describes the outburst of literary production in the South than the term “Southern Renaissance.” While critics have used this term for decades, it is problematic for several reasons. First, it implies that the literary production of the early twentieth century is actually a rebirth, or a cultural reawakening of the Old South. But, unless one strains the definition of literary production to include the documents produced by Thomas Jefferson, the Antebellum South never participated fully in early America’s literary development. Second, “Southern Renaissance” suggests that only southern writers experienced an outburst of literary production. In truth, the period between World War I and World War II may have been the headiest time of literary production in America’s history as writers from across the nation created exciting new literary works. While southern writers contended with some additional issues arising from the region’s history, it is more accurate to regard them as participating in the nation’s literary flowering.

Third, regarding southern modernism as a Renaissance suggests that the South continued to be isolated from the modernist zeitgeist when, in fact, the opposite is the case. As a result of their exposure to new intellectual movements and new social norms during World War I, most of the best southern writers during the modernist period made a radical, refreshing, and occasionally painful transition from self-imposed cultural exile to international literary citizenship.

Many of the writers associated with southern modernism represented World War One's cultural impact on the South in their creative works. Significantly, other than William Faulkner's *A Fable*, which occupies a special category, there is no World War I trench novel—such as Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* or John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*—written by a southern author. While a few southern modernist writers did actually serve in combat, including John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson, who dramatized his experience in the long poem *The Tall Men*, the relative lack of combat fiction implies that the experience of battle was not the most essential aspect of World War I's impact on the American South. While combat deeply scarred the European psyche, the war's effects on the United States were more subtle. Southern writers who depict the South during and immediately after the war describe a region in transition. The representation of these transitions demonstrates the tangible effects of modernism and World War I on the American South. I intend to examine the way modernist southern and non-southern writers portray the South's awkward period of social change following the war.

The Modernist Death of Donald Mahon

Soldiers' Pay, William Faulkner's first novel, portrays, with considerable awkwardness of its own, both the emergence of modernist writing by southerners and the bewildering impact of modernism on the South. When Donald Mahon, a mortally-wounded pilot, returns to his home in rural Georgia, he embodies the horrible experience of combat, which shocks his community. His return initiates a series of changes in the fictional community that reflect the effects of World War I on the entire southern region. Faulkner employs a number of experimental literary devices as he tells Donald's story, which tangibly demonstrates the impact of literary modernism on writers from the South. At the time Faulkner wrote *Soldiers' Pay*, he was encountering new forms of literary expression, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and he was indulging his fascination with the emerging literature of the war, both of which profoundly influenced his portrayal of the post-World War I South. *Soldiers' Pay*, thus, is a microcosm of the emergence of literary modernism in the South.

The book, significantly, opens with a train ride from a port of debarkation in the North, through New York state, and across the Midwest. Donald, bearing a massive scar on his face like a red badge of courage, sits incommunicative and virtually invisible on the train. While the demobilized soldiers rowdily celebrate the Armistice, their survival, and no longer being U. S. soldiers, most of the men on the train are unwilling to notice Donald because they intuit the meaning of his wound. His scar, and the ominous portent of his inevitable death, defines his identity on board the train. As the soldiers consider returning to their hometowns across the country, Donald's military service complicates his regional identity. He wears a RAF pilot's uniform, and most the soldiers are reluctant

to speak to him, as they assume that he is not American, which virtually erases his identity. Julian Lowe, a frustrated pilot cadet from California, sees Donald's uniform and his wound and "wonder[s] what a British officer in his condition could be doing traveling in America" (21). A black porter from the South working on the train, however, sees past Donald's uniform. The porter warns the men carousing around Donald to be careful, and one of the soldiers, a military everyman named Private Joe Gilligan, refers to Donald as "a lost foreigner." The porter corrects Gilligan, "Lost? He ain't lost. He's from Gawgia." This information startles the other soldiers: "Gilligan and Lowe looked at each other. 'Christ, I thought he was a foreigner,' Gilligan whispered" (22). This exchange demonstrates that designations of geographic identity among soldiers were more fluid than for civilians. For the other soldiers, the fact of Donald's southern identity is of less consequence than his British uniform and his wound, which marks him as a member of their transregional fraternity. Faulkner uses this episode to introduce Donald to the reader, thus developing the ersatz protagonist's identity indirectly. Later, when Margaret Powers, a young war widow, encounters the soldiers, she also initially mistakes Donald for British, but Gilligan tells her "he ain't no foreigner" and that the location his hometown is irrelevant: "Whatever he is," Gilligan says, "he's all right. With us, anyway. Let him be whatever he wants" (29). The persistent porter, however, apparently sees regional identity as even more significant than military service. He tells Margaret, "I'm from Gawgia, too. Long time ago." When she responds by telling him that she is originally from Alabama, he seems satisfied: "We got to look out for our own folks, ain't we?" he asks, rhetorically (30). The complicated matrix of regional, national, and organizational identity suggests that major alterations have taken place in the usual

schism of American identity construction. Designations of “northern” or “southern” are no longer sufficient labels within this community.

Donald’s hometown community, however, is more traditional. Faulkner describes the town as a sleepy bastion of the lost cause, ill prepared for the coming of modernism:

Charlestown, like numberless other towns throughout the south, had been built around a circle of tethered horses and mules. In the middle of the square was the courthouse—a simple utilitarian edifice of brick and sixteen beautiful Ionic columns stained with generations of casual tobacco. Elms surrounded the courthouse and beneath these trees, on scarred and carved wood benches and chairs the city fathers, progenitors of solid laws and solid citizens who believed in Tom Watson and feared only God and drouth, in black string ties or the faded brushed gray and bronze meaningless medals of the Confederate States of America, no longer having to make any pretense toward labor, slept or whittled away the long drowsy days while their juniors of all ages, not yet old enough to frankly slumber in public, played checkers or chewed tobacco and talked. A lawyer, a drug clerk and two nondescripts tossed iron discs back and forth between two holes in the ground. And above all brooded early April sweetly pregnant with noon. (108).

Faulkner’s description suggests that only the inevitable creeping of time has altered this setting since 1865, and 1919 finds the community clinging to atavistic icons and traditions. Faulkner indicates that Charlestown is identical to most rural southern communities, which makes Faulkner’s choice of geography interesting. No city of Charlestown exists in Georgia, and Faulkner had not spent any significant amount of time in Georgia at the time he wrote *Soldiers’ Pay*. So the choice of setting appears to be arbitrary—a generic southern town. The phrases he uses to describe the town, and, by extension, the South, indicate a harshly critical attitude, which had been lacking in much earlier southern fiction.

Donald’s return has an unusual effect on the usually tranquil community. Faulkner describes it as “hardly a nine days wonder even”:

Curious, kindly neighbors came in—men who stood or sat jovially respectable, cheerful: solid business men interested in the war only as a by-product of the rise and fall of Mr. Wilson, and interested in that only as a matter of dollars and cents, while their wives chatted about clothes to each other across Mahon's scarred oblivious brow. (145)

For the vast majority of southerners, with the exception of the small group of young men who enlisted in the American Expeditionary Force, the actual events of the war were a distant construct. Since the battlefields of World War I were an ocean away and news of the war reached America slowly and since relatively few goods and services were rationed during the war, the war had only negligible impact on the lives of many southerners. The most significant effects of the war were not realized until after the soldiers returned. The men and women of Charlestown are unable to understand Donald's experience, which falls outside their narrow scope of affairs. They refer to Donald as "one of them airy-plane fellers" and most of their conversations about Donald concern speculations about his inevitable death and gossip about his hometown sweetheart, Cecily Saunders, and the two people who escorted him home, Private Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers (107). Their morbid interest in Donald's romantic affairs indicates that their concern for him personally is superficial and that they do not yet grasp the significance of his return.

As more soldiers come home, more apparent changes begin to occur. At a dance to celebrate the soldiers' return, Faulkner describes a group of young men who have come of age during the war and who, had the war lasted any longer, would have likely enlisted soon. When Private Joe Gilligan approaches the group, a reaction takes place that parallels the experience of rural southern men joining the U.S. Army; the young men become self-conscious of their provincialism: "They greeted [Gilligan] with the

effusiveness of people who are brought together by invitation yet are not quite certain of themselves and of the spirit of the invitation; in this case the eternal country boys of one national mental state, lost in the comparative metropolitan atmosphere of one diametrically opposed to it. To feel provincial: finding that a certain conventional state of behavior has inexplicably become obsolete over night” (194). Exposure to people from outside the South made many southerners aware of their regional identity for the first time. These country boys, as citizens of “one national mental state” have identified themselves as southerners rather than as Americans, thus isolating themselves from the rest of the nation. But interacting with Americans from other regions allows them to realize the limitations of their self-imposed isolation, leading to drastic changes in the lost cause mentality that plagued the South until World War I. Faulkner suggests that the war is primarily responsible for ameliorating inter-regional antagonism by forcing an entire generation of Americans, regardless of geographic origins, to face “the hang-over of warfare in a society tired of warfare” (194). In other words, for all American men of age for military service during World War I, the possibility of—if not the actuality of—fighting in the war established a common identity that transcended regional boundaries, which complicated the long-standing North South schism of regional allegiances. For some southerners, facing the prospect of a modern world that challenged traditional identities caused anxiety and a sense of alienation, hallmarks of modernist writing in the South and themes that Faulkner would continue to explore through Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

A relatively small group of southerners experienced personal loss as a result of the war, and their experiences signify a shift in cultural values that underscores the

modernist sense of alienation. Following the Civil War, a cult of reverence deified the soldiers who died in combat, pageants were held in their memory, and monuments—ubiquitous in southern towns, including Charlestown—were erected in their honor. Following World War I, however, commemorations of lost soldiers were rare. Since relatively few soldiers died in the war, since the conflict's cause concerned geopolitical issues that had a tenuously tangential effect on southerners, and since the influenza pandemic of 1919 distracted the region's attention at the time of demobilization, the civic compulsion to celebrate the soldiers' sacrifice immediately after the war was severely diminished. Thus the individuals who suffered a loss were often left to grieve alone. On one occasion, Faulkner portrays a conversation between Mrs. Burney, whose son Dewey was killed in the war; Margaret Powers, whose husband Dick was killed in the war, and Donald's father. As they talk with each other, unspoken thoughts of the grief, which Faulkner incorporates parenthetically, dominate the exchange. For example, Margaret remembers "(Dick, Dick. ...How ugly men are, naked. Don't leave me)," while Mrs. Burney grieves "(Dewey, my boy)," and Donald's father, unwilling to openly admit Donald's inevitable death, subconsciously accepts his son's fate, "(This was my son, Donald. He is dead)" (177-180). By relating their sense of loss parenthetically, Faulkner emphasizes the isolation they felt as mourners even though their loved ones died as part of a war that united the nation. This dynamic suggests that the celebration of mourning following the Civil War that dominated southern culture for several decades was unusual, that social mourning is a sign of defeat, and that the isolated mourning that accompanied World War I is a sign of victory. But the lack of massive public celebration following the victory suggests that the war's outcome, especially as it pertained to the European

political landscape, was a relatively little consequence to southerners. In other words, few southerners cared about the borders of Austro-Hungary or who occupied Alsace Lorraine; instead, most southerners were concerned with the war's impact specifically on their culture and way of life, especially as it affected their families.

The events of the war initiated a number of changes in gender relations that were of major consequence to southerners. Before World War I, southern women were trapped by what W. J. Cash calls the "cult of gyneolatry," the dual impulse to idolize feminine virtue and to regulate strictly feminine behavior. This patriarchal standard dictated customs of courtship and marriage and prevented women from seeking financial or legal independence from their male benefactors, either their fathers or their husbands. But during the war, a number of women challenged traditional gender codes. In *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner dramatizes the tension between the traditional southern femininity, represented by Donald's fiancée Cecily Saunders, and modern femininity, represented by war widow Margaret Powers. Faulkner portrays Cecily as vapid and foolish, a template for Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*. Her parents apparently forced her to agree to marry Donald before his enlistment, which indicates that she is obedient to patriarchal control, but she has had an ongoing widely-known affair with a town boy, George Farr, since Donald enlisted. When Donald returns wounded, she at first yields to pressure from her parents and agrees to go through with the wedding, then she changes her mind and elopes with George Farr. Cecily, as the modern incarnation of the southern belle, proves to lack the inner strength and virtue that southern men admired in southern women, which brings the entire construct of southern womanhood into question.¹⁸

Faulkner contrasts Cecily with Margaret Powers, an independent, resourceful, sexually-liberated woman.¹⁹ Although originally from Alabama, Margaret used the war as a means to escape the patriarchal South. She explains to Joe Gilligan, “I lived in a small town and I had got kind of sick lazing around home all morning and dressing up just to walk downtown in the afternoon and spending the evenings messing around with men, so after we got in the war I persuaded some friends of my mother’s to get me a position in New York” (158). Living outside the South allowed Margaret to gain a degree of independence. She met and married Dick Powers, but their marriage lasted little longer than their honeymoon, after which Dick deployed to France and died in action. After living on her own in New York, holding a job, and surviving a husband, Margaret gains an insightful perspective on the cult of gyneolatry and southern men’s obsession with feminine virtue: “Men are the ones who worry about our good names, because they gave them to us,” she says, “but we have other things to bother about, ourselves. What you mean by a good name is like a dress that’s too flimsy to wear comfortably” (101). Her remark implies that practical women have more important concerns than their reputations, which can be an impediment to achieving more tangible goals. When Margaret meets Donald on the train, she accompanies him to Charlestown to comfort him as a way of reclaiming her lost husband. She marries Donald when Cecily leaves town, which makes a subtle commentary on the nature of genuine virtue. After Donald’s death, she feels free to reassert herself by leaving Charlestown. Joe Gilligan accompanies her to the train station and proposes marriage to her, but she refuses. As a woman in control of

¹⁸ Jacquelyn Scott Lynch addresses this point in “Postwar Play: Gender Performatives in Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay*.”

¹⁹ Michael Zeitlin discusses Faulkner’s early female characters in “The Passion of Margaret Powers: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Soldiers’ Pay*.”

her sexuality, she invites him to live with her, but the prospect of flaunting moral convention frightens him, and he refuses. Faulkner juxtaposes the scene of Margaret's leaving Charlestown, where she will never be accepted, with Cecily's return, suggesting that the community values Cecily's magnolia-scented façade of virtue more than Margaret's new feminine ideals.

Faulkner deals with changes in gender relations as a result of the war directly, but he addresses issues of race and racism indirectly. Blacks frequently appear in the novel in subservient roles. The porter on the train, various servants, a recurring man in shirtsleeves mowing a lawn, occasional loafers: all reinforce the image of a society with clearly defined color lines. In fact, one could plausibly suggest that the South's racial schism was more pronounced at the time of World War I than at any other time, but that dynamic may have more to do with the success of D. W. Griffith's highly romanticized cinematic version of the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation* that appeared in 1917. Regardless, blacks and whites in the South occupied virtually separate, but hardly equal, communities. But war service altered the normal southern racial dynamic slightly, laying the foundation for substantial civil rights gains made later in the twentieth century. Faulkner includes in *Soldiers' Pay* a brief appearance by a black World War I veteran, and his behavior implies that changes in race relations will be inevitable. After Donald's return, his black nurse, Mammy Callie, comes to visit with her son, Loosh, who would likely have been Donald's childhood playmate.²⁰ Loosh arrives in uniform, and shows his superior officer appropriate military courtesy: "Loosh took two paces and came smartly to attention, saluting: 'If de lootenant please, Co'pul Nelson glad to see—Co'pul Nelson

²⁰ Readers familiar with Faulkner's biography will notice the similarity between this character and Caroline Barr, see Blotner 76-78.

glad to see de lootenant looking so well” (167). Martial dignity, however, does not satisfy Mammy Callie, and she scolds Loosh for “wavin’ [his] arm” at Donald, which causes an interesting response in Loosh. Faulkner writes: “Loosh lost his military bearing and he became again that same boy who had known Mahon long ago, before the world went crazy. He came up diffidently and took Mahon’s hand in his kind, rough black one. ‘Mist’ Donald?’ he said” (167). While the verisimilitude of this passage strains the imagination, Faulkner’s suggestion that Loosh’s groveling behavior better reflects an ordered society—“before the world went crazy”—implies that a black man with a sense of dignity, especially one with a sense of military decorum, is out of place in the South. Faulkner develops this notion farther with the character of Capsey Strother in *Flags in the Dust* and with Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses*.

One can see Faulkner developing in his first novel a number of themes that he would explore in later works, and one can also see him experimenting with new literary techniques that he would refine and master later in his career.²¹ While living in New Orleans and writing *Soldiers’ Pay*, Faulkner read the work of many other modernist writers including F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, and James Joyce.²² In his first manuscript, originally titled “Mayday,” he imitated their writing styles. For example, as Joseph Blotner documents, he embedded cultural artifacts, such as popular songs, into his text as Fitzgerald did to establish setting and atmosphere (429). One of the most obvious borrowings occurs in Chapter Seven of *Soldiers’ Pay* where Faulkner

²¹ For a discussion of Faulkner’s manuscript for the novel, see Margaret J. Yonce, “The Composition of *Soldiers’ Pay*.”

²² Faulkner actually makes references to James Branch Cabell’s *Jurgen*, then a controversial book, in *Soldiers’ Pay* (63), and he makes a derisive comment about Henry James that hints at the antagonism between realism and modernism (227).

copies Joyce's method of assembling a multitude of interior monologues as in the overture to The Sirens chapter of *Ulysses*. Faulkner also incorporates stichomythic dialogue—exchanges of short sentences without embedded character identifiers—in some sections similar to Hemingway's technique in *A Farewell to Arms*. He also occasionally experiments with stream of consciousness, which would eventually become his trademark, but the passages tend to be too brief to adequately develop the techniques intended effect. Faulkner's experiments in *Soldiers' Pay* demonstrate the growth of an immature but ambitious writer exploring new forms.²³

Faulkner's willingness to embrace new literary forms and to seek out artistic influences from outside his otherwise limited scope of experience signals a shift in artistic values in the South. Rather than modeling his early prose after the local color sketches and moonlight and magnolias mythology, such as his grandfather's novel, *The White Rose of Memphis*, that dominated southern literature until World War I, Faulkner rejected these trite apologist forms for new literary techniques to better reflect the uncertainty and disillusionment of the modern world. In a sense, he imported the modernist narrative to the South, but he intentionally maintained a southern voice in his work. This is an important point. Faulkner's early poetry had no specific geographic sensibility, and southern settings and characters did not begin to appear in his work until his earliest post-World War I short stories such as "Landing in Luck." While Faulkner had an opportunity when he visited Paris in 1925 to eschew his southern identity for that of a detached artist as many of the writers of the Lost Generation did, he instead chose to follow Sherwood Anderson's counsel to explore the imaginative life of his own postage

²³ Michael Millgate discusses Faulkner's modernist literary devices in more detail in "Starting Out in the Twenties: Reflections on *Soldiers' Pay*."

stamp of land. By making this decision, he unified the two essential elements of his career as a prose writer, literary modernism and the South. Perhaps he intuited that the South's entry into the modern world would be inherently painful and dramatic and that he could harness the experimental spirit of modernist prose to describe the experience of southern alienation.

World War I constituted for Faulkner a literary threshold that, once crossed, could not be recrossed. It signified a break with the past and with tradition that transcended geographic allegiance. While many of the modernist writers Faulkner emulated in his first novel were searching for new methods to express and describe their apprehension of the modern world, Faulkner possibly recognized that implications of modernism that disturbed them—such as the erosion of religious faith, the development of assembly-line killing machines, and the dissolution of nationalist identities—affected the American South almost as directly as they affected Western Europe. Like many veterans of the war, to construe the term broadly, Faulkner was fascinated with the war's intellectual ramifications. While he was composing *Soldiers' Pay*, he wrote a short, unpublished essay, "Literature and War," that discusses that representation of combat in four contemporary works about the war.²⁴ He takes issue with Rupert Brooke's glorious representation of heroism in battle, he applauds the gory realism of Siegfried Sasson's poetry and Henri Barbusse's novel *Le feu*, and he comments on the veracity of R. H. Mottram's novel *The Spanish Farm*, which depicts the impact of warfare on a small home-front community.

²⁴ Michael Millgate published the recovered essay in "Faulkner on the Literature of the First World War."

The Spanish Farm may have had the most significant influence on the thematic structure and content of *Soldiers' Pay* of any of the works Faulkner read during the composition of his novel (Millgate 391). In effect, *The Spanish Farm* demonstrates that the scope of war's cultural impact is not limited to the battlefield, that massive, dramatic changes can take place far removed from actual combat, and that lingering social consequences can be as conducive to literary development, and as disturbing, as fighting in the trenches. In *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner describes only a brief scene of combat of the "slogging up the Arras" style he admires in Sassoon and Barbusse, which may bespeak his lack of actual experience in the trenches. But he did represent combat in some of his earlier short stories, such as "Ad Astra," and he was clearly fascinated with battle as Donald Kartiganer argues in "So I who Never had a War." So the relative lack of combat scenes in a book ostensibly about war implies that the events that take place at home when the fighting has passed are equally as important as the fighting itself. For the South, which witnessed rapid economic expansion and demographic changes during the wartime industrial boom, the post World War I period, in fact, yielded more difficult problems as the region wrestled with adapting to the new social order.

World War I, Northerners Writers, and the South

Part of the new social order included closer inter-regional relations. Thousands of northerners, most of whom had never had cause to travel in the South, were stationed at American Expeditionary training facilities in the South, such as Camp Gordon in Georgia. Just as first-hand experience of the North and Europe allowed for the diffusion of modernist ideas into the South, the presence of northerners in the South on a large

scale for the first time since the Federal Army of Occupation disbanded had a significant impact on both northerners and southerners. For northerners, the experience of living in the South humanized southerners and overturned many preconceived notions of the South and southerners based on stock characters from local color fiction. After the war, northern writers tended to represent southerners—specifically white southerners—more sympathetically than they had before World War I, indicating a general thawing of interregional relations.

Many northern writers in the period between the end of Reconstruction and World War I tended to portray white southerners negatively and black southerners not at all. Consider, for example, Henry James's representation of Basil Ransom, an attorney from Mississippi practicing law in New York City in *The Bostonians* (1886).²⁵ Published in the decade following Reconstruction, the book focuses more on the ideology of feminism than racism, but James portrays Basil as steeped in southern tradition and unwilling to admit the possibility of social progress. He thus antagonizes his more open-minded northern cousins, but his southern charm and aristocratic manners allow him nevertheless to woo Verena Tarrant, a young member of the women's' rights movement. In constructing a narrative centered on the tension between feminism and male chauvinism, James's choice of a southern character, indeed the scion of a planter family reduced to working to earn money, seems curious. At the time James wrote *The Bostonians* he had not visited the South. In fact, when he wrote *The American Scene* after the turn of the century he never ventured farther into the South than Richmond and Charleston, more than six hundred miles from Mississippi. So James was far from an expert on

²⁵ I am grateful to Emily Rosenbaum for suggesting James's representation of the southerner as a point of comparison.

interregional relations, and after two decades of living in Europe before he wrote *The Bostonians* he doubted his own awareness of his native New England, much less the South. He appears, thus, to be capitalizing on what Charles R. Anderson in “James’s Portrait of the Southerner” calls “southern conservatism,” the impression among northern reformers that southerners, steeped in the tradition of chivalry and social order, were unwilling to or incapable of permitting social progress (311). Basil Ransom, thus, acts as regionally constructed rhetorical foil for the case for the women’s movement. James, in effect, exploits his post-Reconstruction northern readers’ attitudes about the South by aligning southerners with the chauvinistic position, which indicates that northerners’ attitudes about southerners were almost as slow to change in the decades following the Civil War as southerners’ attitudes about northerners.

Literary representations by northerners of southerners during World War I, however, tend to draw more heavily upon the authors’ experience in the South and with southerners, resulting in more fully-developed portrayals of southern characters. Some of these works continue to capitalize on regional differences, but they place the differences within a relatively equitable dialogue of cultural exchange. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Tarleton stories, for example, draw upon stereotypical images of southerners from local color fiction, but his stories place northerners and southerners in proximity to each other, often in romantic relationships, and reflect social changes taking place in the South as a result of World War I.

Fitzgerald, who most readers associate with Princeton, New York, France, and Hollywood, may seem like an unlikely spokesman for the South, but he actually had a number of connections to the South that made him curious about and sympathetic toward

the region. Although Fitzgerald was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, his father came originally from Maryland where he had abetted southern spies during the Civil War. Fitzgerald admired his father's manners, his graciousness, and his exciting stories of the South during the war. His familial connections to the South lead John T. Irwin to suggest that Fitzgerald may be a southern writer by proxy, which may be a slight overstatement, but he clearly had a well-established interest in the South.²⁶ Yet it seems unlikely that he would have made his interest in the region explicit, by living in the South, for example, had not World War I intervened.

Like thousands of other northerners, midwesterners, and westerners who enlisted in the Army, Fitzgerald underwent his training at least partially in the South. After dropping out of Princeton, Fitzgerald enlisted in the Army in 1917. While stationed as a training officer at Camp Taylor in Kentucky, Camp Gordon in Georgia, and Camp Sheridan in Alabama, Fitzgerald wrote and revised the manuscript that would eventually become his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920).²⁷ In Montgomery, Alabama, near Camp Sheridan, Fitzgerald met Zelda Sayre, a beautiful, unconventional southern woman who captivated him. The triangular relationship of living in the South, writing extensively, and romantic interest in a southern woman naturally inclined Fitzgerald to develop a literary interest in the South, which he expresses in two stories he wrote while courting Zelda, "The Ice Palace" (1920) and "The Jelly-Bean" (1920), and a third story written a few years after their marriage, "The Last of the Belles" (1929).²⁸ Collectively,

²⁶ See John T. Irwin, "Is Fitzgerald a Southern Writer?"

²⁷ For details about Fitzgerald's military service in the South and his courtship of Zelda Sayre, see Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, pages 79-91.

²⁸ Scott Donaldson explores this relationship in "Scott Fitzgerald's Romance with the South."

these three stories provide a prism through which to view the shift in northern attitudes toward the South following World War I.

While “The Jelly-Bean” trades heavily in southern stereotypes that reveal much about northern attitudes toward southerners, “The Ice Palace” is particularly interesting because it places southern and northern regional identities in conflict within the context of World War I and draws heavily upon local color stereotypes and lost cause iconography. “The Ice Palace” describes the courtship of a vivacious southern woman, Sally Carrol Happer of Tarleton, Georgia, by a recently-demobilized U.S. Army lieutenant, Harry Bellamy, from a northwestern state, presumably Minnesota. The story plays on regional distinctions, especially climate, contrasting the steamy, languid South with the frigid, inhospitable North. Sally Carrol finds her hometown and the eligible bachelors in it “ineffectual and sad,” so she accepts Harry’s invitation to visit his home in March (51). But she finds the frosty northern spring unwelcoming, as suggested by the metaphorical ice palace, a clear, cold structure constructed entirely of frozen spring water. When Sally Carrol, symbolically, gets lost in the ice palace and nearly freezes, she comes to a realization: “she couldn’t be left here to wander forever—to be frozen, heart, body, and soul. . . .She liked warmth and summer and Dixie. These things were foreign—foreign” (68). Fitzgerald, thus, portrays relations between the regions as thawing, but not yet warmed.

Much of what continues to separate the North and the South concerns the past. When Harry visits Sally Carrol in Tarleton, she takes him to “one of her favorite haunts,” the Confederate cemetery (52). There, where the headstones yield their names to the element, she attempts to explain the Lost Cause to her Yankee suitor:

“[The confederate soldiers] died for the most beautiful thing in the world—the dead South. You see,” she continued, her voice still husky, her eyes glistening with tears, “people have these dreams they fasten onto things, and I’ve always grown up with that dream. It was so easy because it was all dead and there weren’t any disillusionments comin’ to me. I’ve tried in a way to live up to those past standards of noblesse oblige—there’s just the last remnants of it, you know, like the roses of an old garden dying all round us—streaks of strange courtliness and chivalry in some of these boys an’ stories I used to hear from a Confederate soldier who lived next door, and a few old darkies.” (54)

Fitzgerald’s elegant and passionate, if somewhat cliché, description of the Lost Cause seems more than a little unusual for a northern writer, and both P. Keith Gammons and C. Hugh Holman have commented on Fitzgerald’s urge to romanticize the South.²⁹ But he stops far short of celebrating the South. On one occasion, Harry, who, like Fitzgerald appears to have intertwined the myth of Old South with the beauty of the modern southern belle, makes a distinction between the South of myth and the South of reality. He says of contemporary southerners, “they’re sort of—sort of degenerates—not at all like the old Southerners” (62). Harry’s attitude seems representative of northern attitudes toward the South in the early twentieth century, which, after years of consuming local color fiction, absorbed the moonlight and magnolias mythology of the Old South as romantic, yet tragic, and regarded the New South as emasculated and virtually irrelevant. Harry, significantly, was not stationed in the South during the war, and he had spent only a few days in the South, two days in Asheville, North Carolina, where he met Sally Carrol, and a couple of days visiting her in Tarleton. For the person he represents—the disinterested white male northerner with limited experience of the South—the South produced two commodities of value, cotton and women.

²⁹ See C. Hugh Holman, “Fitzgerald’s Changes on the Southern Belle,” and P. Keith Gammons, “The South of the Mind.”

But Fitzgerald complicates that image of the South in the northern imagination with his final Tarleton story, “The Last of the Belles.” In the story, Andy, a former lieutenant once stationed at Camp Henry Lee in Tarleton, remembers his experience in the South and his infatuation with Ailie Calhoun, a friend of Sally Carrol Happer. His initial impressions of the South mimic those of Harry Bellamy, meaning his fixates on the heat and the beauty of the women. He even alludes to local color fiction, lost cause mythology, and the cult of gyneolotry when describing Ailie Calhoun:

There she was—the Southern type in all its purity. I would have recognized Ailie Calhoun if I’d never heard Ruth Draper or read Marse Chan. She had the adroitness sugar-coated with sweet, voluble simplicity, the suggested background of devoted fathers, brothers and admirers stretching back into the South’s heroic age, the unfailing coolness acquired in the endless struggle with the heat. There were notes in her voice that order slaves around, that withered up Yankee captains, and then soft, wheedling notes that mingled in unfamiliar loveliness with the night.
(450)

Andy and a series of Army officers court Ailie until they are shipped to New York to prepare for debarkation, but the war ends before their shipment. When they return to Tarleton for demobilization, Ailie learns that her working-class northern beau, Earl Schoen, fails to meet her matrimonial standards. So Andy, Earl, and the other soldiers return to their homes with only memories of the South.

Andy, however, returns to Tarleton six years later to visit Ailie and the site of the Army camp, but he finds everything changed, especially Ailie: “The modulations of pride, the vocal hints that she knew the secrets of a brighter, finer antebellum day, were gone in her voice; there was no time for them now as it rambled on in the half-laughing, half-desperate banter of the newer South. And everything was swept into this banter in order to make it go on and leave no time for thinking—the present, the future, herself,

me” (460). Ailie, a symbol of the image of the South in the northern imagination, demonstrates that the modern South lost much of its romantic luster. In a sense, the changes that began when northern soldiers came to the South during World War I spoiled the romantic notion of the South—the image of the South based on local color fiction—that northerners idealized. The implications of modernism in the South, in other words, finally dispelled the myth of the Old South. Andy, returning to the abandoned site of the camp, feels ironically alienated in the landscape of the New South, leading him to return disillusioned to his home in the North. He, like Donald Mahon and a host of other characters drawn from modernist southern writing, finds the social changes taking place in the South as a result of World War I to be perplexing, which appears to be a common response.

While Fitzgerald tends to draw on romantic images in his stories about World War I and the American South, John Dos Passos presents a starkly different version of war and regional identity in *Three Soldiers* (1921). The three soldiers in the title constitute a composite portrait of American regional identities at the time of the war’s declaration. Dan Fuselli, an ethnic Italian from San Francisco, Chrisfield, a farm boy from Indiana, and John Andrews, an intellectual and composer from Virginia would have been highly unlikely to meet under ordinary circumstances.³⁰ But as conscripts in the American war machine, as Dos Passos characterizes it, they were amalgamated into a common identity as dehumanized cogs.³¹ Under the regimen of training the soldiers

³⁰ Dos Passos based his portrayal of life in an American training camp on his experience at Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania where he met soldiers named Fuselli and Christenfield. See *The Fourteenth Chronicle*, pages 207-227.

³¹ *Three Soldiers*, like *Le feu*, proved to be highly controversial at the time of its publication. See, for example, reviews collected in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*.

endure, their personal identities tend to dissolve. In the novel's first part, the soldiers discuss their backgrounds and hometowns, and Chrisfield remarks on the range of regional identities, "You're from the [West] Coast, this feller's from New York, an' Ah'm from ole Indiana, right in the middle" (22). Later in the text, regional variations play a less significant role, implying that in the context of the novel the common identity of oppressed soldiers has more significance than individual civilian identity.

Yet Dos Passos does make a few oblique references to the South that reflect conflicting American attitudes toward the region. When the new recruits are discussing their impending voyage to France, their conversation reveals the effects of their indoctrination into an ultra-militaristic patriotic mindset. As a group of soldiers discusses their zeal to destroy the Huns and kill the Kaiser, one comments, "They ought to torture him to death, like they do niggers when they lynch 'em down south" (25). The quote is not attributed to any specific person, but it, nonetheless, demonstrates that Americans at the time of the war, regardless of their region of origin, associated the South with racial violence, a reputation that the region certainly deserved at the time. But the fact that the speaker, who has been programmed to associate the Kaiser with death and brutality, wishes to lynch the Kaiser as an extreme form of bloodthirsty torture clearly indicates that southerners were considered excessive in their cruelty, perhaps even crueler than the Germans who were portrayed as bayoneting children in Belgium. All of this suggests that American attitudes toward the South were deeply ingrained and that only a prolonged period of mutual exposure would serve to alter those perceptions.

Dos Passos, surprisingly, considered Andrews, the Virginian, the most autobiographical of the characters in the novel. While critics do not ordinarily associate

Dos Passos with the South, his mother came from Virginia and, to the extent that he claimed any place in America as home, he considered himself closest to Westmoreland County, Virginia.³² But as a result of his birth in Chicago, his transatlantic upbringing in Europe and on the East Coast, and his education at Choate and Harvard, he never identified himself as a southerner, and he certainly was not inculcated with the myth of the Lost Cause. He, therefore, had a relatively disinterested attitude toward American regional antagonism, which makes him an especially revealing indicator of American attitudes toward the South. From his perspective, apparently, identity had only a minor relationship to geography. Andrews, in fact, claims New York City as his second home, and he never in the course of the novel attempts to tell about the South in the way that Quentin did to Shreve or the way that Faulkner did through Quentin. So Dos Passos and his doppelganger Andrews represent a new, or at least different, type of southern identity: one that bears only a nominal relationship to the South, one that is well-suited for the type of interregional and international exchange that takes place during the war, and one that largely escapes the burden of southern history.

Most southerners, however, carried the burden of southern history well into the twentieth century. Much of the literature of southern modernism depicts southerners struggling to adapt to the changes that took place in southern society following World War I, a difficult transition from the myth of the Lost Cause to the reality of the modern world. This war, like its predecessor in the 1860s, exposed many of the region's social, cultural, and economic weaknesses, but it left the region's writers and intellectuals better prepared to analyze those weaknesses artistically. Faulkner's awkward fumbling in

³² Dos Passos dramatizes his experience as an adolescent in Virginia in the short story "July," which he originally intended to incorporate into *Manhattan Transfer*.

Soldiers' Pay eventually led to the magnificent realization of southern modernist literature in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The South reentering the world, to use Allen Tate's phrase, following World War I after its half-century self-imposed intellectual exile signaled the beginning of an exciting, frightening period in the history of southern literature. The literary representation of the changes that took place within the South's social structure—specifically to its agrarian economy, its traditional identities, its gender dynamics, and its race relations—demonstrate a conflict within the mind of the South over the role of the region's past in its future. But, following World War I, southern intellectuals clearly realized that the old, endemic traditions were in jeopardy of disappearing, initiating a backlash of conservative southerners who took a somewhat quixotic stand against modernism and industrialism in the South.

CHAPTER TWO

Mules and Machines: Modernism, World War I, and the Southern Economy

Eugene Gant in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) is a freshman at the state university at Pulpit Hill when America enters World War I and too young to enlist. Gant, like William Faulkner and millions of other young men in America and Europe at the time, idealizes the glory of open combat and yearns for the opportunity to fight. "He wanted to get in," Wolfe writes, "He wanted to be urbane and careless. He wanted to wear well-cut clothes. He wanted to be a gentleman. He wanted to go to war" (350). But circumstances conspire against him. Sixteen years old when he matriculated at the university, he has to wait two years before being old enough to be eligible to enlist. A couple of weeks before his eighteenth birthday, however, he receives word that his favorite brother, Ben, has influenza, part of the global pandemic of 1918 that American soldiers communicated between Europe and the United States. By the time his brother dies from the virus and is buried, the Armistice is signed. So Eugene's desire to enlist, to fight, and to earn glory is frustrated.

That does not mean, however, that Eugene does not find a way to get involved in the war effort. During the summer of his sophomore year he heeds the call of, not glory, but money:

There were strange rumors of a land of El-dorado to the north, amid the war industry of the Virginia coast. Some of the students had been there,

the year before: they brought back stories of princely wages. One could earn twelve dollars a day, with no experience. One could assume the duties of a carpenter, with only a hammer, a saw, and a square. No questions were asked.

War is not death to young men; war is life. The earth had never worn raiment of such color as it did that year. The war seemed to unearth pockets of ore that had never been known in the nation: there was a vast unfolding and exposure of wealth and power. And somehow—this imperial wealth, this display of power in men and money, was blended into a lyrical music. In Eugene's mind, wealth and love and glory melted into a symphonic noise: the age of myth and miracle had come upon the world again. All things were possible. (424-425)

Eugene goes to Newport News, Virginia, the center of naval shipping during the war, where he finds an awesome amalgamation of people flocking to profit from the war—from southern boys fresh off the farm to immigrant Yankee city dwellers—all reveling in the opportunity for material gain. Eugene learns that success in this war-time boom town has much to do with luck and illusion before he eventually takes a job as a checker supervising the loading of ships bound for Europe. After a series of adventures during which he squanders most of his earnings on gambling and debauchery, he leaves Virginia to return to school with only \$130 and several amusing anecdotes to his credit.¹

Eugene's brief experience amid the war industry in Virginia presages a series of changes that would take place within the South's economic structure as a result of World War I, changes that would inevitably ripple through the region's social structure with consequences more ferocious for the South's traditional agricultural practices than either the Civil War or Reconstruction. In other words, before the Civil War, the South's economic foundation rested on the harvest, primarily by hand, of cotton and small number of other cash crops, such as tobacco, sugar, and rice. The same was true both

¹ That Wolfe's novels are based closely on his personal experience is no secret. For details about Wolfe's experience during the war, see David Herbert Donald, *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe*, 42-48.

after the Civil War and after Reconstruction, with the only significant change concerning the maintenance of the labor force, for after the Civil War, southern landowners shifted, slightly, from slavery to tenant farming, a practice nearly as economically exploitative as slavery but not as morally repugnant.² But agriculture had been the nexus of southern culture since white settlers came from Europe to establish plantations, such as the settlement at Jamestown, on fertile, free (already-inhabited) soil.

The same, however, was not true following World War I. Where the New South backers of the 1880s and 1890s had failed to attract industry to the South in a major way, World War I brought it in force. This is not to suggest that the South suddenly and dramatically shifted to an industrial economy immediately after the war; instead, as a result of the war, an inexorable process began that would gain momentum throughout the twentieth century and that would challenge all the fundamental assumptions of southern society. When northern industrial magnates supporting the war effort built factories in the South to take advantage of a climate better suited to year-round production, they also discovered a relatively cheap, docile, and yet-to-be exploited labor force. That fact trumped the doubts about the southern worker that had made northern investors leery following Reconstruction, and thus began a campaign of boosterism aimed at enticing factories southward where they could take advantage of, to use Sinclair Lewis's phrase, "cheap and contented labor."³ While certainly not as glorious or romantic as Eugene's

² For studies of the transition from slavery to sharecropping in the South, see Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* and Edward Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping*.

³ Sinclair Lewis, *Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929*. For more on the industrialization of the South, see James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984*; Harriet L. Herring, *Southern Industry and Regional Development*; and Broadus Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South*.

hyperbolic vision of life in wartime, the influx of industry into the South following World War I, its impact on farm labor, and its concurrent relationship to agricultural mechanization and technological innovation would ultimately lead to profound changes in southern culture and southern literature.

As the southern economy changed in the years following World War I, southern writers portrayed a region in transition. Any alterations to the traditionally agricultural society were met with equal parts of skepticism, detachment, and enthusiasm. The changes in southern economic practices as a result of industrialization and mechanization of farm labor directly contributed to the emergence of literary modernism in the South. Modernism as an intellectual movement, in fact, has everything to do with the development of technologies that displaced traditional human relationships. Machines that did the work of people altered labor relations, domestic relations, and spiritual relations. Writers and intellectuals in areas that industrialized early, such as Western Europe and the Northeastern United States, began wrestling with these problems before the war, as in the case of the paintings of Marcel Duchamp or in Henry Adams's reflections on the juxtaposition of the virgin and the dynamo.⁴ Southern intellectuals, however, out of the shadow of the factory smokestack, did not begin to consider the consequences of modern technology on a large scale until after the war.

⁴ Duchamp's cubist, mechanical representations of the human form caused a sensation when first exhibited at the New York Armory in 1913. That particular show, whose spectators included Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams, propelled avant-garde literary experimentation by northeastern writers; see Milton Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*. Henry Adams, a medieval historian, realized while examining exhibits at the 1893 Chicago exposition that the dynamo would be powerful a symbol of force in the twentieth century as the image of the Virgin Mary had been in the twelfth century, thus indicating that change in social values that privileged technology over spirituality and presaging a debate that would play out in southern literature following World War I; see his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*.

In the decades between World War I and World War II an animated conversation took place among several southern writers in fiction and non-fiction about the role of industrialism and mechanization in southern society and its implications to dehumanize and displace traditional populations. In Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925), for instance, we see an example of a southern farm taking advantage of the benefits of agricultural mechanization, and in T. S. Stribling's *Teeftallow* (1926) we see the tension between modern ideology and traditional religious values when industry comes to a rural southern community. In W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941) we witness the development of the peculiarly southern type of manufacturing center, the mill town, and Cash expounds on the southern infatuation with reified Progress following World War I. Conservative and liberal southern intellectuals, concerned about the ramifications of progress and its impact on life in the South, spoke out concerning the proper role of agriculture and technology in an exchange of symposia—*I'll Take My Stand* (1930), *Culture in the South* (1934), and *Who Owns America?* (1936)—that interrogates the South's traditional, in some respects feudal, social structure. In the literature of southern modernism we see an inherent tension between technology and humanity as machines such as automobiles and airplanes become common, but, as Faulkner indicates in *Flags in the Dust* (1929), this inevitable union brings dangers both to human life and to way of life. Ultimately, southern modernist writing portrays the implications of post-World War I social changes taking place in the South, and these texts concentrate, to a certain extent, on the effects of economic change, creating an intellectual and artistic dialogue about the course of the South in the modern world.

Economic Change in the Cotton Kingdom

When America entered the war the southern economy changed immediately. With the relative scarcity of skilled laborers as a result of military conscription and the massive demand for war material, a brief labor boom took place nationwide during the war, and new industrial centers emerged from coast to coast. In the agricultural South, the brief war boom demonstrated that industrial development was a realistic possibility. After the war a number of regional planning commissions began work on schemes to electrify, urbanize, commercialize, and industrialize the South that, by the time of the New Deal, resulted in major federal programs such as the Rural Electrification Act, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and in the new sociology of the Chapel Hill regionalists, Howard Odum, Rupert Vance, and Guy Johnson.⁵ Since Reconstruction, a spirited group of progressive political, intellectual, and business leaders had worked tirelessly—and often futilely—to generate social change in the South. As Dewey Grantham explains in *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*, World War I presented a great opportunity for reform in the South:

The war generated strong currents of change in the South, loosening some of the regional restraints on experimentation and innovation. It intensified the process of nationalization, expanding the role of the federal government, spreading the effect of national regulations and standards, and bringing southerners more fully into the arena of national affairs. It resulted in an extraordinary mobilization of resources—private as well as public—some of which were used for social purposes. These developments helped create new avenues of efficiency, public service, social control, and social justice. Social reform was thereby encouraged, although it was frequently constrained, in the South as elsewhere, by an attitude of intolerance and coercive conformity. (408-409)

⁵ For details about federal programs and the economic development of the South through the 1920s into the era of the New Deal, see D. Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA*; Walter L. Creese, *TVA's Public Planning: The Vision, The Reality*; and David Conrad, *The Forgotten Farmers: The Story of Sharecroppers in the New Deal*. For works of the Chapel Hill Regionalists, see Howard Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* and Rupert Vance, *Human Factors in Cotton Culture*.

Yet the changes southern progressives sought in the development of the region's economy and in social justice came slowly, largely because of the southern farmer's stubborn dependence on cotton.

Wartime brought an essential diversity to industry in the South, but, with the notable exception of certain locations that depended upon specific natural resources, such as the iron industry in Birmingham or the oil industry on the Gulf coast, the southern economy in the early twentieth century, like the southern economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, depended upon one product: cotton.⁶ Using cotton production as a lens, we can envision a panoramic view of the relationship between southern economic practice and technological development before, during, and after World War I. Although cotton has long been synonymous with the economy of the pre-Sunbelt South—the so-called cotton belt—actually imagining the depth of the region's dependence on cotton and the adverse effect that dependency had on the region can be difficult. But interrogating the one-crop agricultural system and the mechanisms that perpetuated it illuminates the subtly radical changes that took place in southern society when the region's economic practices began to evolve, changes that include the emergence of literary modernism in the most illiterate region in the United States.

Before World War I, the typical southern community looked much as it had before the Civil War. In *Cotton Fields No More* Gilbert Fite describes the South after the turn of the century as rural, impoverished, and generally unhealthy.⁷ In 1910 there was

⁶ In *North Carolina's Role in the First World War*, for example, Sarah Lemmon documents that “although North Carolina was not a great manufacturing state, some 198 war industries have been tabulated,” including shipbuilding, munitions, and ironworks (46).

only one city of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants south of Washington and that was New Orleans, the region's cotton exchange epicenter. While a few factories, primarily textile mills, dotted the landscape, most of the South's population lived on small one or two mule farms within a day's walk of a crossroads town. The economy of those towns and the outlying farms depended entirely upon the trading price of cotton. Most farmers, especially in the Deep South, planted cotton to the absolute exclusion of everything else, even food for subsistence, leading to the absurd epidemic of hookworm and pellagra in farming communities. Repeated appeals for agricultural diversification from agricultural economists and political leaders went unheeded, so the acreage planted in cotton actually increased from year to year. The greater production of cotton drove market prices down, requiring farmers to produce more cotton to yield a profit from their crops. Replanting nutrient-depleting cotton in the same fields repeatedly quickly exhausted the soil, causing farmers to spend greater percentages of their profit on fertilizer. The cycle of diminishing returns forced increasing numbers of farmers every year into bankruptcy. Black farmers, poor white farmers, and bankrupt farmers formed a vast underclass of sharecroppers who existed in a perpetual system of planting, picking, and failing. Schools met for only a few months a years so all able-bodied children could help with the cotton crop, so the region lagged far behind in education. Understandably, a region suffering from poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition did not offer fertile ground for a literary flowering.

⁷ Fite gives a succinct but dramatic description of the southern agricultural economy in chapter two of *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*.

Ironically, southern cotton farmers came closer than ever to prosperity on the eve of World War I.⁸ In 1914 an infestation of boll weevil destroyed a large percentage of the region's cotton crop, but the relative scarcity drove cotton prices higher than they had ever been before, up to seventeen cents a pound. Then, almost predictably, tragedy struck. War in Europe effectively closed international cotton markets. In the South, prices plummeted immediately to below eight cents a pound. Instead of incremental success, the southern economy faced utter destitution. At first, American diplomats attempted to continue exports to both London and Berlin, two of the three largest overseas markets, but sentiment in the South ran staunchly pro-British. In spite of the collapsed market, southerners preferred not to allow exports to Germany. As one southern minister asked his congregation, "is cotton of so great a value that for it we will sacrifice our manhood, our independence, and our moral poise? I am profoundly convinced that the price of cotton is a fundamental moral question, and by it God is testing the souls of our people."⁹ Fortunately for the South, in the following year President Wilson authorized a plan of military preparedness that led to the construction of some new factories in the South for the production of war implements, but these few industries were insufficient to mitigate the damage done to the southern economy in a significant way. Except for some notable dissenters, such as Tom Watson and James Vardaman, southerners, thus, were among the loudest to clamor for war, both out of inherent bellicosity and out of a genuine need to stimulate the region's economy.

⁸ For more information about the South and the United States during World War I, see David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*; Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era*; and George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, especially chapter two.

⁹ From a sermon by Baptist minister M. Ashby Jones of Augusta, Georgia, quoted in George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 39.

When war was declared the South profited immensely. Nearly a million southerners, many of them displaced farm workers, joined the army. The majority of training camps hastily constructed at the beginning of the war were located in the South, which initiated a period of cultural exchange and infused the region with capital. Naval yards appeared in Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida. The need for raw materials created a greater demand for products produced in the South such as lumber, iron, oil, steel, tobacco, textiles, and cotton. Southern cotton made everything from uniforms to bandages to explosives. The demand was so great that George Tindall documents that “the years 1917-1919 were the best cotton has ever seen. The average price for those years was twenty-seven cents, and the thirty-five cent cotton of 1919 was the most valuable crop ever produced” (60). For a tantalizingly brief period of time, southern cotton farmers realized a substantial profit on their crop, and, concurrently, new factories were built across the South, employing thousands of workers at inflated wages. Southerners were able to purchase the modern conveniences that had become common in the North, such as indoor plumbing, telephones, automobiles, and mechanical farm implements. The influx of new consumer products, the emergence of new factories, and the prospect of successful cotton farming suggested that the South might soon close the economic gap between itself and the rest of the nation.

That, however, was not to be the case. After the war, with the demobilization of the Army, the cessation of wartime industry, and the decreased demand for cotton, the southern economy returned largely to its pre-war stasis. Between the end of the war and the beginning of the Great Depression, cotton prices fluctuated, but they never approached the profitability of wartime. Yet the specter of wartime success, frustratingly,

drove many southern farmers to ignore calls for diversification and to continue to stubbornly plant cotton.¹⁰ While the foundation of the southern economy resisted change after the war, southern people, to a certain extent, did change, primarily in their new desire for material items. Meanwhile, the many of factories built during the war continued to operate, producing consumer products and employing laborers in non-agricultural industries. In the case of the textile industry, for example, domestic production continued to exceed pre-war output, largely because southerners were reluctant to continue shipping raw cotton to uncertain markets in Europe. And mechanical devices, such as trucks and tractors and electric milk separators and egg incubators, not to mention electric lights, began to appear more commonly on farms device, and each of these seemingly innocuous tools led to incremental changes in the southern economy.

Faulkner's portrayal of Jason Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) reflects the nature of this change. Rather than plant cotton, he speculates in the cotton commodities market, obsessing unhealthily over minute changes in the price of cotton set by buyers in the North. He thus complicates the traditional relationship between cotton, the soil, and the southern economy. But, as his allergy to gasoline indicates, he is not comfortable with the new technology of the twentieth century. He, in a sense, metaphorically epitomizes the state of the southern economy between the end World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression: dependent on the agricultural past,

¹⁰ In *Agricultural Progress in the Cotton Belt since 1920*, John Leonard Fulmer explains that, in fact, cotton would not become a consistently profitable crop until after World War II when southern farmers finally diversified their land distribution, adopted schemes of crop rotation, invested in tractors and other mechanical labor devices, and, curiously, as more southerners moved to urban areas, leaving fewer farmers to do more work, pages 170-178. For statistics related to agricultural development and production during the war, see *Effects of the Great War upon Agriculture in the United States and Great Britain* by Benjamin H. Hibbard.

uncomfortable with the mechanical future, and confused about the transitional present. His conflictedness epitomizes modernism in the South.

Labor, Mechanization, and Modernism

Dorinda Oakley, on the other hand, appears to be entirely comfortable with the prospect of agricultural mechanization, although that image may be problematic. In *Barren Ground*, Ellen Glasgow documents the war's impact on a Virginia farm, seemingly far removed from war industry. But her book reveals that the war caused subtle shifts in economic practice that would lead to major social changes. She claims, in fact, that she wrote the book in response to the war. In her autobiography *The Woman Within* (1954), she says, "the war went on, life went on, death went on....Beneath dead and dying illusions, *Barren Ground* was taking form and substance in my imagination" (241). Yet the war plays only an incidental role in the text, none of the primary characters in the story join the military, and the novel's climax concerns romance, not politics. The novel draws upon some elements of sentimental fiction, the type of melodramatic writing often associated with nineteenth-century women authors, such as E.D. E. N. Southworth and Augusta Jane Evans, but Glasgow inverts the traditional sentimental plot and incorporates into her text an overt element of social criticism. While Dorinda Oakley's story in *Barren Ground* begins as a turbulent romance, it eventually evolves into commentary on the development and improvement of southern agriculture. The war takes place an ocean away from Dorinda's Virginia farm, but it has direct consequences that lead to increased mechanization on her farm, which inevitably leads to the essential modernist conflict, dehumanization.

Traditional in its narrative form and realistic in its content, *Barren Ground* does not seem to be a typical modernist text, but several critics have seen in the novel important elements of modernism.¹¹ In “The Real Beginning of the Southern Renaissance,” Carol S. Manning argues that Glasgow, who has been considered, like Kate Chopin, artistically ahead of her time, was a “modernist ... squarely of [her] time: a time of questioning, awakening, and challenge” (47). And in “*Barren Ground* and the Transition to Southern Modernism,” Julius R. Raper explains that Glasgow contributes to modernist southern literature a complexity of philosophy and a multiplicity of vision that had been missing from earlier texts (159-160). While I believe that Glasgow does incorporate some subtle modernist elements into her fiction, she actually acts as an artistic bridge between realism and modernism, which makes her relatively detached representation of social changes taking place in the South especially important. Although obviously not disinterested in the process, Glasgow portrays the economic impact of World War I on the typical Virginia farm objectively. To borrow Julius Raper’s term, her writing marks an artistic transition, and she incorporates elements of naturalism, realism, and modernism into *Barren Ground*. Her book, thus, actively participates in the cultural change taking place in the South as a result of the war that will eventually manifest in alterations in traditional artistic, economic, and social practices.

As Glasgow portrays the experience in the novel, however, most southerners find the war barely worthy of interest in 1914. She notes that Dorinda’s husband “Nathan was the only man at Pedlar’s Mill who had taken the trouble to study the battles in France”

¹¹ In *The War Within*, Daniel J. Singal, who presents Glasgow as a late Victorian southern writer, says of *Barren Ground* specifically that “what this book really entails is not Modernism at all, but nineteenth-century theology got up in stoic dress” (106).

(417). Dorinda and her neighbors find his concern for the war and his prophecy that the United States will eventually be drawn into the conflict far fetched. As the war continues, more people take positions, and a wave of anti-German sentiment emerges. After Nathan dies heroically while rescuing victims of a train derailment, Dorinda returns home to her farm with John Abner, Nathan's son. Although she had taken little interest in the war previously, she comments that "that old German who has just moved into the Haney place" attended Nathan's funeral, and she asks rhetorically, "I wonder what he thinks now of Germany?" (459). The typical southerner's tendency to view the war as a distant curiosity should be understandable; few had a vested interest in the conflict except to the extent that it influenced cotton markets, and the region's willingness to side with the Allies speaks more to the proportion of southerners with Anglo, rather than Germanic, ancestors.

Even when the United States enters the war Dorinda feels detached from it. Since John Abner was born with a clubfoot, he is unable to enlist, even though he sincerely wishes to join the fight. She sees several local boys leave for Europe, and she hears of a few who are killed, but not one of them is close enough to her to make an emotional impact. One of the soldiers returns shell-shocked, and, like Donald Mahon in *Soldiers' Pay*, he spends the remainder of his life on his parents' front porch acting as an unpleasant symbol of the war's destructive, dehumanizing power to the peaceful civilian community. The closest Dorinda comes to feeling personally involved with the war happens when she reads a letter for one of her servants saying that her son had died in a French hospital. Her Darwinian attitude toward the war contrasts with Eugene Gant's romantic attitude toward the war. She explains to a friend that "the worst thing about the

war isn't the fighting. It is not even the murder and plunder of the weaker. The worst thing about it is the number of people, both men and women, who enjoy it, who embark upon it as upon a colossal adventure" (461). Dorinda's reluctance to develop an interest in the war may be the result of several causes. Some may argue that men and women normally take contradictory positions on combat, an idea that certainly held currency in the United States during the war but that has been debunked to a certain extent by a number of feminist thinkers. Others may argue that Dorinda represents the pacifist tendencies of many Americans, including President Wilson, who preferred not to become involved in a foreign war. But her real reason for not developing an interest in the war may have little to do with either gender or ideology and everything to do with economics.

In her imagination, the war becomes an economic struggle between herself and biological forces, and she measures her success in the production of crops. She recognizes that the war will be "fought and won with the help of farmers," and she sees her role as an essential provider of food and resources. But, Glasgow writes, "only when she saw victory in terms of crops, not battles, could she feel she was a part of it" (460). Yet, as a producer, she cannot fathom the willful waste of so many resources and young lives in the attempt to defeat what amounts to her as an abstraction. She describes the Germans as "less a mortal enemy than an evil spirit at large," which contrasts with her obsession with the concrete, tangible elements of her life. Even when she dreams, in fact, she sees the rotation of crops progressing through her mind: "Potatoes. Corn. Wheat. Cowpeas. Clover. Alfalfa. And back again" (460).

In *Barren Ground*, Dorinda inherits her family's dilapidated farms and through consistent hard work, single-minded focus, self-sacrifice, and tenacity she makes it a

successful operation. She, therefore, judges the war primarily by its impact on the local agricultural economy, and when the war ends she sees little change for the better:

With the return of peace, she had hoped that the daily life on the farm would slip back into orderly grooves; but before the end of the first year she discovered that the demoralization of peace was more difficult to combat than the madness of war. ...Even at Pedlar's Mill there were ripples of the general disintegration. What was left now, she demanded moodily, of that hysterical war rapture, except an aversion from work and the high cost of everything? The excessive wages paid for unskilled labor were ruinous to the farmer; for the field-hands who had earned six dollars a day from the Government were not satisfied to drive a plough for the small sum that had enabled her to reclaim the abandoned meadows at Five Oaks. One by one, she watched the fields of the tenant farmers drop back into broomsedge and sassafras. She was using two tractor-ploughs on the farm; but the roads were impassable again because none of the negroes could be persuaded to work on them. (463)

Dorinda's perception of the state of the local economy at the end of the war reveals much about the challenges facing an agriculture-based business, as opposed to a small farmer.

While most farmers and laborers enjoyed the brief period of prosperity, Dorinda sees it as a challenge because it disrupts the labor force, which leads her to invest in a mechanical device to offset the lost labor. As Nicholas Sargen explains in his economic analysis of the spread of agricultural mechanization, "*Tractorization*," Dorinda purchases a prototypical tractor long before they would become common enough to displace manual laborers, but, in some respects, her two tractor-ploughs signify the eventual disintegration of the traditional southern economy.¹²

¹² In "*Tractorization*," Sargen tracks the diffusion of tractor consumption in the United States from 1900 to 1965, and his analysis indicates that tractors were not commonly in use until after World War II and that the South was the slowest region in the country to adopt tractors, largely because early tractors were ill-suited to harvesting cotton. Sargen's analysis of farm mechanization reinforces Ronald Kline's analysis of the spread of electrical and mechanical products through rural areas in *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America*.

The labor problem, in fact, leads Dorinda to invest more heavily in mechanical devices, but the presence of mechanical labor makes her recognize the potentially dehumanizing effects of mechanization:

Machinery could not work alone, and even tractor-ploughs were obliged to be guided. She had installed an electric plant, and whenever it was possible, she had replaced hand labour by electricity. In the beginning she had dreaded the cost, but it was not long before she realized that the mysterious agency had been her safest investment. The separator in the dairy was run by electricity. With the touch of a button the skimmed milk was carried by pipes to the calf-yard or the hog-pen. Pumping, washing, churning, cooling the air in summer and warming it in winter, all these back-breaking tasks were entrusted to the invisible power which possessed the energy of human labour without the nerves that too often impeded it, and made it so uncertain a force. (468)

While the farm cannot be entirely automated, Dorinda prefers the costly initial investment of electric and mechanical devices to the uncertainty and recalcitrance of human laborers. Pursuing this policy made her farm more profitable than the farms of her neighbors, but in time they too began to implement machines to replace human labor, thus displacing a massive number of unskilled laborers who had once formed the backbone of southern economy.

Sociologists studying the impact of mechanization on the southern economy before World War II saw the increased productivity technology promised as a mixed blessing. On one hand, farms such as Dorinda's that invested in mechanical devices after World War I were able to produce more efficiently and cost effectively and, thus, were able to remain profitable even during the Great Depression. But, on the other hand, large farmers who invested in mechanization displaced thousands of families who had traditionally worked on shares or as tenants, which intensified the unemployment and poverty of the Great Depression, especially in the South, which President Roosevelt

called America's number one problem. By the 1930s, some sociologists feared that demographic impact of mechanization would be long term. C. Horace Hamilton, for example, wrote in 1939 that "even though technological unemployment brought about by the introduction of one machine may disappear in time, we would still be faced with problems of a continuously changing technology and hence continuous problems in human maladjustment" (68). Hamilton's portentous analysis reveals that some scholars viewed mechanization as both a problem and a solution, which may encapsulate the attitude of virtually every southerner impacted by the effects of labor-saving agricultural technology.

For Dorinda, the new technology helped her to solve some of her labor problems and to reduce her farm's operational expense, thus improving her profitability, but, although post-World War I technology offered some useful devices to replace human labor, running a successful farm during that era still required an enormous amount of manual labor. As a woman, Dorinda had an unexpected advantage in maintaining relations with her laborers. While most of the farms in the area run by men used coercion and financial domination to control racially-segregated laboring populations, Dorinda approaches workers with a less threatening demeanor. Using her maid Fluvanna as an intermediary, she makes arrangements with several African American families to provide labor at reasonable wages. The fact that Dorinda uses families—"the Moodys, the Greens, and the Plumtrees"—as the basic unit of labor, as opposed to making arrangements with individual workers, reflects one of the unique aspects of southern labor relations under the sharecropping system (469). While sharecroppers often changed farm after each harvest, extended families tended to remain in the same community. With

the large-scale displacement of laborers brought on by the encroachment of mechanization, sociologist B. O. Williams hypothesized that “if mechanization should come to agriculture as it has to industry, and the corporate form of organization should prevail, this positive force of familism might be lost” (76). Williams’s prognostication appears to echo the sentiments of the Southern Agrarians, which exposes an apparent difference of opinion between Glasgow, who apparently favors agricultural mechanization, and the Agrarians, who oppose the displacement to traditional farming families.

Five years after the war Dorinda appears pleased with the results of her investment in mechanization. Her farm has prospered, her products bring in a substantial profit at market, and she has gained a reputation among her fellow farmers, no mean feat for a woman in a male-dominated field. She feels satisfied with her accomplishments, and Glasgow notes that “even [her most persistent problem] the labor question had been lessened, if not solved, by the application of electricity and gasoline” (476).

Mechanization has clearly been beneficial to Dorinda’s farm, but five years after the war the long-term effects of mechanization were just beginning to be felt by the laborers who would eventually be displaced. *Barren Ground*, in effect, indirectly predicts a major paradigm shift in the southern economy that would primarily affect the lowest classes of southern workers. The economic shift necessarily had consequences for the culture of the American South. Even as the post-World War I economy evolved from Jeffersonian Agrarianism to an agricultural-industrial hybrid, southern artists and intellectuals simultaneously celebrated the region’s progress and condemned the region’s break with tradition.

After the publication of *Barren Ground*, Glasgow found herself somewhat conflicted about the changes taking place in southern society as a consequence of agricultural mechanization. In “‘Passion Transfigured’: *Barren Ground* and the New Agriculture,” William Conlogue notes that the Southern Agrarians objected to Glasgow’s portrayal of the mechanization and industrialization of the southern farm as an ideological benign aspect of economic evolution (30-31). Allen Tate, in particular, criticized her in 1929 as “one of the worst writers in the world” both because he detested her prose and disagreed with her politics.¹³ Glasgow’s later novels, specifically *The Sheltered Life* (1932) and *Vein of Iron* (1935), demonstrate a shift in her portrayal of the southern farm that emphasized the organic relationship between the human body and the soil and ceased to advocate mechanization. In some respects, the change in Glasgow’s artistic representation of the southern farm reflects the growing displacement and dehumanization of lower class southern farmers. Apparently this change altered the Agrarians general opinion of Glasgow’s literary merit. Tate praised *The Sheltered Life*, in particular, publicly and privately, and he invited Glasgow to contribute an essay to *Who Owns America?*, the ideological sequel to *I’ll Take My Stand*. Glasgow’s changing attitudes symbolize the internal antagonism taking place within the South as artists and intellectuals, not to mention politicians, businessmen, and farmers, debated about the direction of the southern economy and the extent to which the region should depend of agriculture. Eventually, aspects of this debate would touch virtually every element of southern culture, including religion and ideology, and would lend a critical edge to the literature of the American South.

¹³ See Caldwell, “Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Agrarians,” 210.

Capitalism, Communism, and Southern Fundamentalism

The vicissitudes of the southern economy during the World War I period simultaneously reinforced the region's dependence on agriculture and portended the inevitability of industrialization, urbanization, and mechanization. While these changes were subtle—the South did not morph into the Sunbelt instantaneously—they were highly significant to southern intellectuals and artists, some of whom saw the encroaching changes as a challenge to the soul, if not the mind, of the South.¹⁴ For some southern intellectuals the prospect of economic dualism, partially agricultural and partially industrial, signified a disruption of southern tradition that could lead to the dissolution of southern culture; they tend to disagree, however, as to whether that is good or bad. This is an especially sensitive issue because it concerns more than just economics and technology. Since the cotton belt and the Bible belt overlap in the American South, changes in the relationship between man and the land have religious ramifications. Some southerners equated the continuum between land, man, and God as divine ordinance—based on God's punishment for Adam stipulated in Genesis—and resisted any advance that introduced an intermediary more complex than a mule and a plow into the equation. Machines—from mechanical spindles, to tractors, to washing machines—were therefore considered suspect, and technological advances such as those depicted in *Barren Ground* were often associated with other heathen ideas, such as Darwinism, Marxism, and Women's Suffrage, that detracted from the fundamentalist God with thunder.

¹⁴ For analysis of the relatively harmonious relationship between mechanization and modernism for writers from the North and England see John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America*; Ceclia Tichi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*; Lisa Steinman, *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets*; and Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse*.

In *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash explains the southern aversion to ideological aspects of “Progress,” the mantra of post-World War I America. The headlong rush of new ideas into the South after the war, ideas that “had so long and successfully [been] quarantined at the Potomac,” threatened virtually every aspect of southern society, producing a feeling in every class—from industrialist, to planter, to demagogue, to minister—of “terror and anger” (328-329). According to Cash, these elements of modern ideology, which he lists to include labor unions, evolution, psychoanalysis, communism, racial equality, atheism, and feminism, infiltrated the South along with the machines that Yankees imported into the region, and that southerners gladly accepted, to improve efficiency. But, Cash contends, no one realized at the time that

to accept this Progress at all was manifestly to abandon the purely agricultural basis from which the southern world, and ultimately the southern mind, had been reared. To bring in the factory, to turn to the creation of industrial empire, would be to bring in the town—to turn to the expanding of hundreds of crossroads hamlets into bustling hives, the calling into being of hundreds of altogether new hives. ... To bring in the factory and the town—and, let us not forget, to turn to the magnification of the school [the wellspring of modern ideology]—would be, in other words, to set in motion almost incalculably great forces for the complication of the social scene. (180)

Cash, in my opinion, does not mean to imply that southern society was ever a simple arrangement, but the interjection of mechanization and the attendant implications of modernism presented a series of changes and challenges for which the bucolic South was ill prepared.

Let us consider, for example, the case of Abner Teeftallow. In T. S. Stribling’s *Teeftallow* (1926), Abner represents the southern everyman bewildered by the South’s contradictory, transitional values. The dispossessed grandson of a gentleman planter, Abner leaves the Lane County, Tennessee poor farm to work on a railroad under

construction through the county connecting the aptly-named Irontown with Lanesburg. While much of the story concerns romantic melodrama, the book reflects the inherent tension between the community's agricultural traditions, its religious fundamentalism, and the social changes associated with the encroachment of mechanization as symbolized by the railroad. Although the story never mentions World War I directly, context indicates that the story takes place either during or immediately after the war, apparently during the brief financial boom that occurred as a result of the war. Events in the story indicate that prohibition, which occurred in 1918, has been enacted and that the trial of John T. Scopes for teaching evolution, which occurred in 1925, has not taken place. And a revival preacher is compared to Big Bertha, a famous German artillery piece, so the war evidently has some indirect bearing on the story's setting.¹⁵

But, in spite of the expanded cultural exchange between the North and the South during the war, the small communities of eastern Tennessee have remained largely isolated and agricultural, following the traditional patterns of economic practice in the South. Before joining the railroad workers in Irontown, Abner spends a night in the home of Squire Meredith, a local farmer. Through Meredith, Stribling characterizes the southern yeoman farmer as ignorant, fundamentalist, suspicious, and superstitious. Meredith, for example, feeds his hogs in the public road in front of his house and subscribes to the apocalyptic eschatology of Rev. Solomon Molner, who prophesies that the world will end in a few months time. In many respects, Meredith is a typical resident of Irontown and, by extension, a typical southern farmer. Like many of the other citizens of Irontown, he regards the coming of the railroad with suspicion; he sees little use in

¹⁵ For background on Stribling and the composition of *Teeftallow*, see Kenneth Vickers, *T. S. Stribling: A Life of the Tennessee Novelist*.

greater connection with the rest of the country, he doubts the ethics of the local railroad magnate, and he fears that the influx of laborers will have detrimental impact on the community. As the story bears out, all of his fears—with the exception of the coming apocalypse—are well founded. As hordes of railroad workers who spend their time and money on drinking, gambling, fighting, and whoring crowded into the bucolic town, the community's leaders become concerned about their collective spiritual health. In effect, the presence of industrial workers in an agricultural community conflicts with the community's religious values. The tension reaches a head when the workers fire their guns to disrupt a worship service.

The episode prompts the community to reaffirm its fundamentalist religious ideals by holding a week-long revival meeting. The town leaders invite Rev. Blackman, who earlier circulated a petition to forbid the teaching of evolution in the local schools among the county trustees, to preach to the holy and convert the wicked.¹⁶ On the sixth day of his preaching, Rev. Blackman's revival reaches a crisis over the soul of Tug Beavers, the most recalcitrant of the railroad workers. When Tug refuses to be saved, Rev. Blackman dismisses the congregation and closes the revival a day early. The superstitious townspeople interpret this as an ominous sign, which they see as confirmed when another railroad worker shoots Tug in the back. This act prompts the community to begin a violent process of expurgating sinners by first lynching a white man accused of shooting Tug, then expelling the local bootlegger, closing the local gambling parlor, and

¹⁶ Here Stribling obviously alludes to the trial of John T. Scopes for teaching evolution in the Tennessee public schools that drew massive media attention to the South's fundamentalist religious traditions. For details about the trial and its background, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* and George Ernest Webb, *The Evolution Controversy in America*. For an examination of H. L. Mencken's role in the controversy and his influence over a generation of southern intellectuals, see Fred Hobson, *Serpent in Eden: H. L. Mencken and the South*.

horsewhipping and exiling women of dubious reputation. Eventually, the community's brutally violent awakening loses momentum when the railroad workers move several miles from town to be closer to their work site, but the puritanical spirit of moral retribution clings to the city, eventually reaching Abner and his romantic interest, Nessie Sutton. But the obvious tension between religion and industrialism in the agricultural community suggests that industrialism is antithetical to the community's traditional values, with one exception. The people of Irontown are not averse to the money they hope to gain as a result of the railroad. They, in fact, endorse capitalism as strongly as they endorse both the Bible and cotton.

Stribling portrays the coming of the railroad to Lane County as a tangible example of the diffusion of northern economic practices into the South. Although local investors have financed the construction of the railroad, a northern engineer, Mr. Ditmas, oversees the project. Contrasting him with the pastoral community, Stribling describes him in terms of machinery. When Abner first meets Ditmas, he notes his "mechanical enthusiasm" for sports, his "mechanistic benevolence" for his workers, and his "spiritual automatism" (57). Ditmas creates a scandal during his first week in the community when he organizes a baseball game on Sunday, thus defiling the Sabbath. To emphasize the point, Stribling contrasts his urban, educated, northern attitudes with the community's fundamentalism. In an exchange with the community's resident agnostic, Ditmas explains that "life in the North doesn't seem to revolve around religious creeds as it does down here," a concept that even the southern agnostic finds foreign (111). The inherent tension between Ditmas's mechanical exactitude and the community's arbitrary fundamentalism eventually leads him to the verge of insanity as a result of severe alcoholism. When

Abner last sees him, Ditmas raves about the corruption of the southern legal system, which he sees as a ruse that exploits blacks and working people and sanctions vigilantism. In a sense, his experience demonstrates for the, presumably, northern reader the South's backwardness in the view of people from the more industrialized North and the South's inhospitality toward those who attempt to alter its traditional cultural practices. But he also forces the people of Lane County to a crisis of their own by forcing them to choose between defending their traditions and pursuing the potential prosperity of modernizing. Frustratingly, the people of Irontown, like many other post-World War I southerners, try to achieve both ends simultaneously.

The conflict becomes more complicated when a labor organizer from the North who has come to agitate for socialism among the workers organizes a strike. As southern laborers moved from farms to industrial jobs, it seems, they continued to be exploited. "Low wages," George Tindall observes, "had become one of the cherished southern traditions, the great magnet for outside capital, the foundation of industrial growth" (318). Southern workers, such as Abner, however, were often unaware of their exploitation. He is, in fact, surprised and suspicious when Shallburger, the labor organizer, first approaches him:

a stranger walked up by Abner's side and after a few words about the crap game ventured the remark that rich people could play cards in their own houses, but poor men were forced to go to the woods for their gambling. From this he went on to say that the rich took all the earnings of the poor, which was not right. After that Abner caught phrases about "class consciousness," "unearned increment," [and] "plutocrats." ... The unknown had a queer sharp accent, which reminded Abner somewhat of Mr. Ditmas. The fellow evidently was a Yankee—that is, a trickster. (70-71)

Abner's assumption about Shallburger's motives says much about the state of the southern economy at the time. His deeply-ingrained suspicion of people and ideas from outside the South demonstrates one of the primary impediments to industrial development in the South.

Ironically, Shallburger's ideas eventually gain purchase among some of the workers. Several days before the revival, Tug Beavers tells Abner that he and some of the other workers have attended one of Shallburger's meetings and that they all adopted socialism, which the men support in theory because they see it as a means to work less and earn more, the capitalist dream. Abner even considers adopting socialism for a while when he imagines making a life for himself and Nessie on a laborer's salary, but he immediately abandons the idea when he learns that he has inherited property from his grandfather. Later, the local railroad magnate refuses to pay the workers, and under Shallburger's leadership they organize a strike, which puts Abner in an awkward situation.¹⁷ On one hand, he sympathizes with the exploited workers, many of whom are his friends, but, on the other hand, his appreciation of the immutable values of capitalism trumps his concern for the workers. He explains to Shallburger that he, like all good capitalists with "plain common sense," wants to hire his time for the highest price and wants to hire the time of others for the lowest price (328). When Shallburger refuses to assent to his reasoning, Abner cites biblical sanction for earning a profit at the expense of others, referring to the parable of the three talents: "the idyah," he says, "was to skin 'em when you can, an' that's in the Bible, Shallburger, an' there's no gittin' around that!"

¹⁷ The circumstances of the strike at Irontown seem portentous in relationship to the textile worker strike in Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929, three years after *Teeftallow* was published. For details on the strike, see Thomas Tippet, *When Southern Labor Stirs*, and John Salmond, *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*.

(329). Shallburger responds that the Bible is the “record of an obsolete morality of a barbarous society,” and he asks “what does the Bible know about the complexities and injustices of our proletarian world or the rights of labor?” (329). Raised in a fundamentalist community, Abner has no answer for Shallburger’s question, so, fearing that a lightning bolt might strike them both, he leaves to find the work site.

The exchange between Abner and Shallburger brings the tension between southern tradition and modern ideology to its moment of crisis. The people of Irontown desire the money that they expect the railroad to bring into their community, but they fear the changes it might cause to their way of life, which leaves them feeling conflicted and confused. The local railroad magnate eventually breaks the strike, symbolizing the normative relationship between management and labor in the South at the time. With a glut of available workers, strikers rarely succeeded in making persuasive demands, and southern industrial barons used violence and intimidation to dissuade labor organizers from forming unions. Regardless, many southerners felt afraid and assaulted as new ideas and new economic practices entered their communities, which inspired a range of often defensive responses involving the assertion of elements of traditional southern culture, such as the turn toward fundamentalism. By reinforcing its absolute commitment to religious principles, the community attempts to insulate itself from the infiltration of new ideas from the North. In a sense, some southerners regarded this influx of new ideas, such as evolution and Marxism, as an extension of the Civil War, so they assumed that any ideas in opposition with traditional southern economic practices were automatically inimical.

The Irony of Progress

Analyzing the nuances of the triangular relationship between modernism as an ideology and as an artistic movement, industrialism and changes in the southern economy, and the deeply-ingrained traditions of the American South after World War I occupied a surprising amount of energy on the part of southern intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century, producing such books as Clarence Cason's *90° in the Shade* (1935), Virginius Dabney's *Liberalism in the South* (1932), Edwin Mims's *The Advancing South* (1926), William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941), and Ben Robertson's *Red Hills and Cotton* (1942). In one of the more enduring texts from this barrage of books telling about the South, W. J. Cash attempts an idiosyncratic psychoanalysis of southern society in *The Mind of the South* (1942). He diagnoses the South as schizophrenic, vacillating between a set of values that yearns for a reified Progress—partly as a means of achieving self-sufficiency and partly as a means of competing with the North on an economic battlefield—and a set of values that defiantly clings to southern tradition—partly as a means of affirming the rectitude of those traditions and partly as a means of antagonizing the North. Cash's analysis, obviously, builds on the legacy of the Lost Cause, but Cash, like the region he describes in his book, seems to prevaricate between endorsement of changes that will lead to a more urban, more industrial South and affirming traditions that maintain the South's pastoral uniqueness. For Cash, World War I represents a crucial moment in the tension between these competing mindsets. While New South boosters had advocated industrial development since the end of Reconstruction, their rhetorical construct did not become a realistic possibility until the infusion of capital investment in the region's resources and

labor took place during wartime mobilization. Since the war, in Cash's view, the region has faced the awkward challenge of accommodating and acquiescing to the actuality of Progress.¹⁸

Rather than extending his scope to encompass the entire region, Cash's analysis of the South focuses on the piedmont of South Carolina and North Carolina, the heart of textile mill country. Cash, in fact, spent virtually his entire life in the vicinity—except for an ill-fated visit to Mexico in 1941—moving just slightly between his hometown of Gaffney, South Carolina; his alma mater of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and his professional home of Charlotte, North Carolina, where he wrote for the newspaper.¹⁹ Cash's personal experience with racism, fundamentalism, and the exploitive economics of the textile mill town clearly informs his analysis of the South's dual obsession with Progress, which he spells with a capital letter, and tradition. Cash's father worked in the Gaffney Mills, so Cash grew up with a keen awareness of the South's only successful post-Reconstruction industrial development before World War I, an arrangement that, in some respects, replaced agricultural plantations with abusive colonial fiefdoms that manipulated workers and their families.²⁰ While Cash identified with the South, he developed an iconoclastic tendency while studying at Wake Forest that eventually led him to write a series of essays for H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* that

¹⁸ For a critique of Cash's economic analysis, see Gavin Wright, "Economic Progress and the Mind of the South."

¹⁹ Details of Cash's life can be found in *W. J. Cash: A Life* by Bruce Clayton.

²⁰ David L. Carlton explains the uniqueness and history of the textile industry in the area of Gaffney in *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*.

blasted some of the South's most sacred institutions.²¹ In *Mind of the South* Cash brings together his own unsettled ideas about the South's past and the South's future.

Cash describes the South after World War I as reckless and wayward, naively buying into dreams of material success spread by duplicitous Yankees who seek to strip the region of its resources and take advantage of its workers. But southerners, he notes, were willing victims, easily seduced by the materialism of the post-War boom. "Into this [period of relative wealth] the South," he says, "natively more extravagant than the rest of the country, more simple and less analytical, entered with the most complete abandon. If these years were years of increasing sickness for the all-important cotton-mill industry, they were nevertheless to be the heyday of the dream and program of Progress" (259). The dreams of enduring success, of course, were false, and soon inflated wages, inflated land prices, falling cotton prices, and increased international production returned the southern economy to its pre-War conditions. Yet as the economy returned to normal, a new class of southerners emerged, a middle class of merchants and professionals who, along with the traditional yeoman farmers, filled the gap separating planters and mill barons from tenant farmers and mill workers. In a real sense, the most significant challenges to southern traditions stemmed from this new non-farming middle class who essentially divested from the South agrarian economy. From this new class of southerners emanated a capitalist ethos, "more into the mold of Babbitt," that valued the acquisition of money more than the perpetuation of traditional social practices (267). Cash's allusion to Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, and the hollow boosterism of the Midwestern town Zenith,

²¹ In *Tell About the South*, Fred Hobson examines Cash's uneasy intellectual apprenticeship with Mencken and *American Mercury* and a number of other twentieth-century southern intellectuals, such as Walter Hines Page and Gerald Johnson.

could be supplanted with Faulkner's depiction of scheming and machinations of the rising middle class Snopes family in Mississippi. Although native born, they represent a foreign element that in their single-minded drive for profit figures to overgrow southern traditions like kudzu.

The commercial middle class that emerged after World War I, in effect, embodies Progress. Explaining the development of the new, non-agrarian middle class leads Cash to a moment when, like Henry Adams contemplating the Virgin and the dynamo, he sees the tangible shift in southern society from plow to machine. Curiously, he comes to this vision while discussing the decline in lynchings in the South in the years after the war, which he attributes to a major shift in the southern mindset:

the processes of commerce are essentially orderly and deliberate; they follow a fixed procedure and, beyond a certain limit, cannot be hurried or dislocated. As for industry, the machine, of course, is the very image of order, the embodiment of a fixed, rigidly conventionalized procedure through time, and the antithesis of the headlong impatience of a lynching mob. Is it unlikely that all this had its effect of the mental pattern of men who dealt with it day by day and fixed all their hopes on it, whether as worker or as master?

...the machine is a jealous and exacting taskmaster. The plow-boy may dream the whole day through as he walks behind his beast and still get his field broken. The old-fashioned artisan, beset by a fancy or an emotion, could dawdle for hours or days over his task with no other damage than a slowing of its progress. But the modern high-speed machine demands from its human helpers the most alert concentration on the task at hand, else in short order the huge quantities of ruined material and the dislocation in the schedule of deliveries have eaten up the master's profit and are hurrying him to bankruptcy. (308)

An industrial society, in Cash's view, is antithetical to the organic rhythms of the southern economy, and converting to a system based on machines, in his opinion, will accelerate the pace of life to a speed that the mule and plow cannot match eventually obliterating the place of the farmer as a viable commercial entity.

The rise of a machine-based economy, naturally, threatened to displace farmers as the crux of southern society, which led to tension between the “new mechanical order,” led by poor whites working in textile mills, and the traditional agrarian order (271). But the shift in the root of the southern economy had the dual impact of lowering the social standing of both the common farmer and the common laborer. Where the traditional southern social order tended to be rigid and paternalistic in a peculiar way that exalted the intangible value of the land and the necessity of noblesse oblige, the new social order valued nothing as highly as the accumulation of wealth. Those who acquired wealth, whether they exploited sharecroppers or textile workers, dehumanized their fellow southerners. Cash, thus, diagnoses a top-down erosion of the southern social structure, as the wealthiest and most powerful social class loses its sense of benevolence toward and responsibility for the lower classes, the lower classes lost what little standing in the community they had traditionally held. Farmers, especially, noticed a change in their social station. Southerners of the new mechanical order, especially the new commercial middle class, migrated to increasingly larger cities, and they shunned the rural farmers, the men at the center, eventually making the title farmer synonymous in the opinion of urbanized southerners with white trash, the lowest echelon in southern social stratification.

Cash’s critique of developing class consciousness clearly omits the presence of African Americans in the southern social structure, an absence that comments loudly on the actual composition of the southern race and class social matrix. But his focus on the impact of economic change on the lower white classes reveals much about the ethos of the post-World War I South. “It adds up to this,” he says, “that in the cotton mills, in the

towns generally, on the land, the common white had increasing cause in the [1920s] to feel irritation—that there were powerful forces to move him toward the development of class consciousness all along the line, and to prompt him at last to begin anew where Populism had ended thirty years before” (283). Cash’s analysis suggests that after the war the South was, in some respects, ripening for a communist revolution as it developed a self-conscious proletariat. But some force or combination of forces prevented such an occurrence. One of those forces may have been the infatuation with Progress itself. With every newspaper, politician, and minister in the region declaring that prosperity and forty cent cotton were imminent, “even the indolent, unambitious ruck felt cheerfully if vaguely that very fine things for everybody were just around the corner” (288). That optimism, however, was not a panacea strong enough to alleviate all the social pains of economic change.

On several occasions, labor organizers agitated for unionization and reform in southern factory towns, similar to the scenario described in *Teeftallow*, but Cash explains that, while labor unions might have helped southern workers, they were shunned by virtually every strata of southern society. The southern oligarchy opposed labor unions for the same obvious reason northern oligarchy opposed them: paying workers a livable wage cut profits. But both middle and lower class southerners, partly as a result of influence from wealthy southerners, came to believe, as Cash says, “labor organizer equals Communist organizer” (297). The combined effects of a campaign to associate labor unions and Communists equally with atheism, miscegenation, foreigners, and racial equality; the sense that each of those entities threatened southern traditions; and southerners’ deeply-ingrained sense of fear and hatred toward both change and outsiders

led the middle and lower class southerners to oppose the presence of labor reformers in the South, occasionally with violence. Southerners, in his opinion, preferred the relative stability of exploitation to influence from outsiders.

The South's defensive inward turning contributed to the reawakening of religious fundamentalism after World War I, which Cash calls "orgiastic religion," among the lowest classes (289). Fundamentalism gives an organized charismatic voice to "the complex of fears and hates" that dominated the psyche of ignorant southerners both in the factories and on the farms (332).²² While southerners welcomed the prospect of economic prosperity in theory, they had a highly selective attitude toward any ideology or influence that might alter southern traditions. Southern prejudices—"fears and hates"—explain three elements of the irony of Progress in the South: the false consciousness that led lower class southerners to assent tacitly to their own exploitation; the suspicion and violence targeted toward all racial, ethnic, or religious others; and the censorship of public intellectual debate. All of these, plus fundamentalism, represent, in Cash's opinion, a cultural defense mechanism, what he calls "an attempt to retreat upon the past and make sure of the support of the heavenly powers by way of escaping from dangers felt to be too great to be faced without such assistance" (333). The emergence of fundamentalism among the lowest class of southerners as a response to economic and social change illustrates the antagonistic relationship between southern tradition and Progress.

In Cash's opinion, post-war economic advancement forced all southerners, regardless of their position within the system of social stratification, to find a way to

²² For more about fundamentalism in the South, see *Religion in the South*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson, and *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, edited by David E. Harrell.

maintain regional identity. The broader cultural exchange between northerners and southerners that occurred as a result of the war promised to finally produce the period of prosperity that southern demagogues had predicted since the end of Reconstruction, but the lingering residue of the Lost Cause and essential mistrust of Yankees made this new-found Progress problematic. Cash uses the trope of the savage ideal to explain this sense of conflict: “Another great group of Southern fears and hates fixed itself on the line of what I have called the savage ideal—the patriotic will to hold rigidly to the ancient pattern, to repudiate innovation and novelty in thought and behavior, whatever came from outside and was felt as belonging to Yankeedom or alien parts” (319). In some cases, southerners resolved this conflict by engaging in an interregional economic competition, a purely fiscal version of the Civil War in which the side with the greater profit would be victorious. But, clearly, regardless of the amount of economic progress that took place in the region, the South was not prepared to legitimately compete with the North on a financial battlefield. Other southerners sought ways to adapt to new ideas, new economic methods, and new social developments while maintaining as much as possible of the southern traditions that the changes threatened to displace. And others, especially intellectuals such as Cash, adopted a detached, analytical perspective on the relationship between Progress and the South. But that sense of detachment provoked other southern intellectuals to respond to the changes taking place in the South and the criticism directed toward the South, thus, in a sense, demonstrating the intensity of the savage ideal.

* * *

The Agrarian Backlash

By the end of the 1920s changes taking place in the southern economy following World War I were beginning to have a tangible impact on southern traditions. Increasing agricultural mechanization, such as that portrayed in *Barren Ground*, displaced large numbers of laborers, black and white, sending droves of people to industrial centers in the North new and relatively new urban areas in the South to seek work in factories. Alien ideologies, such as Marxism depicted in *Teefallow* and Darwinism, at odds with the South's Byzantine social and religious mores threatened to alter the dynamics of race, class, and gender relations in the region. Increasing awareness of class consciousness and widening class divisions within the South, such as Cash describes, coupled with more intense scrutiny and criticism of the South in the national media as a result of broader cultural exchanges between the South and the North made some southern intellectuals more self-conscious about their southern identity and, thus, more prone to defend the region. All of these circumstances contributed to the publication of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), a collection of essays by twelve self-proclaimed southerners, most of whom were in some way affiliated with Vanderbilt University and some of whom—most notably John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren—had been leading members of the Fugitive group, which between 1922 and 1925 published the leading journal of modernist verse based in the South. This apparent disconnect, that many of the leaders of the Agrarian endeavor that ostensibly sought to preserve southern traditions were also artistic innovators who embraced modernist technique and challenged traditional forms and overtly repudiated

“Southern Literature,”²³ has confounded literary scholars and historians alike, leading to a long-running and occasionally querulous debate over how to interpret the Agrarian response to modernism.²⁴

A number of essential conditions converged in the late 1920s to spawn the Agrarian movement. The first concerns the Agrarians themselves, all of whom were well-educated, well-traveled—many, including John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Herman Clarence Nixon, served in Europe during World War I—and highly analytical. While some of the Agrarians who had been involved in *The Fugitive* had embraced modernism, by the late 1920s many of them had come to identify with the southern past: John Crowe Ransom wrote a book that defended religious fundamentalism, Allen Tate wrote a biography of Stonewall Jackson, Donald Davidson wrote an epic poem celebrating his Tennessee ancestors, and Robert Penn Warren wrote a biography of John Brown investigating the slave debate.²⁵ At the same time the South had come under

²³ In *The Fugitive Group*, Louise Cowan documents that the foreword to the first issue of *The Fugitive* famously states: “Official exception having been taken by the sovereign people to the mint julep, a literary phase known rather euphemistically as Southern Literature has expired, like any other stream whose source is stopped up. The demise is not untimely: among other advantages *The Fugitive* is enabled to come to birth in Nashville, Tennessee, under a star not entirely unsympathetic. *The Fugitive* flees from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South” (48).

²⁴ The extent of scholarly sources devoted to analyzing the impact of the Southern Agrarians is startling. All or a significant part of more than a dozen books discuss the Agrarians, including *The Fugitive Group* by Louise Cowan, *The Burden of Time* by John L. Stewart, *Tillers of Myth* by Alexander Karanikas, *The Wary Fugitives* by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *A Southern Renaissance* by Richard King, *The Idea of the American South* by Michael O’Brien, *The War Within* by Daniel Joseph Singal, *The Southern Agrarians* by Paul Conkin, *The Southern Tradition* by Eugene Genovese, *Inventing Southern Literature* by Michael Kreyling, *The Unregenerate South* by Mark Malvasi, *Fugitive Theory* by Christopher Duncan, and *The Rebuke of History* by Paul Murphy. The Agrarian movement has also been commemorated in three collections of essays and interviews: *A Band of Prophets* edited by William C. Havard and Walter Sullivan, *Fugitive’s Reunion* edited by Rob Roy Purdy, and *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal* edited by Emily S. Bingham and Thomas S. Underwood.

²⁵ Andrew Lytle, himself a Fugitive turned Agrarian, explains his perspective of the transition from poetry to social criticism as follows: “It seems to me in this [Fugitive] stage, when they were trying to purify the word in terms of poems and discussion, their flight was from that spurious word which defined the cultural tradition and its history, and that historical circumstance of the First World War, which gave this affluent

attack from within and from without as a result of the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, and the response to the scrutiny at Vanderbilt had been an increased emphasis on scientific research and the publication of Edwin Mims's paean to progress, *The Advancing South* (1926). Amid the apparent worship of economic advancement in the South, a state of intellectual panoply seemed to be at play in America with Socialists, New Humanists, Distributionists, and others vying for influence.²⁶ Meanwhile, the erstwhile Agrarians, all of whom hailed from the rural South, observed serious threats to the traditional southern way of life as mechanization displaced legions of farmers, forcing them to seek work in factories, thus, reshaping demographics in the region. In response to all of these circumstances, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Donald Davidson collaborated to recruit a group of like-minded southern intellectuals to contribute to a collection of essays that would, as Donald Davidson explained in a letter to a potential contributor, "center on the South as the best historical and contemporary example in American society of a section that has continuously guarded its local and provincial ways of life against a too rapid modernization."²⁷

Each essay in the collection examines a different aspect of southern culture, but all of the contributors ascribed to a statement of principles that acts an introduction to the book. Originally drafted by John Crowe Ransom and edited by each of the contributors, the statement outlines the Agrarian agenda. Clearly reactionary in tone, the Agrarians

kind of release into which all things seemed to be extravagantly enlarged. Then suddenly, as always, you come back to the domestic scene, into the local situation; and the trial at Dayton focused it—as a concrete instance always does. And then what you got was a poet operating at various levels of interest" (quoted in Purdy, *Fugitives' Reunion*, 178).

²⁶ For a discussion of the debate between the Southern Agrarians and the New Humanists, particularly Allen Tate's role in the exchange, see *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940* by David J. Hoeveler.

²⁷ Donald Davidson to Herman Clarence Nixon, quoted in Shouse, *Hillbilly Realist*, 52.

intended primarily to warn their fellow southerners of the evils of industrialism. They claim that the collectivist nature of modern industrial society could lead to a communist state, which threatened the religious, social, and cultural traditions of the American South by glorifying science and technology at the expense of God and humanity. They also claim, in apparent agreement with Cash, that the tedium of industrial work would diminish man's sense of vocation and his enjoyment of labor. They predict that industrialism could potentially damage the relationship between man and nature by adversely affecting religious and aesthetic experiences. They warn that industrialism creates a cult of consumerism that causes people to idolize inanimate objects, thus forsaking their relationship with nature, community, and spirituality. Against the industrial way of life, which they take to be the prevailing American way of life, they offer the traditional, pre-industrial southern way of life, "the culture of the soil," as an alternative to the age of the machine. Beyond making this assertion, however, they decline to make any specific suggestions for how to achieve this idyllic way of life.²⁸

The changes taking place in the southern economy following World War I, specifically the advent of mechanical and electrical labor-saving devices such as the ones Dorinda uses in *Barren Ground*, trouble the Agrarians for two key reasons. First, they dispute that saving labor, the intended purpose of the mechanical labor-saving device, actually has a beneficial effect. The implication, in their opinion, of investing in labor-saving technology as an economic imperative is to strip labor of its dignity, to make the act of laboring "mercenary and servile," and, thus, to dehumanize the laborer (xl). This

²⁸ *I'll Take My Stand*, xlvii. In *The War Within*, Daniel J. Singal describes the Agrarian agenda as an sign of cultural change: "the Agrarians, in their resort to Old South symbolism, were attempting to recapture the unified structure of belief that had characterized Victorian culture, and with it the capacity for religious faith they had lost—all the while preserving the intellectual advances of Modernism" (202).

phenomenon, they argue, leads inexorably to their second objection to mechanization, the collectivization of resources. They predict that increased mechanization will lead to “overproduction, unemployment, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth,” which will require the creation of an “economic superorganization,” which would result in a socialist state (xli).²⁹ In a statement that echoes the mistrust of outsiders, especially Communists, that resonated in both *Teeftallow* and *The Mind of the South*, the Agrarians argue that “the Communist menace [is] a menace indeed” and the American economy, if it continues its “blind drift” toward industrialization, will result in “the same economic system as that imposed by violence upon Russia in 1917.” Herein lies the crux of *I’ll Take My Stand* as a statement of economic principles. In other words, the Agrarians sought not merely to preserve the southern way of life from encroachment by northern influence, but also they sought to prevent the collapse of the capitalist economic system in the West.³⁰ At one point, in fact, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren suggested that the title of the book should be changed to “Tracts Against Communism” and on one occasion John Crowe Ransom, as a representative of the Agrarians, debated V. F. Calverton, a Marxist critic, over the fate of the American economy.³¹

Only one essay in the collection actually discusses the southern economy, and, curiously, that essay, “Whither the Southern Economy?” by Herman Clarence Nixon,

²⁹ In *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years*, Richard Pells notes that ironically the Agrarians use the same means and methods to reach their audience as the communists used to reach their audience (103).

³⁰ Mark Jancovich argues that this ideology evolved into the New Criticism, an aesthetic theory based on capitalist principles. See *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism*, especially pages 33-66.

³¹ Ransom’s debate with Calverton appeared in *Scribner’s* magazine in 1936 and has been reprinted as “The South is a Bulwark” in *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, edited by Emily S. Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood. For an insider’s, yet slightly revisionist, history of the Agrarian movement, see *Southern Writers in the Modern World* by Donald Davidson.

takes a cautiously accommodationist approach to the industrialization of the South. Nixon, a political scientist who would eventually become a liberal proponent of the New Deal and split with the other Agrarians, concedes that opposing industrialism in the South is futile since “there is no point in a war with destiny or census returns” (176).³² But he deplores “this spread of southern worship of industrial gods after the World War.” His essay describes the state of the southern agricultural economy since the end of World War I and the impact of increasing industrialism and consumerism on the economy. He notes that much of the industrial development that has occurred in the South serves the needs of agriculture, such as railroads that transport cotton, textile mills that transform cotton into cloth, and new machines to improve the harvesting of, primarily, cotton. The centrality of cotton becomes a refrain for Nixon. He says that “cotton and the south distinguish each other,” explaining that the region’s economy, infrastructure, labor, and politics are all designed to serve the interests of cotton production (184). He, therefore, warns that altering the South’s traditional economy too rapidly may lead to unforeseen results. Displacing large populations of workers could cause a socialist revolution; the need for vast quantities of natural resources could lead to a war of acquisition, similar to Germany’s invasion of Belgium and France; and the disruption in the world’s most stable economy could destabilize the global economy, resulting in untold calamity. Nixon allows that industrial development in the South is unlikely to lead to such dire consequences, but he admonishes American policy makers to be aware of the changes taking place in the southern economy and the potential ramifications of those changes.

³² For details about Nixon’s personal and intellectual life, see *Hillbilly Realist: Herman Clarence Nixon of Possum Trot* by Sarah N. Shouse.

Ultimately, he calls “for southerners to say affirmatively that the South must cultivate its provincial soul and not sell it for a mess of industrial pottage” (199).

The Agrarians’ call for action caught the attention of other southern intellectuals, but, with a few notable exceptions, specifically Cleanth Brooks and Richard M. Weaver, these intellectuals supported the cultivation of industrialism on the South. William Terry Couch, director of the University of North Carolina Press, organized a symposium of southern intellectuals, including some of the Agrarians, titled *Culture in the South* (1934) that examined numerous aspects of the southern way of life. Although Couch and his colleague Howard Mumford Jones actually began editing the collection a few years before *I’ll Take My Stand* appeared, in the introduction to the book Couch speaks directly to the Agrarians, pointing out a fundamental flaw in their argument: “the serious error of interpreting southern life in terms of industrialism vs. agrarianism.”³³ In other words, Couch, and many other southern intellectuals, did not see industry and agriculture as mutually exclusive endeavors, nor did they see industry as a clear and present threat to the southern way of life. On the contrary, many hoped that investment in industry might enhance the southern way of life by lessening the impact of poverty, ignorance, and insularity. For example, Clarence Poe, editor of *The Progressive Farmer* magazine, contributed an essay on farmers to Couch’s collection. After describing—with credible statistics—the state of farming in the South and the realistic possibility of economic agricultural development in the region, he responds to the Agrarians by saying “with ‘Better Business’ added to ‘Better Farming,’ no one need fear there will not also be ‘Better Living’ all over rural Dixie. The tendency as a whole, in my opinion, will favor

³³ Couch, “Preface to *Culture in the South*,” vii. For details about Couch’s role in the editing and publication of *Culture in the South*, see *The War Within* by Daniel Joseph Singal, pages 281-284.

the development, not of commercialized farming . . . , but of small farmers of the general type described by the twelve young southerners who recently defended the South's agrarian tradition in that thought-provoking volume, *I'll Take My Stand*' (342). Poe's response overlooks the ideology that propelled the Agrarian movement, saying nothing about Marxism or dehumanization, but he clearly articulates the common-sense response of many southerners dependent upon agriculture.

Poe's response also subtly points out a major fallacy in the Agrarian agenda. While the Agrarians purport to defend the tradition of small farmers rooted in the community and tending their own land, in reality only a small number of farmers in the South in the early twentieth century owned their own farms. Many farmers, instead, either leased fields from large landowners or worked on shares. Clarence Poe documents that in 1930 72% of cultivated land in Mississippi, the most economically stagnant state in the South, was tended by tenant farmers (326). At the end of each harvest cycle, tenants often moved in search of new accommodations, which means that they developed few close bonds within a community and had little personal connection to the land.³⁴ They were, in fact, as dehumanized as the mules that pulled their plows. In the years immediately following the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, many of the Agrarians extended their comments to address this criticism and to offer practical measures to safeguard the southern tradition. In "The Pillars of Agrarianism," Frank Lawrence Owsley, one of the original twelve southerners, described a plan for redistributing land in the South that involved the intervention of a government agency that would purchase

³⁴ For descriptions of the lives of sharecroppers in the South during the 1930s, see *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans, *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, and *Forty Acres and Steel Mules* by Herman Clarence Nixon. Nixon's book is especially significant since it signifies his break with conservative agrarianism.

land and distribute to capable farmers plots of eighty acres “with sufficient stock to cultivate the farm,” presumably including a mule (210). Owsley’s plan would empower the government to prevent the sale and mortgage of distributed land, to establish guidelines determining the quantities and types of crops that may be produced on distributed land, and to restore “a modified feudal tenure where the state had a paramount interest in the land and could exact certain services and duties from those who possessed the land” (211). Many of the other Agrarians supported Owsley’s plan; Allen Tate described it as the most genuine description of Agrarian doctrine.³⁵ The parallels, however, between the scenario Owsley describes and the socialist, collectivist state should be apparent, which implies that the Agrarians, in their hearts, had more in common with the Marxists than they were willing to admit.

While the Agrarians had great sympathy for the southern peasants who labored in the service of the ruling class and advocated a scheme in which each member of the community contributed to the collective resources to the best of their ability and took from the communal resources to the fulfillment of their needs, they maintained one fundamental disagreement with the Marxists: the ownership of property. In 1936 the remaining Agrarians partnered with the English Distributionists and some other conservative intellectuals to publish *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence*. This book heralded a few significant changes in Agrarian ideology: first, the defense of the agrarian economy took on nationalist, rather than sectionalist, overtones; second, the ownership of property, not the opposition to industrialism, became the focus of the agenda; and third, contributors focused on issues of policy, rather than

³⁵ In *The Southern Agrarians*, Paul Conkin calls Owsley’s article “the closest the group ever came to endorsing specific remedies for agricultural distress in the South” (113).

elements of culture. The key difference between Marxism and late Agrarianism, then, concerns land: Marxists believe that no one should own land privately, but the Agrarians believed that everyone—at least everyone capable—should own land privately.

Some of the Agrarians who contributed to the collection, specifically, Andrew Lytle and John Crowe Ransom, continued to focus on the small farm as the bulwark of capitalism. Lytle argues that the small farm “is the norm by which all real property may be best defined” because only the ownership of a self-sustaining farm provided the possibility of complete economic independence (“Small Farm” 310). Ransom, echoing Thomas Jefferson, argues in “What Does the South Want” that only a property owner is qualified “for the complete exercise of citizenship,” but he does not specifically say that only property owners should be allowed to vote or hold office (238). Those who own property in Ransom’s scheme, the capital holders, have an obligation to preserve the dignity of those who labor, implying that the spirit of noblesse oblige is essential to the maintenance of a thriving economy. In his opinion, an industrial society necessarily dehumanizes the worker. “The indignities of modern mechanized labor,” he says, “are the marks of slavishness, not freedom; they affect principally the spirit, then incidentally the body, and the purse” (249). Ransom’s vision of the ideal state invokes the model of the feudal society, the type of organization he described in his contribution to *I’ll Take My Stand*, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” based on aristocratic religious humanism. Yet even he appears to recognize that replacing the modern industrial state and the modern mechanized farm with an atavistic economy based in the Middle Ages is both impossible and, frankly, undesirable. And he fails to note that the practical analogue to his system, sharecropping, dehumanizes its subjects as efficiently as industrialism. But he, like all of

the Agrarians, advocates the essential protection and preservation of a human-centered way of life and the age of technology.

In 1956 during a reunion of the members of the Fugitive group at Vanderbilt that included several of the key members of the Agrarian movement, including Ransom, Tate, Donald Davidson, and Andrew Lytle, the, youngest, most ambivalent, and least ideological contributor to *I'll Take My Stand*, Robert Penn Warren, offered, perhaps, the most accurate assessment of the Agrarian project. He described their sense that humans as individuals were losing their identity, their fundamental place within society, and, even worse, they feared that humans would become as interchangeable and irrelevant as spare parts. He uses the metaphor of the machine to illustrate his point: "it's the machine of power in this so-called democratic state; the machines disintegrate individuals, so you have no individual sense of responsibility and no awareness that the individual has a past and a place" (qtd. in Purdy, *Fugitives' Reunion* 209). He, thus, explains that the Agrarian movement was a reaction to the changes taking place in the South following World War I. Like many other modernist intellectuals, including T. S. Eliot in England, James Joyce in Ireland, and Fritz Lang in Germany, they were concerned about the effects of mechanization and the displacement of humanity. Publishing *I'll Take My Stand* was, as Warren says, "a protest ... against a kind of de-humanizing and disintegrative effect on the notion of what an individual person could be in the sense of a loss of his role in society" (qtd. in Purdy, *Fugitives' Reunion* 210).

I'll Take My Stand, then, was a conservative response targeted directly at the changes taking place in the southern economy as a result of World War I. The introduction of mechanized farming, the growth of cities, the construction of factories,

the displacement of laborers, the rise of American Marxism, and the loss of connection with the soil troubled the Agrarians, and, as artists and intellectuals, they felt obliged to defend their region's honor and their way of life. Although the Agrarians wrote nonfiction essays and obviously engaged in social policy, one could argue, as Robert Penn Warren does in "Literature as a Symptom," that the movement was primarily a literary enterprise.³⁶ Warren explains that any work of literature reflects a combination of the writer's creative genius, certain elemental themes of human nature, and the writer's time and place. Thus, Warren says, "at no time, not even the happiest, was the novelist or poet relieved of the responsibility of inspecting the aims of the society from which he stemmed and in which he moved" (346-347). The Agrarians, and many other southern artists and intellectuals of the modernist period, incorporated the changes taking place in southern society into their writings about the South, reflecting, among other things, the challenges and opportunities presented by the post-World War I economy.

Machines in the Dust

But the Agrarians, obviously, were not the only modernist artists and intellectuals who commented on the changes taking place in the southern economy following World War I. In *90° in the Shade*, for example, Clarence Cason described the South as "the machine's last frontier," a place trapped between manual agriculture and mechanical agriculture and struggling either to discover or to retain its identity as a region. He phrases the challenge southerners faced between World War I and World War II as follows: "shall they return to the cultivation of cotton, tobacco, sugar cane, and rice under

³⁶ Louis Rubin emphasizes this point in the introduction to the 1977 edition of *I'll Take My Stand*, noting that "the Agrarians were *not* economists. They were humanists" (xiv).

a system of agriculture largely manual, or shall they continue their efforts to carry these raw products farther along the economic progression by maintaining their faith in the machine?" (133). Clearly, by the time Cason asked this question the answer was self-evident. In spite of the laments of the Agrarians, machines were invading the South and disrupting the region's traditional way of life. The question that really needed answering concerned how the South, notoriously slow to accept change, would adapt to the age of the machine, which it could no more prevent than stop a speeding locomotive by placing a plow on the railroad tracks. Perhaps no work of literature better dramatizes the South's transition from a pre-mechanized agriculture to agricultural mechanization and the direct impact of World War I on the process than William Faulkner's first novel set in Jefferson, Mississippi, *Flags in the Dust*.

In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal* (1964), Leo Marx explains that since the colonization of America by Europeans technology has consistently and increasingly been at odds with the idea of America as an Edenic utopia, yet Americans continue to cling to the image of wide open spaces, virgin wilderness, and purple mountains majesty as representative of the national landscape. He grants that the image of the American landscape as unspoiled has become less tenable since the turn of the century, but he still sees modernist authors—he specifically mentions Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Frost, Hemingway, and West—invoking “the image of a green landscape—a terrain either wild or, if cultivated, rural—as a symbolic repository of meaning and value” (362-363). Yet the images have become more complicated and they are often juxtaposed with the image of technology, and the images usually threaten each other. Modernist authors, Marx explains, “acknowledge the power of a counterforce, a machine

or some other symbol of the forces which have stripped the old ideal of most, if not all, of its meaning.” To put it another way, the modernist incarnation of pastoralism “acknowledges the reality of history.” The process of civilizing a landscape, in effect, necessarily alters, even destroys, the landscape, and the advent of powerful devices capable of altering a landscape more quickly accelerates the process. So an inherent tension exists between nature and machines. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship illuminates the tension between technology and pastoralism, as represented by premechanized agriculture, in *Flags in the Dust*.³⁷

In the novel, Bayard Sartoris, a World War I combat pilot, returns to his hometown of Jefferson, Mississippi to find both himself and his community unrecognizable. The town in the recent past has changed from a “hamlet” into a town of people obsessed with money (400). Yankee investors moved into the town just before the war, purchased huge tracts of land for timber, clear cut it, left it to erode until it was unfit for farming or habitation, and bought their wives in “New York and New England” extravagant luxury goods, such as “Stutz cars and imported caviar and silk dresses and diamond watches.” Since the beginning of the war, equally avaricious locals have developed the town by building sprawling neighborhoods of “mile after mile of identical frame houses with garage to match” until “the very air smelled of affluence and burning gasoline.” Bayard returns to this newly mechanized community aboard a train on the railroad track his great-grandfather built, but he does not return with the bravado of a war hero or the swagger of the scion of the town’s founder. He, instead, slips off the train

³⁷ *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner’s third novel, was published in a highly-edited form as *Sartoris* in 1927, and republished in 1973 based on typescripts found among Faulkner’s papers at the University of Virginia. For details about the publication history of this text, see Douglas Day’s introduction to *Flags in the Dust* and Joseph Blotner’s *Faulkner: A Biography*.

before it reaches the town depot, like a hobo, to avoid attention. When he arrives at home, his grandfather, Old Bayard, and his aunt, Miss Jenny, notice the change in his demeanor immediately, and they also understand its cause. Bayard watched as his twin brother, John, was shot down while flying a patrol in France. As the surviving half of the first of numerous doubled pairs who populate Faulkner's fiction, Bayard feels John's absence deeply, more deeply than the absence of his first wife. John's death, like Donald Mahon's scar, signifies the sublimated emotional trauma of the war's veterans.³⁸ Faulkner, thus, portrays Jefferson after the war as a community in transition, increasingly materialistic, emotionally wounded, and spiritually alienated, in other words, as a typical modernist environment.³⁹

The most visible outward change taking place in the community is the influx of money and machinery, accentuated by the contrast between new technology and the town's pastoralism. Bayard goes to Memphis to buy a sports car, which he keeps in the family barn. Bayard's car takes on an important role in the novel; it becomes a symbol for Bayard's alienation from the community and his self-destructive tendencies. Miss Jenny comments on the profligacy of owning such an extravagant car in a rural community, and she notes that Old Bayard, president of the local bank, would never lend money to a person who would own one, implying that such a purchase indicates poor financial judgment (57). Bayard's car, unlike the tractors and milk separators Dorinda purchased for her farm, does not strictly save labor or increase production. The car,

³⁸ For a discussion of this motif in Faulkner's fiction, see John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*.

³⁹ For a discussion of *Flags in the Dust* specifically within the context of modernist technique, see Barry Atkins, "Yoknapatawpha, History, and the matter of Origins: Locating *Flags in the Dust* within Faulkner's Modernist Project."

therefore, represents a new type of machinery desired for its own sake, for its aesthetic value, or for its symbolism. Faulkner's description of the car suggests all of these characteristics: "the car was long and low and gray; the four-cylinder engine had sixteen valves and eight sparkplugs, and the people [who sold it] had guaranteed that it would do eighty miles an hour, although there was a strip of paper pasted to the windshield, to which he paid no attention whatever, asking him not to do so for the first five hundred miles" (81). Bayard's car epitomizes the changes taking place in the southern economy following World War I as materialism, mechanization, and modernism congealed into an insoluble nexus. Faulkner underscores this intractable relationship when Bayard briefly turns his attention to the business of farming and persuades his grandfather to buy a tractor. For a brief time, the tractor acts as an intermediary between mechanization and pastoralism, and Faulkner portrays a corresponding change in Bayard. During the time Bayard turns his attention to the tractor he even goes to town on horseback, but both Old Bayard and Miss Jenny feel "nervously anticipatory," expecting Bayard to return to his car and his self-destructive tendencies (225).

Bayard's car becomes a barrier between himself and everyone else in the community, especially his grandfather. Faulkner uses the relationship between the two living Sartoris males to dramatize the generation gap between the Lost Cause Generation of southerners and the Lost Generation of southerners. Old Bayard represents the values of the pre-mechanized, pastoral South. He is skeptical of change, clings to his family's traditions, reveres his family's honor, and identifies himself as a southerner more than as an American. From the story, in fact, one cannot tell if he has ventured outside of Mississippi any farther than Memphis, yet, either in spite of or, more likely, because of

his insularity, the members of the community regard him as one of its wisest, most honorable leaders. Young Bayard, on the other hand, represents the mechanizing, modern South. Unlike his grandfather, he embraces change, has little regard for his family's and his community's traditions, and considers his family's reputation a burden. As a result of his war service, he has a much more cosmopolitan base of experience than most of the other townspeople, which makes him somewhat of an outsider even though he has deep roots in the community. The eventual resolution of the tension between these generations is obvious: the new generation will supplant the old. Faulkner accentuates the tension between these generations by omitting the link between them. John Sartoris, the son of Old Bayard and the father of the twins Young Bayard and Young John, is not mentioned in the novel and neither is his wife. The absence of this generation of Sartorises broadens the gap between the remaining generations into an unbridgeable chasm, which will inevitably lead to tragedy.⁴⁰

In the same way that Faulkner associates Young Bayard with the car, he associates Old Bayard with a horse-drawn carriage. Old Bayard's carriage symbolizes his place with the community's stratified class system, and the time and labor required to maintain it demonstrates the social structure of the pre-mechanized southern economy. Old Bayard maintains an entire family of black servants who have spent their lives in menial domestic tasks, including cooking, cleaning, serving at table, planting flowers, and tending the carriage and horses. The patriarch of this family, Simon Strother, resents the presence of the automobile, and he sees it as a threat both to his place within the

⁴⁰ Alluding to his description of Charlestown in *Soldiers' Pay*, Faulkner emphasizes the generation gap within the community by contrasting the khaki clothes of the young people on the courthouse square with the with the old men wearing "the grey of Jackson and Beauregard and Johnston" (175).

family's extended structure and the family's place within the community. When Old Bayard begins riding to town in Young Bayard's car, ostensibly to prevent Young Bayard from driving recklessly, Simon complains that Old Bayard allows "a gent'mun's proper equipage" to get "rack and ruin in de barn" (121). Tellingly, Simon, who is in an advantageous position to observe change within the Sartoris household, attributes the change and, in his opinion, decline in social status to the war. He mumbles to himself, "wid all dese foreign wars and sich de young folks is growed away fum de correck behavior; dey don't know how ter conduct deyselves in de gent'mun way," and he feels ashamed that Sartoris should ride "in de same kine o' rig trash rides in" (121). While Simon is absolutely correct that Old Bayard's carriage—his gentleman's equipage—symbolizes his wealth and station in the community, he does not realize until he rides with Young Bayard that the car also symbolizes power, but in a different way. Lured by curiosity, Simon reluctantly agrees to a short ride in the car, during which Bayard speeds along dirt roads, swerves recklessly to avoid a family in a mule-drawn wagon, and intentionally scares Simon nearly to death. Young Bayard uses his car on several occasions to frighten and intimidate other people with the vehicle's power and, by extension, his power.

Bayard's sense of alienation, his emotional wounds left by the loss of his brother, causes him to act out against the community in harmful and dangerous ways, such as his reckless driving.⁴¹ He feels disconnected from his community because no one can relate to his experience during the war. While a few veterans apparently populate Jefferson, the

⁴¹ Bayard's recklessness and possible causes for it have been the subject of several critical examinations of the book. See, for example, "Vision and Re-Vision: Bayard Sartoris" by Judith Bryant Wittenburg, "Horace Benbow and Bayard Sartoris: Two Romantic Figures in Faulkner's *Flags in the Dust*" by Katherine C. Hodgin, and "Bayard Sartoris: Suicidal or Foolhardy?" by Arthur H. Blair.

only other World War I veteran developed in the story is Capsey Strother, the son of Simon, but, although Capsey and Bayard live in immediate proximity to each other, they are helpless to penetrate the color boundary that prevents them from sharing personal feelings. So Bayard focuses his anger and grief inward and uses the car and other reckless behavior, such as riding an unbroken stallion, as a means of release. After recovering from broken ribs sustained during a car wreck, Bayard temporarily integrates with the pastoral community. But describing his integration requires certain qualifications, for he never completely sheds elements of mechanization. Faulkner writes:

For a time the earth held him in a smoldering hiatus that might have been called contentment. He was up at sunrise, planting things in the ground and watching them grow and tending them; he cursed and harnessed niggers and mules into motion and kept them there, and put the grist mill into running shape and taught Capsey to drive the tractor, and came in at mealtimes and at night *smelling of machine oil* and of stables and of earth and went to bed with grateful muscles and with the sober rhythms of the earth in his body. (229, my emphasis)

During this brief period Bayard nearly achieves the agrarian ideal of communion between the body, the soul, and the land, yet he brings a foreign element—mechanization—to the organic rhythms of pastoral life. And the same memories that he attempts to evade with self-destructive behavior continue to torment him, quickly sending him back into his earlier pattern of recklessness.

Bayard's recklessness may be an attempt to equal the recklessness that caused his brother's death. The emotional scars from witnessing his brother's death obviously color his relationships with other people in the book, including his family, and memories of the event haunt both his waking thoughts and his dreams. When Bayard first returns to Jefferson, he attempts to explain John's death to his grandfather, but they are unable to communicate. Old Bayard retreats into his literal and metaphorical deafness as Young

Bayard narrates the event, and, rather than sympathize with Young Bayard, Aunt Jenny listens opaquely then sends him in to dinner (45). Their inability to connect forces Young Bayard to internalize the experience, causing him to relive it through recurring nightmares. On one occasion he tries to explain what he saw to his new wife, Narcissa, but she refuses to listen. He awakens violently from a nightmare, asks her for a cigarette, and when she gives it to him he grabs her arm and tries to force her to listen as he describes how he tried vainly to save John. He tells her that he saw the German fighter planes ambush John, that he watched as John's plane burst into flame, and that he watched as John "thumbed his nose at me like he always was doing and flipped his hand at the Hun and kicked his machine out of the way and jumped" (280). Bayard searched, but he never found his brother's body. While Bayard tells the story, Narcissa struggles with him, pulling her arm away and whispering desperately "Please, please." As her name suggests, she cannot relate to the experiences of others, leaving Bayard emotionally isolated.

Equally disturbingly, Bayard's images of the event are filled with machines—flying machines, machine guns, and other mechanisms of death—that imply that machines are inherently destructive. This motif, in fact, resonates throughout the book and, to a large extent, throughout modernist literature, especially in works about World War I. In John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*, for example, war itself becomes a machine whose sole purpose is to destroy lives. While Faulkner treats the theme a bit more subtly, one can see from his representation of machines that they are violent and dangerous. Guns, cars, and airplanes in *Flags in the Dust*, and other Faulkner novels, take lives rather than improving lives. Even tractors, the machine that would eventually

revolutionize the southern economy, brutally rip the earth apart. In the modernist equation of humanity and mechanization, destruction is an inevitable result.

Bayard's car, the most visible machine through much of the text, causes destruction on two occasions. In the first instance, Bayard's brief pastoral interlude comes to a violent end when he crashes his car into a bridge. Faulkner describes the crash scene as an absurd juxtaposition of pastoral elements and mangled machinery: "at the foot of the hill the road crossed the bridge and went on mounting again; beneath the bridge the creek rippled and flashed brownly among the willows, and beside the bridge and bottom up in the creek, a motor car lay" (230). Thanks to a pair of unlikely and reluctant rescuers, Bayard survives the accident, but he breaks a few ribs, which leaves him confined to bedrest for a few weeks, during which time Aunt Jenny effects a match between him and Narcissa in hopes that marriage will tame his recklessness. While Bayard and Narcissa do develop a romantic relationship, the car continues to function as an antagonistic force. After his convalescence, Bayard sends the car to Memphis for repairs, and when it returns, Aunt Jenny and Old Bayard refuse to allow him to drive alone, which has disastrous results. While driving with his grandfather, Bayard crashes the car into a ravine, killing Old Bayard. This moment in the text signals several types of change within the story: Bayard exiles himself from his family, his sense of alienation that began with the death of his brother grows deeper, the Sartoris family—one of the oldest and most honored in Mississippi—begins to dissolve, and, echoing a theme in modernist texts from *The Waste Land* to *Ulysses*, the new generation destroys the old generation with negative repercussions for both.

In what may be a vain attempt to shore fragments against his ruin, Bayard tries belatedly to reintegrate with a pastoral community after his grandfather's death. Faulkner, notably, counterpoints each scene of mechanical destruction with a pastoral scene. After the first wreck, a black farmer and his son riding in a mule-drawn cart rescue Bayard and transport him back home. And after his grandfather's death Bayard apparently returns home just long enough to saddle a horse, Perry, and ride out of town to the farm of the Macallum family. Faulkner describes Bayard's arrival at the farm in Arcadian terms: "before him lay a glade—an old field, sedge-grown, its plow-scars long healed over. The sun filled it with dying light, and he pulled Perry short upstanding" (355). Here the sound of engines and the smell of machine oil are absent, here humans and the land co-exist peacefully and respectfully. This is, in a sense, the pastoral ideal, but, like many ideals, it is impractical. Bayard spends several days with the Macallums, working and hunting with them in masculine solitude. Curiously, while at the Macallums, Bayard never discusses his grandfather's death or the sense of guilt and grief that presumably sent him to find sanctuary. He does, however, have another nightmare about John, which signals that he cannot escape the sense of disconnectedness that torments him. Bayard, in fact, leaves the Macallums on the day that the younger boys go to town to procure a turkey for Christmas dinner. Doubtlessly, he infers that they will learn what happened to his grandfather while in town, and the prospect of that knowledge chases Bayard from his makeshift Arcadia.⁴²

But before Bayard exiles himself from the pastoral community permanently, a vignette plays out that underscores his separation from premechanized society. After he leaves the Macallums' farm on Christmas Eve, rather than return to Jefferson, he spends

⁴² For an ecocritical examination of Faulkner's portrayal of hunting as a type of communion, see Lawrence Buell, "Faulkner and the Claims of the Natural World."

the night in the barn of a black sharecropping family, a scene that juxtaposes modernist spiritual alienation with Christian iconography. Bayard, predictably, does not experience a rebirth. For him, instead, the experience reinforces his sense of disconnection. While with the family—the foundation of the labor-based southern agricultural economy—Bayard cannot help but observe the family’s exploitation. Faulkner makes the relationship between Bayard and the family plain when Bayard first approaches the house and the father of the family asks him to identify himself. When Bayard says his name, the man responds, “Banker Sartoris’s folks?,” thus establishing an implicit economic imperative between himself and Bayard, which Bayard reinforces by offering to pay the man for allowing him to sleep in the barn (388). Close readers of Faulkner will recollect from *Intruder in the Dust* that economic and social exchanges between the races can be highly sensitive, and that in some cases an offer, or an expectation, of payment for hospitality would be construed as an insult in a pastoral community. While the sharecropper does not demand payment, certain financial considerations apparently enter into the initial exchange. For example, the sharecropper makes Bayard promise not to strike any matches while in the barn, because he keeps all his tools in the barn and he cannot afford for them to be destroyed because, as he says, “insu’ance don’t reach dis fur” (389).

The next morning Bayard spends Christmas with the sharecropper’s family, and he observes the relatively primitive conditions in which they live. He notes that the children have little in the way of gifts except for a cheap toy car, some wooden beads, and “a huge stick of peppermint candy to which trash adhered and which [the children] immediately fell to licking gravely” (392). Faulkner fills the setting at the cabin with

socioeconomic markers. For Christmas dinner the family has possum with sweet potatoes, coffee, and ashcake, which contrasts with the elaborate, sumptuous feast the Sartoris family enjoyed a few weeks earlier at Thanksgiving.⁴³ Possibly disturbed by the family's Dickensian squalor, Bayard asks the father for a ride to town as soon as possible, and he offers to pay five dollars if the father will return his horse to the Macallums. Sensing the advantage, the man negotiates for ten dollars and some time to spend with his family before making the trip, which signifies that Bayard and the sharecropper have a free market relationship.⁴⁴ In other words, except for the customary boundaries of race, the sharecropper feels no inherent obligation to serve Bayard. But their relationship becomes more complex as they make their trip toward town, where Bayard intends to catch a train. As they ride through the quarters, they see black families celebrating Christmas in traditional ways: the adult men and women drink liquor, the children set off firecrackers, and whites give away "nickels and dimes and quarters to negro boys who shout Chris'mus gif! Chris'mus gif!" (395). These celebrations are identical to the ones Eugene Genovese describes in *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. "Slaveholders," he explains, "tried to use these occasions to impose their own version of paternalism and to tighten their control" over the slaves by reinforcing the slaves' dependence on the masters for subsistence (575). The continued presence of this dynamic

⁴³ Faulkner describes the Thanksgiving feast in details, beginning with a whole red snapper, then "a roast turkey and a cured ham and a dish of quail and another of squirrel, and a baked possum in a bed of sweet potatoes; and Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes, and squash and pickled beets, and rice and hominy, and hot biscuit and beaten biscuit and long thin sticks of cornbread, and strawberry and pear preserves, and quince and apple jelly, and blackberry jam and stewed cranberries," followed by "pies of three kinds, and a small, deadly plum pudding, and cake baked cunningly with whiskey and nuts and fruit and treacherous and fatal as sin" (329-330). The traditional use of foodways in the context clearly marks economic difference, and suggests that, if the sharecropping family eats such a modest meal as a celebration, then their ordinary diet must be barely above subsistence.

⁴⁴ Richard Godden explores Faulkner's portrayal of labor, specifically the transition from bound labor to a free labor market, in *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution*.

juxtaposed with the incongruous presence of a free market dynamic indicates that economic relations between labor and capital in the South were in transition.

Perhaps the most obvious symbol of the changes taking place in the southern economy following World War I is the creature that “furnished the motive power” for the premechanized agrarian economy, the mule (313). Faulkner crafts an encomium to the mule in *Flags in the Dust* that illustrates the integral relationship between humanity and work in a pastoral community:

Some Cincinnatus of the cotton fields should contemplate the lowly destiny, some Homer should sing the saga, of the mule and his place in the South. He it was, more than any other creature or thing, who, steadfast to the land when all else faltered before the hopeless juggernaut of circumstance, impervious to conditions that broke men’s hearts because of his venomous and patient preoccupation with the immediate present, won the prone South from beneath the iron heel of Reconstruction and taught it pride again through humility and courage through adversity overcome; who accomplished the well-nigh impossible despite hopeless odds, by sheer and vindictive patience. (313-314)

As an emblem of the southern economy, the mule represents both stubbornness and steadfastness, characteristics that may explain both the success and failure of the South as a self-sufficient agrarian system until World War I.⁴⁵ The elegiac tone Faulkner uses to describe the mule’s lot, the incongruous presence of “worn-out automobile tires,” and the mule’s inability to procreate signify that the mule will soon be supplanted, if not eliminated, as a source of power in the southern economy (315).

The sharecropper and his mule-drawn wagon deliver Bayard to the depot, where he surreptitiously boards a train, leaving Jefferson forever. Fittingly, Bayard leaves town by the same means and in the same manner as he returned. The pattern of self-destruction and alienation that his story follows during his time in Jefferson makes one wonder if the

⁴⁵ Jerry Mills expounds on the centrality of mules to southern literature in “Equine Gothic.”

experience has changed him. The psychological demons that tormented him after John's death in the war clearly still affect him, and he apparently never finds a way to reintegrate himself into any type of community, pastoral or otherwise. Aunt Jenny receives occasional notices from him in far-away cities, and she expects that he will return after the birth of his son, who she believes will replace his lost twin. She proves to be wrong on both of these points. What appears to have changed most dramatically as a result of Bayard's story is the town of Jefferson itself. In fact, after Bayard leaves town the streets are paved. In a highly symbolic scene that blends human labor with mechanical labor a group of men, possibly a chain gang, uses picks and shovels to prepare the roadbed, while "further up the street a huge misshapen machine like an antediluvian nightmare clattered and groaned. It dominated the scene with its noisy and measured fury, but against this as against a heroic frieze, the negroes labored on, their chanting and their motions more soporific than a measured tolling of far away bells" (403). The juxtaposition in this scene of brutal machinery with heroic labor described with allusions to ancient statuary and the suggestion of funeral bells, such as the tolling of the bells in Donne's Meditation XVII, implies that physical labor is a lost art, stripped of its beauty and dignity by vulgar, noisy machines.

Ultimately, the machine that best represents the modern age and the machine that indirectly causes Bayard's sense of alienation causes his death. After wandering for months across Central and South America, Bayard finds himself in Chicago, where an Army pilot and a "shabby man" who has designed a questionable new airplane convince him to test pilot the new plane (412). Considering Bayard's quest for self-destruction and his infatuation with machines and danger, one must wonder if Bayard looks on this as an

another opportunity for an adrenaline-charged thrill or as a final chance to equal John's spectacular death. Regardless, Bayard seems to understand that will be his final adventure as he disregards advice and concerns for his safety. To underscore the dispassion with which machines destroy human life, Faulkner uses an especially restrained tone when describing Bayard's flight. He gives details about the aeronautic theory behind the new plane design, and he explains how the plane responds to Bayard's controls.⁴⁶ Curiously, when describing the event, Faulkner uses the word "plane" only once, but he uses the word "machine" four times, including the ambiguous line that implies Bayard's death: "the machine swung its tail in a soaring arc, but this time the wings came off and he ducked his head automatically as one of them slapped violently past it and crashed into the tail, shearing it too away" (419). Bayard's death, thus, becomes a mechanical failure, which, in some ways, symbolizes the relationship between mechanization and modernism. Unlike his brother, he dies without glory; unlike his grandfather, he dies in exile from his community; and, like generations to follow him, his life depends upon technology.

Over time the machines that changed the southern economy after World War I would completely alter the region's physical and financial landscape. This theme would recur in Faulkner's fiction, especially his later works *Go Down, Moses* (1940) and *The Reivers* (1962). But he would not be the only southern writer preoccupied with the impact of technology on the South and on southerners. Many other writers have portrayed the changes from shotgun shack to mobile homes, from bottle trees to satellite dishes, and from grits and eggs to cappuccino and croissants. Eventually, an accumulation of changes

⁴⁶ For an interesting explanation of both Faulkner's fascination with flying and his use of aircraft terminology, see *Aviation Lore in Faulkner* by Robert Harrison.

taking place in the region would threaten the very notion of a southern identity, an issue that John Edgerton explores in the *Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*. Yet, in spite of a continually homogenizing national identity, southerners continue to self-consciously cling to their regional identity. While machines and new ideologies were changing economic practices following World War I, military mobilization and a wave of war-time patriotism began to complicate the notion of southern identity, a theme that would play out in the works of several southern writers concurrently with the theme of mechanization.

CHAPTER THREE

Re-Reconstructing Regional Identity:

Martial Patriotism, Southern Sectionalism, and American Nationalism

Bayard and John Sartoris were not the only southerners, fictional or otherwise, to enlist when America joined the war in Europe. Altogether, between the opening of hostilities in Europe in 1914 and the demobilization of the Army of Occupation in Germany in 1919, nearly a million southerners served in the military, comprising almost a quarter of America's enlisted personnel and a higher demographic proportion than any other region of the United States. For rural farm boys turned doughboys, the prospect of military service was, in many cases, exhilarating, novel, and unsettling. Along with the many challenges of recruitment and military training, southern soldiers faced the additional task of reconfiguring their national identity. Even after the turn of the century, in spite of considerable political gains since the end of Reconstruction, many white, male southerners conceived of the South as an occupied nation and regarded the federal government as an enemy agency. The election of Woodrow Wilson, a native southerner, in 1912 mitigated that sentiment but did not eliminate it. Wilson, in fact, hoped that the war might finally assuage sectional animosity, so he ordered that all units in the American Expeditionary Force should be geographically heterogeneous. As he explained to Virginia Governor Henry C. Stuart: "There should be intermingling of troops from all

the States. We should submerge provincialism and sectionalism and party spirit in one powerful flood of nationalism, which would carry us on to victory.”¹

While southerners enlisted in large numbers and did contribute to the Allies’ victory in significant ways, the powerful flood of nationalism Wilson predicted proved to be problematic.² A scene from Faulkner’s *Flags in the Dust* illustrates the tension within the South between allegiance to the Lost Cause and allegiance to the United States. When Bayard Sartoris takes refuge on the Macallums’ farm, he shares a room with Buddy Macallum, who, like Bayard, had served with the Army in Europe.³ Bayard and Buddy discuss the death of Bayard’s twin brother, John, and their experiences in the Army. Buddy offers to show Bayard a medal he won for bravery, but he warns Bayard that they will have to look at it when his father is not around. “Why?,” asks Bayard, “Don’t he know you got it?” Buddy answers, “He knows.... Only he don’t like it because he claims it’s a Yankee medal. Rafe [Buddy’s brother] says pappy and Stonewall Jackson aint never surrendered” (368). Buddy’s father, in effect, regards the American Army as a foreign force, and he, if not Buddy, is obviously conflicted about his son’s role in the American Army. Because Congress enacted mandatory conscription when America entered the war, many southerners who, like Buddy, felt ambivalent about both the war and about the United States were forced into service.

¹ Wilson, *Congressional Record*, 1827-1828.

² Perhaps the most notable contribution—certainly the most famous contribution—by a single enlisted soldier to the American war effort occurred in October of 1918 when Sergeant Alvin York of Tennessee killed twenty-five Germans and captured 132 more in a single day. Media attention made Sergeant York an immediate folk hero in the United States, and the film *Sergeant York*, starring Gary Cooper, has made him an enduring pop culture icon. For more on the story of Sergeant York, see David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*.

³ Buddy, by the way, is the pastoral antithesis to Bayard’s modernism. When Bayard asks Buddy where he served, Buddy responds, “Where them limeys was. ... Flat country. Don’t see how they ever drained it enough to make a crop with all that rain” (366). His concern about farming and the condition of the land even in a combat zone signals that he is completely integrated with the environment.

These southern soldiers found themselves in an awkward situation. While an inherent bellicosity and an overdetermined sense of honor and duty compelled many southerners to enlist regardless of their sectional loyalty, others wrestled with conflicted attitudes about their place within the amalgamated American military. Those who identified as southerners more than as Americans found themselves conscripted to fight for a virtually foreign army against a completely foreign enemy in an absolutely foreign country. Southerners, naturally inclined to isolationism, tended to believe that America should not intercede in the war. In fact, when Wilson ran for re-election in 1916 using the slogan “He kept us out of war!,” he carried a vast majority of the vote in the South. But when America declared war on Germany, public sentiment ran staunchly and unequivocally patriotic, at least on the surface. Yet beneath the surface, within the hearts and minds of several white southern intellectuals who served in the American Expeditionary Force, a set of antagonistic forces created a sense of ideological confusion. Serving in a national army forced them either to repress their sectional identity or to embrace patriotic nationalism, and serving in an army obviously determined to invade a foreign country forced them to set aside their isolationist tendencies at least temporarily.

World War I, thus, caused many white, male southern intellectuals to self-consciously question their regional identity, leaving them torn between the legacy of the Lost Cause, their tendency to view America as an occupying enemy, and their sectional identity on the one hand and their sense of patriotism and duty, their impulse to homogenize with the rest of the nation, and their emerging sense of nationalism on the other. To a certain extent, regional and ideological confusion were common themes in modernist literature, and one can find examples of characters conflicted about their

relationship to place and to ideology in Joyce's Dublin, Fitzgerald's West Egg, Eliot's Unreal City, and Woolf's London. But the southern modernists faced an even more complicated quandary than most modernists because of the South's history of defeat and lingering sectional animosity. Several modernist southern intellectuals who served in the American Expeditionary Force explored their sense of displacement in texts that demonstrate a range of responses to war-time patriotism. William Alexander Percy regarded service in World War I as a means of validating his allegiance to the Lost Cause by vainly pursuing honor and glory, experiences he describes in his memoir *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941). North Carolina playwright Paul Green was more conflicted about military service, and, in a series of poems he wrote while in the Army and in the play *Johnny Johnson* (1937), Green works through a broad range of ideological commitments that range from naïveté to disillusion. Of the white, male southern intellectuals who portrayed their experience during the war in artistic ways, Donald Davidson may be the most defiantly and intentionally sectional, an attitude that he explores in the poem *The Tall Men* (1927) and his memoir *Southern Writers in the Modern World* (1958)

Birth of a Nationalism

Even before these southern intellectuals enlisted in the Army, sectional identities were clearly changing. The election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, in particular, represented a watershed in the course of sectional animosity. Although ostensibly a representative of New Jersey, Wilson was born in Virginia and raised in South Carolina, and southerners claimed him as their own. Election returns, in fact, show that Wilson polled a majority in only one state outside the South, maverick Arizona, which means that Wilson ascended to the White House as a direct result of political support in the

South.⁴ At Wilson's inauguration a former Rebel, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Edward Douglass White, Jr. of Louisiana, administered the oath of office, and rebel yells and cries of "Dixie!" were heard among the crowd.⁵ The South, which had been politically irrelevant since the end of Reconstruction, was now a major force in American politics. With a sizable representation in the Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress and a southerner in the White House, the region influenced the national agenda, and the new administration enacted a number of policies that supported the objectives of southern progressives: promoting investment in southern industry, securing the place of southern crops at market, and not altering the racial status quo. So, on one level, the American South in years immediately before the outbreak of the war in Europe seemed poised to begin the process of peacefully homogenizing with the remainder of the United States.

Progressive southern politicians and business leaders promoted the idea of ideological re-unification as a means of improving social welfare and economic prosperity in the South. While they had a certain degree of success in pressing their agenda, many other southerners, especially rural southerners, continued to feel, at best, ambivalent about America and, at worst, openly hostile.⁶ Since the end of the Civil War, white southerners had invested an enormous amount of cultural capital in creating the myth of the Lost Cause. In *Still Fighting the Civil War*, David Goldfield says, "White

⁴ See Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 1.

⁵ Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom*, 24-26.

⁶ In *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War*, Jeanette Keith explains that support for the war ran along race and class lines with white middle class and urban southerners generally supporting the war and with rural white and black southerners generally dissenting. These latter groups represented the bulk of southern draft dodgers during the war.

southerners elevated defeat into a heroic Lost Cause, their fallen comrades and faltering leaders into saintly figures, their crumbled society into the best place on earth, and their struggle to regain control over their lives and region into a victorious redemption.

Memory offered salvation; they could not allow the past to slip into the past” (20).

Granted, southerners’ collective memory of the Lost Cause was not entirely based on reality, but it was, even on the eve of America’s entrance into World War I, the defining element of white southern identity.⁷ In order for white southerners to begin to conceive of themselves as Americans first and southerners second, the grip of the Lost Cause would have to be loosened.⁸

The opening of hostilities in Europe had a mixed impact on sectionalism, the ideology of the Lost Cause. Sentiment in the South ran strongly on the side of the Allies, and some political leaders, ministers, and newspaper editors publicly denounced Germany. But isolationism in the South ran more deeply than support for England and Belgium.⁹ Actually, southerners were most concerned initially about the war’s impact on cotton markets. Because of the blockade of German markets and submarine activity in the Atlantic, much of the export crop of 1914 was a loss, and many farmers, unable to sell

⁷ A century and a half after the end of the Civil War, the myth of the Lost Cause continues to define the identities of some white southerners. The acrimonious debates on the placement of the Confederate battle flag on the state capital grounds in South Carolina and Alabama and the statewide referendums in favor of keeping emblems of the Confederacy on the state flags on Mississippi and Georgia indicate that old times, at least in those states, will not be forgotten. Tony Horwitz, furthermore, documents the fanaticism of Civil War re-enactors in *Confederates in the Attic*, and John Shelton Reed’s research in *The Enduring South* indicates that white southerners continue to identify themselves according to regional labels.

⁸ In the minds of some southerners, Wilson’s election signified the final triumph of the Lost Cause. Edwin Alderman, the president of the University of Virginia, for example, wrote that the election of Wilson was “a sort of fulfillment of an unspoken prophecy lying close to the heart of nearly every faithful son of the South that out of this life of dignity and suffering, and out of this discipline of fortitude and endurance there would spring a brave, modern national minded man to whom the whole nation, in some hour of peril and difficulty would turn for succor and for helpfulness.” Quoted in Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 193.

⁹ For an analysis of southern attitudes toward American foreign policy in the early twentieth century, see Alexander Deconde, “The South and Isolationism.”

their crops that year, fell deeper into debt. Meanwhile, in response to the impending threat of war, the Federal government began a program of national military preparedness, even while Wilson promised that the United States would not get involved in the war unless absolutely necessary. Even though southerners sided with the Allies, they were uneasy about the prospect of growing the national military. Already economically unstable, southerners were reluctant to see large amounts of money invested in potentially unnecessary preparations. George Tindall comments that “a deep suspicion permeated the rural South that preparedness was a scheme for the profit of munitions makers and financial interests” (41). Part of that paranoia can be traced directly to sectionalism; in effect, southerners regarded a strong American military as a potential threat both politically and economically. That is not to say that southerners expected to be invaded again, but, since virtually all of the military’s bases, training camps, shipyards, and munitions factories were located outside the South in 1914, southerners saw little direct benefit from increased preparedness.

By early 1917 the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the publication of the Zimmerman telegram rendered the debate over preparedness moot.¹⁰ When America formally entered the war, a wave of martial patriotism swept the South, making southerners, as Dewey Grantham says, “more self-conscious about their Americanism”(*Southern Progressivism*

¹⁰ Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi and House Majority Leader Claude Kitchin of North Carolina opposed America’s entrance into the war. Both men had been friends of Wilson’s Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, and they admired his conviction and commitment to neutrality, which he demonstrated by resigning his office when Wilson pursued preparedness policies following the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Their opposition to the war in spite of its political costs indicates that, while patriotism lessened isolationism in the South, isolationism was not vanquished. Dissenting on the war vote cost Vardaman his political career, and even newspapers in his native Mississippi branded him as Herr Von Vardaman. Incidentally, the majority of southern politicians who opposed preparedness also lost war-time elections. The single exception was Claude Kitchin, who remained in office through the end of the war. For more on Vardaman, see William F. Holmes, *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman*, and for more on Kitchin, see Alex M. Arnett *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies*.

386). For perhaps the first time since the end of the Civil War, southerners proudly waved the flag of the United States.¹¹ But George Tindall notes that the southern version of war-time nationalism was “a peculiar kind of ‘Americanization’ in the fires of patriotism,” although he allows that “sectional loyalty receded at least temporarily before the universal cry for unity” (63). In some respects the myth of the Lost Cause expanded to encompass the nation’s entrance into war, as, for example, in the hyperbole of Representative Robert L. Doughton of North Carolina who, in a speech to a northern audience, said that “the grandsons of the men who wore the gray and the grandsons of the men who wore the blue are now marching with locked shields and martial step to the mingled strains of Dixie and the Star Spangled Banner.”¹² Doughton’s rhetoric exemplifies the natural bellicosity for which southerners are famous, which, in spite of isolationist tendencies, made many white male southerners regard the war as an opportunity to seek glory, honor, and other chivalrous abstractions. Other southerners, represented by the fictional Eugene Gant in *Look Homeward, Angel*, had more pragmatic economic goals, and the massive infusion of capital into the region after the declaration of war indicates that money, even in the land of the Lost Cause, trumps ideology. In *The South in Modern America*, Grantham understatedly notes that “the wartime patriotism of southerners and their willingness to adjust to the changes that came with American involvement were encouraged by the expansion of the region’s economy” (81).

For a brief period, nevertheless, southerners identified themselves as Americans, thus reconciling sectional differences, a topic that Woodrow Wilson addressed in a

¹¹ Prophetically, a Florida newspaper lamented in 1918 that after World War I all Americans, including southerners, would be known by that hateful epithet, “Yankees.” Bailey, *The Man in the Street*, 114.

¹² Quoted in Grantham, *The South in Modern America*, 81.

speech before the 1917 reunion of the United Confederate Veterans. On that occasion, symbolically, a southern-born President of the United States spoke to surviving members of the last army to invade the United States about patriotism and American nationalism. He acknowledged that memories of the Lost Cause brought the Confederate veterans together to celebrate “those days when the whole nation seemed in grapple,” when “heroic things were done on both sides,” and when men fought “in something like the old spirit of chivalric gallantry.”¹³ Yet he urges the Confederates to forget their sectional animosity, saying, “there are some things that we have thankfully buried, and among them are the great passions of division which once threatened to rend this nation in twain.” He goes on to suggest that the South’s defeat was part of a grand design. “We now see ourselves,” he says, “part of a nation, united, powerful, great in spirit and purpose, we know the great ends which God, in His mysterious Providence, wrought through our instrumentality. Because, at the heart of men of the North and of the South, there was the same love of self-government and of liberty, and now we are to be an instrument in the hands of God to see that liberty is made secure for mankind.” Charles Reagan Wilson uses this speech to conclude *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, implicitly suggesting that this moment represents the end of sectionalism as a major ideological barrier between the North and the South. The fact that Wilson gave his address on the same day that the first Conscription Act since the end of the Civil War went into effect—which means that at the same time he was speaking lines of young men in the North and the South were waiting to register for the first American military draft since the end of the Civil War—signifies a definite threshold in the course

¹³ Wilson, “Remarks to Confederate Veterans in Washington,” 451.

of southern history. But, while the irony and symbolism of this occasion cannot be overlooked, the tension between sectionalism and nationalism within the hearts and minds of the Confederate veterans present to hear Wilson's speech and, more importantly, within the hearts and minds of their grandsons who were at the same moment enlisting was more complex.

While Wilson's speech to the Confederate veterans represents a key moment in the ideological reunification of the United States, it has been long overshadowed by the impact of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. The film, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, depicts a template for how nationalism might be achieved within the context of the Lost Cause.¹⁴ Released in 1915, the film takes advantage of Wilson's election and the sense of regional reconciliation he represented. Several intertitles in the film quote from Wilson's *A History of the American People*,¹⁵ a title that, in itself, implies the eventual success of nationalism.¹⁶ The film's opening intertitles, in fact, blame abolitionists for the sectional animosity that divided the nation and that led to the Civil War. The key issue in the film, and some might argue the key issue that maintained the cult of the Lost Cause, concerns the color line. The film suggests that national reconciliation is not only possible and desirable, but that division would never have

¹⁴ Thomas Dixon, a staunch advocate of military preparedness, made a film in 1915 titled *Fall of a Nation* that depicts a race of obviously Germanic people infiltrating and conquering the United States. The film, relative to *Birth of a Nation*, apparently flopped, and no copies of the movie survive. For details about the film, see Anthony Slide, *American Racist: The Life and Films of Thomas Dixon*, 89-104.

¹⁵ For the context of Wilson's quotations, see *A History of the American People, Volume 5: Reunion and Nationalization*, 19-78.

¹⁶ Thomas Dixon and Woodrow Wilson knew each other as graduate students at Johns Hopkins, and they maintained a relationship throughout their careers. Dixon helped to arrange a private screening of *Birth of a Nation* for the President, making it the first film shown in the White House. For more on the relationship between Griffith, Dixon, and Wilson, see Michael P. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie, and other Episodes in Political Demonology*, 192-198.

occurred if not for a small group of agitators who confused racial hierarchy by opposing slavery. In this way the revisionist logic of the Lost Cause asserts that North and South have no quarrel outside the debate over racism and slavery. The film, instead, asserts that northerners and southerners should reunite under a common banner, in this case the flag of the Ku Klux Klan, to vanquish their mutual enemy. An intertitle during the film's climactic action, a racial uprising, asserts, "The enemies of North and South are united again in common defense of their Aryan birthright."¹⁷ The film, thus, fetishizes race as the key to national unity.

Considering the context, the film's impact on nationalism should not seem surprising. The film was released on the fiftieth anniversary of the surrender at Appomattox, by which time northern attitudes toward southerners had softened even as southerners continued to cleave to the Lost Cause. Meanwhile, as a result of increasing waves of immigration into northern industrial centers, including the first waves of the Great Black Migration, northerners developed increasingly xenophobic attitudes. And the war in Europe, especially the German submarine campaign in the Atlantic that targeted American shipping, made Americans more bellicose and jingoistic than usual. Griffith's film capitalized on all of these sentiments with a cinematic spectacle that appealed to patriotic, if racist, ideals. Since the film easily fit the myth of the Lost Cause, southerners were quick to admit the film's portrayal of Reconstruction and the rise of the Klan as fact, but, curiously, many northerners were equally willing to sanction the film's interpretation of history. In "Dixon, Griffith, and the Southern Legend," Russell Merritt states that "most of the audience that came out of the Tremont theatre [in Boston] that

¹⁷ Quoted from the script of *Birth of a Nation*, published in Lang, *The Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director*, 134.

night in 1915 [when the movie opened] believed Griffith's story was historically true" (26). But that does not mean that the film did not create controversy. The NAACP protested the film vehemently and numerous other racially progressive leaders boycotted the film. But, considering the film's overall impact, the film's opponents composed a relatively small, yet vocal, minority.¹⁸

Birth of a Nation prepared northerners and southerners for the process of sectional reunification. By portraying the Civil War as a violent misunderstanding between racial brothers, the film generated a rhetoric of national unity and patriotism that both northerners and southerners could employ. Southerners, drawing upon the image of a united Anglo-Saxon army, could, when America joined the war in Europe, envision themselves fighting alongside northerners against a common enemy. The only alteration necessary in the southern psyche required the transposition of Germans for blacks. Southerners, thus, already had a useable model for national ideological unification on hand when America declared war on Germany; they only had to find a common enemy whom they and northerners could both hate. During the war, maintaining this sense of unity through animosity contributed to the success of the war movement, but after the war, when the common enemy had been vanquished, nationalism proved to be more problematic.

An ideological transition occurred in the South following World War I that mimics the experience of post-war disillusionment commonly associated with the Lost Generation of European and American intellectuals with only a few notable differences. As Charles Reagan Wilson explains, "the post-war era was one of disillusionment

¹⁸ For more on the film's reception, see Janet Staiger, "*The Birth of a Nation*: Reconsidering its Reception."

throughout much of Western society, as the world was not made safe for democracy or the Lost Cause” (179). The patriotic ideals upon which nationalism hinged proved to be false, and the decline of Wilson’s political influence and his physical health following the defeat of the League of Nations proposal symbolizes the waning influence of the South on national and international affairs. Southern intellectuals responded to these events in ways similar to their counterparts in England, France, Germany, and the North. They challenged their artistic traditions, they vilified abstractions, and they reverted from nationalism back into sectionalism. But the sectionalism of southern modernism shows the battle scars of World War I in that it is equally likely to question both American patriotism and the Lost Cause, initiating a new critical temper in southern writing, particularly in the work of southern World War I veterans.

The Dark of Modernity

William Alexander Percy, the real-life scion of an aristocratic Mississippi family with a legacy as long, distinguished, and colorful as the fictional Sartorises, responded to the challenge of modernity with equal parts of ideology and abstraction. Unlike Bayard, Percy abhorred mechanization and cleaved to tradition desperately, so his peculiar critical temper reflects the despondency of one who sees his world “crashing to bits,” as he writes in the foreword to his memoir *Lanterns on the Levee* (xx). Percy, whose namesake grandfather had been a Colonel in the Confederate Army and whose great aunt had bequeathed her family’s estate to Jefferson Davis, had a congenital allegiance to the Lost Cause. And, while he may have been one of the most cosmopolitan southern intellectuals of his generation, he identifies himself with his native land. He opens his memoir, in fact, by saying, “my country is the Mississippi Delta, the river country” (3). Percy’s memoir

describes his childhood on the Delta, his patrician family, his education, and his service during World War I. For Percy, the war represented a crucial moment, perhaps the most crucial moment in his life. Equating the Great War with the Civil War, he says, “The North destroyed my South; Germany destroyed my world” (156). This bit of hyperbole reveals much about Percy’s ideological affiliation; implicitly, he identifies with the South over the North within a national context, but he identifies with the United States and the Allies over the Germans in an international context. Even more importantly, Percy places himself within a matrix of identity markers, and the stability of this matrix is precious to him. In a sense, his memoir is a vain attempt to sandbag the levee of tradition against the flood of modernism.

Many of the critics who have studied Percy’s autobiography have noticed that his war experience triggered a defensive atavism. Fred Hobson asserts that World War I was “the most intense experience of [Percy’s] life” and that after the war he saw his “world rapidly changing and [felt] the need to capture it while he could, before it disappeared completely.”¹⁹ “Percy was a serious man,” Richard King writes, “whatever else he was, and attempted to live by a tradition that had been created by the Civil War and destroyed by the First World War; or, perhaps more accurately, destroyed by the Civil War and re-created by the First World War.”²⁰ King implies that Percy conceived of himself as a last gentleman, a living vestige of a version of the South that may have never existed or may have existed only in Percy family legend. James Rocks notes that “Percy’s is not the fragmented sensibility we associate with the post-World War I temperament, for he holds

¹⁹ Hobson, *Tell About the South*, 284 & 294.

²⁰ King, “Mourning and Melancholia: Will Percy and the Southern Tradition,” 248-249.

on to the memory and the values of the past. But in his struggle to integrate the inner self and the outer world he reflects the kind of dialectical process we find in so much modern literature, particularly of the South.”²¹ Sensing, on the eve of World War II, that his time is out of joint, Percy attempts in *Lanterns on the Levee* to capture an image of southern tradition that virtually vanished following World War I.

Percy, born into an upper-class family, has a top down perspective on southern tradition that differs from that of middle and working class southerners. Whereas white writers such as Faulkner and Cash tend to be critical of certain aspects of southern society, especially the hegemonic functions that maintain socioeconomic class stratification, Percy defends these traditions and laments the social changes taking place following the war that threaten to eradicate them. In this sense he has much in common with Ben Robertson, the son of a leading family from upcountry South Carolina who wrote a memoir, *Red Hills and Cotton*, in the same year that Percy published *Lanterns on the Levee*. Writing in the same milieu and from a similar perspective, Robertson states a creed in his book that could, for the most part, apply equally to Percy:

In the South we are patriotic. We believe in the original hope of the original American State.... We believe in men more than in machines. We believe in the spirit. We realize that the spirit alone is not enough, but on the other hand neither is the machine enough.... What we believe in is going toward an American state that will be ruled by the Northern mind and guided by the Southern heart. (293)

The chief difference between Robertson and Percy concerns the degree to which they accept mechanization. Robertson suggests that mechanization, while insufficient to advance society, may not be inimical to the type of idealistic progress he foresees. Percy, on the other hand, maintained a life-long aversion to machinery; he never even learned to

²¹ Rocks, “The Art of *Lanterns on the Levee*,” 815.

drive. But Percy and Robertson appear to be equally committed to a type of idealistic abstraction rooted in the values of the southern planter class. Robertson's tendency to exalt the abstract over the concrete mimics Percy's obsession with certain abstractions, such as honor, glory, and tradition, and both Robertson and Percy indicate that these values were inculcated in them by their families. They, in fact, tell remarkably similar stories about their respective grandmothers fetishizing their family's past. And they take apparently similar positions on the role of the South functioning within the United States as a separate, yet essential, component of the national character.

William Alexander Percy's personal character, meanwhile, revealed him to be an upper-class aesthete. Born into the Percy family, who traced their lineage, dubiously, to the lords of Northumberland, he lived in the dark shadow of his grandfather, a family deity whose Civil War exploits formed a Percy family catechism, and of his father, Leroy Percy, who represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate. Heir to their wealth and prestige, Will, like a real-life Gavin Stevens, received an education with impeccable southern credentials. He studied at the University of the South, spent a year after graduation traveling in Europe, and then studied law at Harvard. When Percy returned to Greenville after his education, he felt himself to be an outsider, and he felt that his family regarded his chosen ambition—to be a poet—as superfluous and precious. He felt, frankly, that “in a charitable mood one might call me an idealist, but, more normally, a sissy” (126). This act of self-naming simultaneously places Percy inside and outside the traditions of the southern planter class, making his identity as a member of the Percy family problematic in his mind. For him, service in the war offers a realistic opportunity to verify his masculinity and thus to establish his credentials as a Percy by defending the family's

honor. Not long after Percy's return to his family home in Greenville, in fact, his father lost a bid for reelection to the Senate to James K. Vardaman, whom Percy characterizes as a ruthless, vain, white trash demagogue. He describes Vardaman's election as outside the natural order, an example of the bottom rail on top. In fact, one might conjecture that Vardaman's public and principled, yet racist, opposition to America's entrance into World War I fueled Percy's obsession to enlist, seeing his service as an opportunity to defend his father's honor and to discredit the usurper.

After his father's defeat, Percy returned briefly to Europe, and he describes himself in the summer of 1914 climbing Mt. Etna in Sicily to see the sunrise. In an especially prescient moment, his Italian guides told him that the last person they had taken to the top of the volcano before the last eruption was Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who the newspapers reported was assassinated the day before Percy's climb. There, while gazing at the sunrise, Percy's aesthetic sensibilities collided with world events. While Europe tumbled into war in 1914, Percy returned to Greenville, Mississippi, where his obsession with glory and abstraction pulled him back toward Europe. He writes:

Safely back home, I wondered why I had left [Europe]. I was miserable. Men were fighting for what I believed in and I was not fighting with them; men were suffering horribly for my ideals and I was safe at home applauding and sympathizing. I tried the usual opiate—travel—and my private opiate—writing poetry. But I was shot through with discontent and probably self-disappointment.... Physically I was not made for a soldier, nor spiritually, for that matter.... But ... for me, feeling as I did, not to have enlisted was inconsistent and shabby. (158)

Percy eventually volunteered to join Herbert Hoover's Commission for Relief in Belgium, where he distributed supplies to civilians in German-held territories. His living conditions during this period were, to use his term, "war de luxe," as his Belgian hosts

feted him and his American comrades nightly (161). When America finally entered the war, Percy left Belgium with intentions of joining the American army. After a series of misadventures and a period of internment in Switzerland, Percy returned to Greenville once more, this time to enlist.

By the time Percy arrived in Greenville, the town, like the rest of the nation, buzzed with the excitement of war. Gratuitous, often meretricious, displays of American patriotism took place on every corner; “women were knitting,” he says, “and beginning to take one lump of sugar instead of two, men within draft age were discussing which branch of service they had best enter, men above draft age were heading innumerable patriotic committees and making speeches” (169). The patriotism of this post-declaration period greatly appealed to Percy’s sense of abstraction. Like many traditionalists, he appreciates the order of a society committed to a single aim, but, as a southern traditionalist steeped in the Lost Cause, he, curiously, does not comment on the fact that this aim—the war to save democracy—unifies the South with the North against a common, foreign enemy. For the moment, sectionalism is irrelevant, since he can immediately supplant it with patriotism as an abstract, unifying ideology. Note the enthusiasm in his tone when he comments that “People found themselves all of a sudden with an objective in common, with a big aim they could share, and they liked it immensely. You could sense the pleasurable stir of nobility and the bustle of idealism” (169). Because he had recently returned from Belgium and could speak about the atrocities of *les Boches*, Percy found himself invited to lecture, “to be a rabble-rouser” he says, on behalf of various military causes, such as Liberty Bond drives, draft congregations, or YMCA charity events (171). Then, befitting his station in society, he

joined the Officers' Training Camp at Leon Springs, Texas that "bulged with five thousand anxious, husky young Southerners who believed that if they failed to become officers the war would be lost and they might just as well have been born out of wedlock in New England" (173).

While Percy's metaphor hints at sectionalism within the military, in reality Percy allowed his preference for abstractions such as glory, courage, and patriotism to displace his latent sectionalism. Furthermore, since Percy, unlike many of his counterparts in training camp, had lived outside the South before the war and had already traveled to Europe, he experienced relatively less cultural dissimulation than his peers. Yet even he felt aware of his attachment to the South on a few occasions. When he finally reached Europe, because he spoke French he was assigned to act as a billeting officer, acquiring lodging for other officers. Percy placed himself in the home of a well-to-do French family, and he frequently enjoyed their hospitality at meals and other family gatherings. On one of these occasions, a middle-aged female family relation, in the course of conversation, said "and now, Lieutenant Pairsee, won't you tell us something of the fauna and flora of your dear Southland?" (187). Percy responds by relating an extravagant anecdote about rattlesnakes, "a serpent ... three or four kilometers long ... [who] always carries little chimes" (188). His fluency fails when he attempts to explain that the chimes, or rattles, are at the end of the snake's tail, so he inadvertently commits a hilarious faux pas. This particular anecdote, while amusing, reveals that Percy's perception of the South differs in substance from the perception of other southerners. Before he commits to describe rattlesnakes, in fact, he fumbles in his mind to define the limits of the South in a way that his conversation partner could understand. In fact, he, to use his own term,

“panicked,” becoming “distracted in his search for a Southern theme,” finally selecting rattlesnakes because “they were pretty Southern and not the least French” (187).

Eventually Percy was reassigned as a training officer to a unit that made him feel more at home. During World War I, the Army often assigned white southern officers to mostly black units, on the logic that white southerners were more accustomed to directing black workers. While that paternalistic attitude reeks of institutionalized racism, in Percy’s case, it was absolutely correct. In fact, when Percy first reached his new unit, the 92nd, he had a reaction that epitomizes the impulse of *noblesse oblige*: “looking out of my train window, I decided that in a fit of homesickness I had lost my mind—the landscape was speckled with Negro soldiers!” (196). Percy, representative of the highest echelon of southern society, believed that American society fell neatly and naturally into three categories: land-holding whites, poor whites, and blacks (19).²² Partially because the votes of poor whites evicted his father from political office, Percy resented them, but he held a special, some may say infantilizing, sympathy for blacks, and he felt comfortable training black officers within a segregated army. Yet the necessities of military courtesy complicated his interactions with black officers, some of whom outranked him, slightly. Through “meticulous politeness” he manages to satisfy both his deeply-ingrained Mississippi mores and the rules of military courtesy. “I knew they would be looking out for slights and condescensions,” he explains condescendingly, “especially after they recognized me as a Southerner. I wanted to give them their every due, to pay them their military respect, but at the same time I was not going to let them be familiar” (198). Percy feared that the soldiers of the 92nd would not follow the commands of black

²² William L. Andrews analyzes Percy’s racial attitudes in “In Search of a Common Identity: The Self and the South in Four Mississippi Autobiographies.”

officers, and he recounts an anecdote where two black officers beg his intervention lest the unit dishonor itself in battle. Without questioning the veracity of this incident, one must wonder if Percy does not project his own attitudes onto the black officers.

Percy left the 92nd before they were transferred to the front lines. He served as aide-de-camp to General William P. Jackson of the 94th Brigade, an all-white unit stationed on the front lines in the Argonne forest. Percy, sensing the opportunity for glory, felt a surge of idealism. He was, in fact, disappointed when he reached the front to find an insufficient quantity of danger upon his arrival. He wrote to his mother, “we carry our gas masks about, but it’s only to give us a serious air ... I’ve resigned myself to losing all chances of glory, and what’s more, of the deep human satisfaction of suffering and fighting with the men.”²³ Percy’s cavalier tone may have been intended to mollify his mother, but his obsession with glory has more to do with his father. As a self-described “sissy,” Percy felt a sense of inadequacy in regards to his father, an attitude reflected in the self-effacing subtitle to his memoir, *Recollections of a Planter’s Son*. Since his father had been too young to serve in the Civil War and was too old to serve in World War I, Percy may have believed that proving his manhood in combat was the most efficient means of earning status within his family.

During the battle of the Argonne forest, Percy’s unit captured the German stronghold at Mountfaçon amid fierce fighting. To describe this experience, Percy changes his narrative position in *Lanterns on the Levee*. Rather than describing the events as first-person recollection, the stance he uses in most of the text, he inserts a selection of letters he sent to his parents before and after the battle, perhaps because he felt that they

²³ Quoted in Baker, *The Percys of Mississippi*, 84.

would more accurately reflect his immediate response to combat. A letter to his father dated October 4, 1918, recounts the events of his first battle experience in fairly concrete language. He discusses the events objectively and only occasionally shifts into a moralistic tone, as when he claims that an “infantryman is the most to be pitied person in the world” (204). But, curiously, a letter to his mother dated November 4, 1918 reveals Percy returning to his obsession for glory and his preoccupation with abstraction. He describes for her the “beauty” of battle as a truck convoy braves artillery fire to supply front-line troops, the “day of glory” when his unit enters a recently liberated French village, and he compares a peasant woman serving milk to American officers to “the wife of the king who poured the mead cup for the heroes” in *Beowulf* (208-211). Percy appears to intentionally play roles to suit certain contexts, a subliminal theme that recurs throughout his autobiography: with the French aunts he plays the southern huckster, with the black officers he plays the paternalist, with his father he plays the daring soldier, with his mother he plays the romantic idealist. On occasions when he knows the appropriate role, he appears to be comfortable and confident, but on other occasions, he seems disconnected. This sense of alienation and psychological fragmentation, underscored by his lingering melancholy, demonstrates one of the fundamental tensions of modernism. Percy, who clings to southern traditions as the bedrock of his identity, realizes that modernity has altered the social structure that he intends to inhabit, and he finds the new social structure, much like the battlefields of France, foreign and uninhabitable.

Percy omits from *Lanterns on the Levee* a letter that complicates his role playing in relation to his father, which may be his most revealing piece of writing. Lewis Baker reprints the letter dated October 25, 1918 in *The Percys of Mississippi*. It uses a

surprisingly different syntax to describe no-man's-land, the demolished, violent space between the trenches. Consider the following sentence:

In the mad welter of shell holes and filth and mud emerge, like prehistoric animals from the slime of creation, the wrecks of battles lost and won—shelters of elephant iron, for in the waterlogged land trenches could not be dug; concrete pillboxes torn apart till the iron ribs shattered in gigantic explosions, tanks fantastic and terrible, that had crawled to the roadside or into a shell hole to die (you could not believe they belonged to men till you looked inside and saw the skeletons still by the wheel and the guns); planes that crashed down doubtless into the midst of hurley-burley; shells of all sizes; exploded; duds, used and unused, helmets, coats, equipment, belts of ammunition, these were down broadcast over the loblolly and in and around and across the inextricable confusion, pattern without plan, ran the barbed-wire, a crown of thorns on the mangled landscape.²⁴

For this letter, Percy sheds his compulsion for abstraction and writes in a visceral, experimental style that, to a certain extent, presages the trench novels of Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and Erich Maria Remarque. This letter, in fact, may be the most modernist piece of writing Percy ever produced.

Two weeks after Percy wrote this letter, the war ended. He wrote to his mother on November 11, 1918 expressing his relief and elation over the Allies' victory. Perhaps revealing his true intentions for enlisting, he tells her, "I haven't got a captaincy ... so I'll bring home no honors," but he catches himself, and says, "I didn't go into it with the hope of getting any, and rewards given by other men have never impressed me" (213). Yet, after a flurry of post-war promotions and decorations, he returned home with an impressive set of medals. When he met his mother and father in New York after his demobilization, in addition to insignia indicating his promotion to Captain, he wore a *Croix de Guerre*, *L'Ordre du Corps d'Armee*, and *Le Médaille du Roi Albert*. If Percy did

²⁴ Quoted in Baker, *The Percys of Mississippi*, 86.

enlist in the Army in hopes of achieving glory, his uniform, at least, suggests that he accomplished his goal.

When Percy went to war he intended, after the conflict, to become a poet, in spite of his father's disapproval. In the October 4 letter to his father, in fact, he notes that he carried a copy of the *Oxford Book of Verse*, not a Bible, into battle, implying, Oedipus-like, that a man can find courage in verse. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell notes that a number of British soldiers also carried the *Oxford Book of Verse* in their knapsacks, and the poems in it served as models for many of the trench poems written during the war.²⁵ Percy may have used his copy for the same purpose, as his war poems tend to employ similar metaphors and imagery to describe the experience of combat. Characteristically, Percy's poems tend to be highly formal and traditional; in fact, his war poems are among the few poems that he does not set in antiquity and that do not meditate on aestheticism. But that is not to suggest that his poems demonstrate the raw, critical edge associated with the modernist work of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Edmund Blunden. Instead, Percy's poems have more in common with the late Edwardian poems of Rupert Brooke and John McCrae. Like them, he plays on common tropes—such as the soldier's grave, poppy fields, and swallows over the trenches—to juxtapose images of peacefulness with combat.²⁶ Moreover, his war poems, rather than facing the gruesomeness of modern combat, valorize abstractions and ideals, such as courage and glory. For example, in the elegy "For Them That Died in Battle" he

²⁵ See Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 159-161.

²⁶ For comparison, see Brooke's poem "The Soldier" and McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields" in *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*. In the introduction to this anthology, Jon Silkin usefully describes the arc of European trench poetry from idealistic to utterly disillusioned while highlighting the work of British poets, especially Wilfred Owen.

writes, “How blossomy must be the halls of Death / Against the coming of the newly dead! / How sweet with woven garlands gathered / From pastures where the pacing stars take breath!” (*Collected Poems* 196). Percy’s flowery, romanticized Valhalla has nothing in common with the brutal experience of trench warfare.

One of Percy’s war poems, “The Farm Again,” describes the experience of a southern veteran of World War I who feels a sense of unique guilt for surviving the war. Much like Tennyson’s “Ulysses,” the poem’s persona glorifies his dead comrades and pines for the clarity and intensity of combat. In the poem, Percy blends southern imagery with Flanders imagery as he imagines fallen soldiers resurrected and “marching down the road / And whistling in the rain” as “They talk of Montfaucon, / Of Thielt and Chryshautem; / My cotton rows, it seems, / Are turnip fields to them” (*Collected Poems* 197-198). Transposing the turnip fields of Flanders in which the bodies of the fallen soldiers were planted with the cotton fields of Mississippi connects Percy’s southern identity with his identity as an American soldier, bridging both the Atlantic and the Mason and Dixon line in a single verse. The tone of this poem reveals his sublimated survivor’s guilt and his vainglory. Watching the phantom soldiers march through the turnip fields turned cotton fields, his persona says, “It’s hard to stay indoors / With soldiers marching by. / And if you’ve hiked and fought / It’s hard until you die.” The speaker in this poem clearly feels disconnected from his post-war environment. But, whereas Donald Mahon in Faulkner’s *Soldiers’ Pay* and many other shell-shocked veterans were unable to reintegrate because of the horror of their combat experience, Percy’s persona seems to prefer the masculine camaraderie and the singleness of purpose to wartime to the comparative social disintegration of peacetime.

Percy, in fact, had difficulty reintegrating after the war. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown says in *The House of Percy*, “for once in his life, [during the war] Will Percy was not the alienated observer,” but “once the war ended and the noise of victory parades and cheers died away, [his] sense of isolation quickly reappeared” (216-17). Wyatt-Brown goes on to explain that the disconnect between Percy’s wartime clarity and his peacetime confusion stems, in part, from his identification with the Lost Cause: “Like Sarah Dorsey [his great-aunt who bequeathed her home to Jefferson Davis] after the Civil War, his reaction to the great, shattering conflict of his life was to claim for the prewar years a legendary grandeur, of moral principle and uprightness to contrast against the tawdry present. Thus participation in the war did not shake his faith in the old verities but made him more aware of their obsolescence or unacceptability in the face of harsh reality” (216). For Percy, patriotism and sectionalism were equivalent and interchangeable abstractions to be defended, quixotically, against the relentless approach of modernity.

While the idea that Percy went to war to defend abstractions may seem ironic, thousands of young men on each side of the conflict enlisted for exactly the same reasons.²⁷ But, unlike Percy, most of these men found that the horror of trench warfare obliterated their attachment to abstractions. Consider, for example, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves, three British soldiers whose backgrounds parallel Percy’s: all were educated middle to upper class men, all enlisted for reasons of duty and glory, all wrote poetry during the war, and all wrote memoirs about their experience.²⁸

²⁷ Phillip Larkin’s poem “MCMXIV” describes long lines of British men outside British recruiting stations all waiting to fight and die for king, country, and the same other abstractions as their American counterparts in 1916. His haunting refrain, “never such innocence again,” cuts with irony that the process would repeat several times in the same century.

But, when one compares Percy's memoir to those of his British counterparts, the parallels end. As John Hildeble explains, the primary theme in the British memoirs is "the shame of having lived when so many have died."²⁹ They describe the trenches as chaotic and their own experience as traumatic. Percy, by shifting his narrative into letters, omits a detailed account of his experience in combat, but he represents his experience as difficult yet hardly traumatic. So he does not portray the sense of destabilizing disillusionment that the British memoirists do, which marks a key difference in tone between his work and their work. Perhaps, since Percy's combat experience was relatively brief compared to that of the three British memoirists, he simply could not relate to their sense of psychological destabilization. Or, perhaps, Percy portrayed his combat experience in a way calculated to reinforce his defense of the old verities.

Like the three British memoirists, Percy published a collection of poems about the war. They comprise a third of his 1920 collection *In April Once* where they appear alongside poems inspired by his visit to Sicily before the war and lyrical pieces chasing aesthetic quandaries. Percy's war poems stand out, but they share in the affected tone of the entire volume. William Faulkner, then an unknown struggling poet, reviewed the collection, and he perceptively diagnosed that Percy "suffered the misfortune of having been born out of his time." The poems about medieval knights and the fixation with beauty lead Faulkner to observe that Percy "is like a little boy closing his eyes against the dark of modernity which threatens the bright simplicity and the colorful romantic

²⁸ See Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*, Robert Graves's *Good-Bye to All That*, and Siegfried Sasson's *Memoirs of George Sherston*.

²⁹ Hildebidle, "Neither Worthy nor Capable," 103.

pageantry of the middle ages with which his eyes are full.”³⁰ On this point, Faulkner is correct, but for Percy the knights of the Middle Ages, the soldiers of the Old South, and the soldiers of World War I shared a common quest: to defend reified Tradition. Curiously, considering that at the time Faulkner wrote the review he, like Percy, was obsessed with combat and was composing Swinburne-esque poetry, he comments that Percy’s war poems “will tend more than anything else to help [the collection] oblivionward.”³¹ On this point, too, Faulkner is correct, for Will Percy now receives virtually no regard as a poet. Instead, literary scholars look to his memoir, *Lanterns on the Levee*, as a record of one vestigial southern aristocrat fighting vainly against the dying of the light as the dark of modernity overtakes his Delta home.

Biography of a Common Soldier

Perhaps more than any other single figure, Paul Green personifies the experience of white southern male writer during World War I. Raised on a farm in rural Harnett County, Green had just entered the University of North Carolina when the war began. Like the typical southern farm boy turned soldier during World War I, he was ill prepared for the events he would experience during the war. Before the war, he was, despite considerable intellectual gifts, an unreconstructed and unreflective southerner. During the war, he wrote poems about his experiences that catalog his ideological shift from sectional identity to national identity, which would eventually develop into committed liberalism. After the war, he became a successful playwright—famous for his Pulitzer prize-winning play *In Abraham’s Bosom* (1926), his collaboration with Richard Wright

³⁰ Quoted in Collins, *William Faulkner*, 71.

³¹ Quoted in Collins, *William Faulkner*, 72.

on the dramatic version of *Native Son* (1941), and his symphonic dramas, such as *The Lost Colony* (1937)—and a public intellectual who advocated for an end to segregation in the South. Green’s war experience had a crucial impact on his ideological and artistic development. Like many of his modernist British counterparts, Green’s literary apprenticeship took place in the form of ecstatic trench verse, which would, under the influence of Prof. Koch and the Carolina Playmakers, emerge into modernist drama, including a play, *Johnny Johnson: Biography of a Common Man* (1937), set in the trenches of World War I. But, even more significantly, during the war he developed a strong populist awareness that transcended and transgressed racial boundaries, which would become his intellectual trademark.

“When I was a boy,” Green writes in the introduction to his autobiography *Home to My Valley* (1970), “the gaunt shadow of the Civil War hung like a spectre out of the Apocalypse over this land” (ix). At the turn of the century, Harnett County in eastern North Carolina, Green’s childhood home, was unquestionably a bastion of the Lost Cause, a place where he learned to fear God, revere Lee, and pick cotton.³² But Green demonstrated significant academic gifts that led him to pursue an education at Chapel Hill, a heretical school by his family’s strict Baptist standards. An innate intellectual living in an isolated community, Green is an ideal test case for the war’s impact on the region’s ideological climate. As a result of the war, Green visited New York, traveled in England and France, studied in Paris, experienced gruesome combat, and matured into a battle-tested leader all before he finished his sophomore year in college. While it is impossible to speculate how Green’s intellectual development would have differed had

³² For details about Green’s childhood and his later career as a dramatist, see John Herbert Roper, *Paul Green: Playwright of the New South*.

he remained isolated in North Carolina during his formative years, he makes the impact of his experience evident in the poems he wrote while a soldier.

While in training camp in South Carolina, Green began publishing poems in the Charlotte newspaper, and the poems he wrote during this period reflect his feelings of naïve patriotism, but they also reveal curious ideological overtones. For example, in the poem “They’re Dying To-night,” Green celebrates the Americans who have already committed themselves to fighting for the cause of liberty in France, but the poem’s closing quatrain indicates that the American army still bears sectional distinctions: “O North! O South! How fierce you fight / For the white ideal out here to-night— / And ye shall know when the battle’s done / What the living gain when the dead have won.” This verse suggests that the two regions have unified for a common cause, but his description of that cause, “the white ideal,” offers many puzzling interpretations. The word “white” clearly has racial implications, which, considering that most of the American soldiers were white and that most of the English, French, and German soldiers were also white, seems self evident, yet, as we shall see, even that presupposition proves problematic. But the term “ideal” offers no obvious referent other than the usual abstractions of wartime, such as freedom, liberty, and so on. Regardless, this poem reveals that Green still sees the United States as a sectionally-divided nation. Other poems, however, depict the American army as geographically homogenous and harmonious. The poem “Men of America,” for example, projects an attitude of patriotic nationalism, as he exhorts, “Men of America! / The whole world breathless waits on thee / Arise and grasp thy vengeful steel / To save endangered liberty” (6). Green self published these poems and several other pieces he

wrote while in training camp in a small collection titled *Trifles of Thought*, but he continued writing poems in his journal while in Europe.³³

After a terrible Atlantic crossing on the converted cattle ship *Talhythibus*, during which Green wished “a submarine would come and blow us all to hell,” Green’s unit arrived for final orientation in England before taking their posts in combat. His unit, the 105th engineers, was posted along the front line near Ypres, which had been the sight of fierce combat, leaving the landscape devastated. Raised on a farm and attuned to the sensibility of the soil, Green found the destruction unimaginable. He told his sister, “the poor tired earth has drunk enough blood within the last four years to be offensive in the sight of God.”³⁴ In the trench poem “Marching up to Ypres at 2:00 am,” he personifies the landscape, which takes pity on the soldiers marching into the city of the dead (44). As a soldier, Green spent much of his time under the soil of the battlefield, digging tunnels beneath no man’s land with his unit. His work was incredibly dangerous, but he performed bravely. Within a few weeks he was promoted to Sergeant Major, and a few weeks later, as officers for his unit became increasingly scarce, he was brevetted Second Lieutenant and assigned to a field training program that allowed him to remain with his unit while training to be an officer.

In spite of his ascension through the ranks, Green identified with the common soldiers, including the soldiers in the opposing trenches. Green biographer John Herbert Roper explains that Green viewed the war as a class conflict in which the working classes of both sides were manipulated by the aristocracy into fighting to the death. He focused

³³ John Herbert Roper published Green’s war poems, including the poem in *Trifles of Thought* as *Paul Green’s War Songs*. The volume includes a lengthy introduction about Green’s war experience. All further references to this volume will be in parentheses.

³⁴ Paul Green to Erma Green, *A Southern Life*, 10.

his anger on the “silver-spurred Prussian officers” who forced the “poor German boys” into the trenches at gun point.³⁵ Roper argues that Green saw parallels between Germany and the Confederacy, which caused Green to examine his attitude toward the South:

It bound up his identity perhaps too neatly but very effectively for he wanted nothing less than the defeat of the landed elites everywhere. The prospect that this war would herald the liberation of the lower classes of eastern Carolina and western Flanders, of the Mississippi Delta and the Slovakian Danube ... literally gave Paul the rationale to fight. (*War Songs* 136)

In this sense, military experience was an ideological watershed for Green. He began to identify himself with the oppressed classes, and he apparently resolved to advocate on their behalf, which he would do for the remainder of his career as an artist and public intellectual. Green saw the social hierarchy of his native South reflected in the militaristic hierarchy, which led him to develop a social vision expansive enough to allow for the possibility of social plurality, the populist ideal.

For many southerners serving in the American Army, the transition from sectionalism to nationalism presented a challenge, forcing them to identify with an entity, the United States, that they regarded as a conquering force. But, ironically, many southerners, including Green, could easily identify with their foreign comrades in arms. Green took a particular interest in the diversity of the international soldiers fighting in the trenches. His poem “Four Ways We Have of Saying ‘Yes’” describes his affinity for the multicultural military. “I’ve met ‘most every sort o’ man,” he says, “‘Tween Ypres and the Sea / From sturdy Tommy with his fog / To swarthy Bengalee. / An’ everyone has difference / An’ everyone’s unlike / Except they’s all good fighting men / An’ hell upon a hike” (48). Green’s poem celebrates allies and enemies alike, which, considering the

³⁵ Paul Green to Erma Green, *A Southern Life*, 11.

circumstances, seems unusual. During wartime, patriotic emotionalism typically leads soldiers to vilify their enemies, an attitude that military training and the loud strains of nationalism channels into aggression. But Green recognizes the humanity in both his friends and his foes, which makes his populism appear genuine. But that does not mean that his sense of humanity was not tested.

As a southerner, Green had developed a set of racist attitudes that he carried with him into combat. While Green's racism at the time of his enlistment was fairly benign, he clearly had not yet developed the sense of racial justice that he would advocate after the war. For example, on one occasion during training several other soldiers made a game of flinging a young black boy into the air and catching him in a blanket, which went on until the boy was injured. Green wrote in his diary that he did not approve of the game, and he shunned some of the soldiers who played, but he said nothing outright about the incident.³⁶ While in Europe, his attitudes changed, slowly. He admired the contributions of African American and African soldiers, who he believed fought as bravely as any white soldiers, but, at least initially, he had trouble with the prospect of interracial relationships that emerged as a consequence of the war. In his diary Green described his consternation over the prospect that black American soldiers were becoming involved with white French women. "Many of the negroes are marrying French girls," he writes, "in some places the negroes represented themselves as the real Americans."³⁷ Eventually, Green would overcome his objection to racially-mixed relationships. Roper says, "by the bleak midwinter of 1919 he was taking a stand on integration and miscegenation utterly

³⁶See Roper, *Paul Green: Playwright of the Real South*, 33.

³⁷ Quoted in Roper, *Paul Green: Playwright of the Real South*, 41.

different from other southern reformists” (42). Roper directly credits Green’s exposure to black soldiers as the cause for his changing racial attitudes.

One of Green’s trench poems, “Things Ain’t Right Since Joe Wuz Kilt,” may be one of the best examples of his growing liberalism:

Dey’s a lil’ wooden cros,
In a poppus Field down deh,
An’ eb’ry time ah thinks o’ it
Ah a’mos’ seems tuh heah
De laftuh ob de boy who sleeps
Deh in his blanket baid—
Ah sohta pain gits in muh thoat
Tuh know muh buddie’s daid. (49)

In the two following stanzas the speaker reminisces about his friendship with Joe, and he claims that he does not fear death because he will be reunited with Joe in the afterlife.

Green uses this poem to praise black soldiers, which for any American, much less a southerner, would have been an unusual attitude at the time. He juxtaposes traditional tropes of trench poetry—poppies, nightingales, rows of crosses—with African American Vernacular English, implying that the death of a black soldier is as heroic as the death of a white soldier.

Green wrote this poem after the Armistice while he was stationed as a clerk in Paris. He took the sinecure position because it allowed him to experience the culture of the city. He wrote to his sister ecstatically, telling her that he had been reading new literature, seeing the city’s museum, and meeting intellectuals. He read *The New Poetry* (1917), a collection of modernist verse edited by Harriet Monroe, which left him somewhat conflicted. He says, “Although I like its freshness, I fear there is little worth in it. All this swarm of *Vers librists*, this motley crowd of discordant street musicians, are poor ragged illegitimate children of the powerful Walt Whitman—nothing else. Still, I

enjoy reading these verses; their jaggedness makes them hang in your mind.”³⁸

Considering the formalism of Green’s own poems, his response to the collection does not seem surprising, but he kept an open mind about literary experimentation, which he would later incorporate into his drama. When not reading, he walked the city and visited the Louvre with a lovely Parisian, Violet Boislet. And he thrilled in meeting and exchanging ideas with other intellectuals drawn to the city. In the letter to his sister he gushes, “This afternoon I took my first tea among the intellectuals as they style themselves. And what a time I had! Such talk. For once in my life I felt happy.”³⁹ Green clearly found a level of intellectual stimulation in Paris that he had not yet found in the South, even during his brief period at the University of North Carolina.

But Green did not, nonetheless, find Paris to be an idyllic sanctuary of intellectual reverie. As a southerner raised in a farming community, Green internalized a set of agrarian values that made him inherently suspicious of cities and industrialism. While in Paris, Green observed the dehumanizing effects of the modern city: filth, degradation, and poverty. By this time, Green’s exposure to new ideas and his innate sympathy had merged to produce the liberalism that would be his intellectual trademark. Several poems he wrote while in Paris describe the inhumane conditions some Parisians endured, but, from an intellectual perspective, these poems may be most interesting for their class awareness. In the poem “The Other Night I Saw a Little Ragged Girl in a First Class Metro Car,” for example, he emphasizes the distinctions between social classes in a common setting, as a self-conscious girl tries to hide “her sabots and her ragged dress”

³⁸ Paul Green to Erma Green, *A Southern Life*, 15.

³⁹ Paul Green to Erma Green, *A Southern Life*, 17.

from the judgmental eyes of “the jeweled women there / and officers in gold and braid” (71). In another poem he wrote while in Paris, provocatively titled “The Making of a Bolshevik,” he describes the experience of a laborer, Nicolai, who is exploited and exhausted and “made to be a cog of the machine” until “his weary soul rebelled” (74-75). When a stranger, a communist agitator, whispers to Nicolai that “the trouble lay / With those who rule,” he joins an apparent uprising, gets arrested, and ultimately is sentenced to death. Implicitly, Nicolai as a worker, an impotent agent, has been manipulated by both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Green stopped short of becoming a radical intellectual, but the sense of intellectual sympathy for the underclass that he developed while in Europe evolved into an intense sympathy for the plight of African Americans in the South. After the war Green returned to Chapel Hill to complete his studies under his two mentors, the philosopher Horace Williams and the playwright Frederick Koch. While Williams had designs on grooming Green as his successor, Green became increasingly interested in drama as a vehicle for social change, as a means for making his liberal attitudes into works of aesthetic and social art. In the 1920s, Green committed himself to writing socially-conscious plays for the New York stage, and he had success with productions concerning topics such as the sexual exploitation of black women by white men in *White Dresses* (1922), superstition and education on black folk life in *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926), and the inhumanity of the southern chain gang in *Hymn to the Rising Sun* (1936).

By the 1930s Green had established a reputation as an important playwright. During the early 1930s he wrote two plays for the experimental drama company called

The Group Theatre.⁴⁰ His first play for the Group, a story about a decaying southern family called *The House of Connelly*, was a critical success in 1931, and the success of that play emboldened Green to attempt a more ambitious play set in the trenches of World War I. To write the play *Johnny Johnson*, which Green called a “successful failure,” he collaborated with Kurt Weill, a composer recently exiled from Nazi Germany.⁴¹ Their joint production blended drama with music in a way that Green would later develop into symphonic drama, the mode of production for which he is most well known. *Johnny Johnson*, first produced in 1936, however, is a more typical proscenium production with an ideologically-charged plot about an attempted mutiny on the front lines. While the play’s commentary on the value of war and its overt religious and psychological symbolism are overly didactic, the play offers a fascinating insight into the effect of World War I on white, male southern ideology.

The play opens in a small town in the South on a morning in 1917 when the people of the town have gathered to dedicate a monument to peace, although the particular peace it commemorates, whether peace between the North and South or the abstract ideal of peace, is unclear. As the town’s mayor gives a pompous speech praising peace, a newsboy presents to the mayor an announcement of Wilson’s declaration of war on Germany, and instantly the community’s aspect changes from peaceful to warlike. This opening scene juxtaposes three crucial elements of southern ideology at the time of World War I. First, the entire community, especially the mayor, complies with Wilsonian policy, changing without hesitation from isolationism to militaristic engagement in

⁴⁰ Harold Clurman, a member of the Group Theatre, recounts the company’s history in *The Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theatre in the Thirties*. For details about Green’s collaboration with the company, see 187-193.

⁴¹ Quoted in Vincent Kenny, *Paul Green*, 87.

accordance with the President's decree, even though they do not yet know against whom they have been asked to fight. Second, even as the community attempts to valorize peace, it retains and valorizes the Lost Cause in the character of Grandpa Joe. Although comical, this character—who the scene notes describe as “an old man with a scraggly graying moustache dressed in a shrunk-up faded blue-and-gray uniform of 1865 on the breast of which is pinned a marksman's badge and ... hold[ing] a bloodthirsty looking saber in his hand”—acts as a living relic of the Civil War (*Johnny Johnson* 4). Even as the mayor speaks of peace, Grandpa Joe rants about fighting at Chickamauga and inflames the community's bellicosity. Third, only Johnny Johnson, the stonecarver who crafted the monument to peace the town has gathered to dedicate, recognizes the town's ideological capriciousness and remains committed to pacifism after the declaration of war. Yet even Johnny's allegiance proves fungible when his sweetheart insinuates that refusing to enlist would be unmanly.

After an absurd scene where Johnson literally fights his way into the Army at a recruiting station, he is mustered into the American Army and shipped to Europe. The final scene of act one takes place on a troop ship sailing out of New York harbor, past the Statue of Liberty. To underscore the southern soldier's patriotic nationalism, he delivers a soliloquy to the Statue of Liberty in which he swears that he will not see the Statue again until he has “helped to bring back peace and win this war which ends all wars” (57). In the trenches, Johnny takes his place in his platoon, which includes an absurdly diverse cross section of American society. Among his comrades are Private Svenson, “a long horse-faced Swede” from Iowa; Private Goldberger, “a little squabby Jew”⁴²; Private

Kearns, “a huge square shouldered fellow about twenty years old, chewing tobacco”; Private O’Day “a short red-faced Irishman” from Boston; Private Harwood, “sandy-haired and blue-eyed, about twenty-one” from Texas; and an English Sergeant (64-66). The men in the unit squabble among themselves according to their historical differences—the urban Jew teases the rural Swede, the Irishman blusters the Englishman—but, notably, there is no inter-sectional tension. In fact, Johnny, the only obvious southerner in the group, has an uncanny mollifying effect on the unit. Johnny, curiously, seems to be beyond regional or ethnic identifiers; rather than representing the southern soldiers, Green means for him to represent the American soldier. Green apparently had exactly this notion in mind when he wrote in a 1942 letter “that there were several thousand Johnny Johnsons in the first world war army. In fact, according to the records, there were over three thousand of them in the American Expeditionary Forces alone.... Johnny represents the common man.”⁴³ Considering the still-smoldering embers of sectionalism even in the 1930s, the presentation of a southerner as a typical American, especially in the context of World War I, seems surprising. Yet, when one considers that southerners enlisted in the military during the war in disproportionately large numbers and that southerners, such as Sergeant Alvin York, were among the war’s most recognizable figures, the role seems fairly reasonable.

Johnny’s exploits on the battlefield follow a convoluted modernist plot that combines elements of absurdity, religious mythology, political conspiracy, and Freudian psychoanalytical gibberish. He volunteers for a mission to find a German sniper hidden in

⁴² In the original production of *Johnny Johnson* presented by the Group Theatre at the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre in New York in 1936, Elia Kazan, later to become famous as a director of Tennessee William’s plays, played Private Goldberger and a few other minor roles.

⁴³ Quoted in Zachary Perkinson, “The Group Theatre,” 26.

a huge wooden statue of Jesus. Instead of killing the sniper, Johnny befriends him and together they conspire to cause a bilateral mutiny. Johnny later infiltrates a meeting of the assembled Allied High Command and uses a tank of laughing gas to force them to sign an order ending the war. After causing a momentary cease fire, he is arrested and sent to a psychiatric hospital, where he is incarcerated for several years. The scenes that take place in the psychiatric hospital may be the most interesting in the play. The inmates there mimic a meeting of Congress in which they debate the ratification of a treaty to form the League of World Republics, which they pass unanimously. Obviously commenting on the failure of the supposedly-sane U.S. Congress to support the creation of the League of Nations, this scene suggests that rationality, particularly among politicians, may be relative. While the inmates debate their resolution, Green introduces another plot element that comments on modern American society. Johnny's romantic rival, Anguish Howington, who dodged military service and has since become a wealthy businessman, visits the hospital. Apparently, he has taken a paternalistic philanthropic interest in the hospital, in part because his wife, Minny Belle, who had once been Johnny's girlfriend, thinks it is important. The juxtaposition at the end between sanity and financial success subtly critiques the materialism of American society in general and southern society in particular. Anguish, throughout the play, represents the materialism of the New South boosters, and the implication at the end is that money, even in the South, trumps idealism.

Green, nonetheless, in spite of somewhat cynical attitude toward the modern world, took from the war a liberal idealism. He genuinely believed that activism, both artistic and political, could make a difference in public policy. One of his last war poems

reveals that he felt the war to be a terrible loss but that he hoped the lesson of the war would be heeded. While working as a clerk in Paris he wrote a poem, "War Book," in the form of an accounting book. In the losses column he listed "2.5 million killed / 26,000 factories destroyed / Thousands of miles of rich farming lands rendered unfertile / Thousands of broken hearts / Thousands of ruined homes / Hundreds of wrecked villages and cities." In the visibly shorter gains column, he listed "Alsace-Lorraine / Gain of self-confidence." He succinctly tallies the balance as "Unspeakable losses." (*War Songs* 85) A rational, sympathetic person could not achieve a different conclusion about the experience of the war. Yet Green, like his idol Woodrow Wilson, continued to believe that some value could come from the experience.⁴⁴ While World War II renders moot any discussion about the value of World War I as a geopolitical event, on an individual level the war had the effect of raising the consciousness of a generation of artists and intellectuals, including Paul Green.

The Southern Soldier in the Modern World

When America joined the war in Europe, Donald Davidson, who would later be a member of the Fugitive Poets and the Southern Agrarians, was beginning his senior year at Vanderbilt; he volunteered without hesitation to serve in the Army.⁴⁵ Davidson's stalwart sense of duty and loyalty would become his defining characteristic as, later in his

⁴⁴ Green, like Johnny Johnson, greatly admired Woodrow Wilson. In 1964 he wrote to a friend who had sent him a recently-published biography of Wilson, "I admired and loved Wilson long ago, and still venerate and love his memory.... [This biography] is one more step in the rehabilitation and reaffirmation of a great man and his rightful vision in a tangled world." See Paul Green to Frances Phillips, *A Southern Life*, 632.

⁴⁵ John Crowe Ransom, Davidson's poetic and intellectual mentor, also served in the military during the war, as an artillery training officer in France. For an account of Ransom's experience during the war and its effect on his aesthetic sensibility, see Davis, "Grace After Battle."

life, he would defend the southern tradition from attacks at all corners. But in 1917, as an insecure twenty-four year old college student, he had yet to develop his trademark rancor toward the enemy he called “industrialism.” By the time he returned from World War I, however, Davidson had changed significantly. He had experienced active combat, which he found profoundly affecting, and, after returning to the United States, he identified with the generations of his forefathers who had fought Indians, Yankees, and adversity to settle his beloved Tennessee homeland. His sense of history and tradition led him to question the imminent post-war modernization of the South. Lewis Simpson says that “in 1917 Davidson was far from thinking about the necessity of another Southern secession, a spiritual and literary one, but in a few years he would be close to doing so. He would come to interpret his First World War experience as a revelation of the Truth of his homeland, or the America that is the South.”⁴⁶ Davidson’s military service became the crucial experience of his lifetime, and military nuances touch his poetry, his politics, and his rhetoric.

Yet, like most recruits, Davidson’s military career began with little fanfare. When America declared war, he applied for admission to Officers’ Training School, and he reported to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, in May 1917 for training as an infantry officer. He left Vanderbilt one semester before completing his degree, and Chancellor Kirkland allowed his military training to substitute for the physics course he lacked, so Davidson received his B. A. *in absentia* just before he shipped out. In August 1917 Davidson also received his commission as a second lieutenant in the U. S. Army, and he was assigned to the 81st “wildcat” division being formed at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. Just before his

⁴⁶ Simpson, Foreword, vii.

division came up for rotation overseas, Davidson married Theresa Sherrer, a woman with whom he had taught at a private school in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1916. Davidson felt oddly guilty for falling in love with a Yankee (Theresa came from Ohio), and he later wrote in *The Tall Men* that “in being faithful to [her] I have been unfaithful / Maybe, this once, to my own. I forgot the looks / Of the Tennessee girls” (100). He took his southern identity extremely seriously; even in a heterogeneous army of northerners and southerners, he gravitated toward soldiers from the South.

While in training at Fort Oglethorpe, Davidson had an experience that made him reflect on his southern identity and his relationship with the greater United States. In the shadow of the Chickamauga battlefield, where the creeks ran red with rebel blood, he and the rest of the, chiefly southern, cadets heard a speech from General John T. Wilder, who had commanded federal troops against the southern soldiers under General Braxton Bragg on that same battlefield. Davidson says, “With great pride the old General told of his part in that other war. He dwelt long and, it seemed to me, with vicious exultation upon the fact that his mounted infantry were armed with Sharps repeating rifles, and therefore did bloody execution upon the Johnny Rebs opposite him, who had only single shooters” (*Southern Writers* 33). He recognized the painful irony that he had enlisted with the same army that had once slaughtered his kinsmen and countrymen. When General Wilder reached his climax—that the doughboys should massacre the Germans with equal zeal—Davidson and many of his comrades sat in awkward silence. Wilder’s speech left him facing a serious crisis of identity:

The Blue and the Gray had merged in undistinguished khaki, and we were going to cross the Atlantic Ocean in the First World War of our century to fight an alleged enemy for reasons that we had to take on faith and actually did not in the least understand. As young southerners from South

Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee we were inwardly disturbed at the crude equation set up by an old Union General. How could Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, or even Braxton Bragg be equated, as enemies to be slaughtered, with Kaiser Wilhelm, Hindenburg, and *Les Boches*? (*Southern Writers* 34)

Thinking of himself as an enemy forced Davidson to realize, perhaps for the first time, that he stood outside the mainstream of early twentieth-century American society, that he did not share in the broadly-defined American dream, and that he greatly valued the traditions and history of the South. After the war, he found himself utterly disillusioned with America, and he vilified the northern industrial economic complex that invaded the South after the Armistice, which he saw as a clear and present threat to the southern way of life. Extending the lesson he learned at Chickamauga, he says, “We could hardly anticipate that the identical social and historical forces that in 1917 could send us to a foreign battle could also operate in civil life in the United States and actually demand that the South put General Wilder’s equation into effect—in politics, in economics, in literature, in religion” (*Southern Writers* 34). Like the doomed confederates firing antiquated muskets at the federals, he saw the South as outgunned by the North’s relentless industrial efficiency.

Davidson’s unit saw ferocious fighting on the Western Front during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. In August of 1918 Davidson’s division arrived in France, and in September his unit reached the front near Fort Douamont. “On November 8, 1918,” three days before the signing of the Armistice, “orders were sent from division headquarters at Somme Dieue, and received quite unexpectedly in the middle of the night, that an attack would be initiated against the Germans at eight o’clock on the morning of November 9” (Young, *Donald Davidson* 28). During the proceeding attack, the wildcat division met

fierce resistance from German regulars near Moranville, but, by dawn on November 10, the Americans had captured the town. The Germans, however, continued to shell and gas the uncovered Americans well into the morning hours. By the end of the day, Davidson's unit lost more than four hundred men. In merely six weeks at the front, his unit lost more than one thousand men, including almost fifty officers. After the Armistice, his unit marched for three weeks to a billeting area in central France to await demobilization, which took more than six months, until April 1919.⁴⁷

For Davidson, who had spent his entire life until this time in central Tennessee, the war presented enormous opportunities along with tremendous danger. Significantly, he never mentioned the carnage he must have experienced in France. Instead, he focused on the relatively positive aspects of his service. He describes his personal experience in the war as “novel, indeed astounding.” He says, “I had never traveled before; now I traveled: to Columbia, S. C., an old and sleepy town, suddenly beset by hordes of new officers, new soldiers . . . Traveled—yes, to New York (my first sight), Long Island, across the Atlantic on the Cunarder *Aquitania*, across England, into France, and all that!”⁴⁸ Coming from an insular, but educated, background, Davidson appreciated his unexpected tour of the United States and Europe, and he made friends with soldiers from across the country and with many of the villagers whom he guarded in Central France. His combat experience, military travel, and his new marriage “encouraged the development of a new maturity for which his former life as a romantic young student and teacher could hardly have prepared him” (Young, *Donald Davidson* 29). Between 1917

⁴⁷ Mark Royden Winchell quotes a lengthy passage from Davidson's diary recounting his experiences in combat; see *Where No Flag Flies*, 39.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Inge, “Donald Davidson's Notes,” 210.

and 1919, Davidson, and many other young men of his generation, matured much faster than they may have under peacetime conditions, and they transferred their new energy and experience into a flurry of postwar cultural development.

Davidson, for his part, would mine his military experience for his finest poetic achievement, “The Faring” section of *The Tall Men*. In “The Faring,” He explores the war’s psychological effects on the soldiers, both those who died and those who survived, and, of course, the war had a tremendous impact on him. He never wrote explicitly about his experience as a soldier, although he was contemplating a memoir at the time of his death, yet a sense of urgency rooted in personal trauma in his poetry and his politics discloses his internalized attitudes toward conflict. Davidson—fresh from college, thousands of miles from home, separated from his new wife and the infant daughter he had never seen, responsible for the lives of a company of men, and surrounded with senseless carnage and brutality—must have felt overwhelming psychological pressure. One of his closest friends from the army, a fellow officer named S. Toof Brown, says, “It was hard to realize then the thoughts which must have been constantly in Don’s mind and the agony he must have suffered, particularly when at the front. Naturally, he spoke of [his wife and infant daughter] often, but his anxiety neither affected the performance of the job at hand nor did it reflect in his disposition.”⁴⁹ The experience of World War One left Davidson dramatically changed. He wrote to his M. Thomas Inge, who was preparing an unfinished biography

It’s very important to understand that the military life is a complete life in itself, so totally different from civilian life as to be beyond explanation. You have to experience it to understand, or at least to know, the difference. After two and a half years of military life I found it very hard

⁴⁹ Quoted in Young, *Donald Davidson*, 30.

indeed to become a civilian again. I'm not sure I ever have quite fully become one.⁵⁰

Perhaps, indeed, his military experience helps to explain the militant tone in his essays on industrialism and his attitude toward threats to his southern homeland.

In a sense, Davidson engages in his poems, especially in *The Tall Men*, in exactly the same sort of project that T. S. Eliot engaged in as he shored fragments against his ruin in *The Waste Land*. They both look to the past for objective models of behavior in a relativist age, but Davidson takes a much more reactionary tone toward the progress of the modern South, which he sees as an inevitable byproduct of the South's engagement in the First World War. In fact, Davidson wrote to his publisher in 1927 to explain that in *The Tall Men* he intended to place "considerable emphasis on the heroic and the romantic, in contrast to the disillusionment which afflicts us in the chaotic modern world. The idea is to arrive at some basis for an attitude of acceptance, which, while resting on the past, would not wholly reject the present—a mood of positiveness rather than the gesture of defeat to be found, say, in *The Waste Land*."⁵¹ Obviously, he had in mind for this poem to be a statement about the modern world, but the type of modernity he advocates looks backward rather than admit the inherent post-war disillusionment of modernism. Yet, even while he intends to strike a positive tone, his preoccupation with clinging to traditional values belies his distaste for imminent change.⁵²

⁵⁰ Quoted in Inge, "Donald Davidson's Notes," 210.

⁵¹ Quoted in Jordan, "*The Tall Men*: Davidson's Answer to Eliot," 50.

⁵² Daniel J. Singal also notes the modernist anti-modernism in Davidson's poem. He says "Davidson was convinced that he was moving daringly backward [in composing *The Tall Men*], rejecting twentieth-century culture decisively. To the extent that he was countering the threats of skepticism and relativism, this was true. But paradoxically, his glorification of primitivism and attack on cultural elitism sprang directly from the Modernist strain in his thought." See *The War Within*, 223.

In *The Tall Men*, Davidson romanticizes the pioneer spirit that led his ancestors to leave their Scottish homeland, journey to America, settle the frontier, and establish a community. He traces the same fierce determination through the generation that fought in the Civil War to defend the community against northern aggression and his own generation, who fought to make the world safe for democracy. In the wake of these courageous generations, however, he dramatizes a precipitous decline in his community's individual fortitude. He portrays lethargic, content men replacing the determined pioneers, and he makes clear that modern generations have not met the standards of their predecessors. Davidson bases his poem on his own life experience, using the stories he heard as a child, his experience as a soldier, and his opinions about modernity to craft a long poem with a pointed message.

In *The Tall Men*, Davidson engages in poetry of social discourse, verse designed to press a social agenda, which constitutes a shift in his poetic development. Louis Rubin suggests that this shift had a negative impact of his poetic career:

Davidson largely ceased to use the form of poetry as a vehicle for self-examination and began using it to celebrate a predetermined intellectual and social position, with the result that though his advocacy and evocation of that position was often eloquent indeed, his language thereafter lacked the element of tension between self and society, public and private identity, tradition and modern circumstance, that made for the creative resolution of poetry such as Tate's and Ransom's. (*The Wary Fugitives* 162)

Actually, in the case of *The Tall Men* and much of his later overt social criticism, he develops an unmistakable element of tension between himself and society in general and between tradition and modern circumstance in particular, but he ceases to explore his own relationship with society. He becomes, in effect, an imaginative ideologue, too involved in his own opinions to recognize change in his midst.

Although written years before *I'll Take My Stand*, *The Tall Men* previews the agrarian agenda, the crux of Davidson's social ideology. In the opening lines of the poem he idealizes the pioneers who will, ultimately, become his cultural standard: "It was a hunter's tale that rolled like wind / Across the mountains once, and the tall men came / Whose words were bullets. They, by the Tennessee waters, / Talked with their rifles bluntly and sang to the hills / With a whet of axes" (4). He contrasts these rugged individuals with his own generation, which has become weak and corrupt: "Something (call it civilization) crept / Across the mountains once, and left me here / Flung up from sleep against the breakfast table / Like numb and helpless driftwood. Through the trees / Where summer morning grows with a threat of drouth [sic] / I look back on the centuries (not quite two), / Rustling the morning paper and watching the clock" (5). By obvious implication, he suggests that civilization, which he characterizes as numbing, has supplanted the vigor and determination of the tall men, and he sees his own generation as pivotal, wavering between the values of his fathers and the values of the carpetbaggers. Indeed, Davidson overtly describes the corrupting agent as northern industrialism, and he also describes the tension between values as a kind of warfare:

Some sort of battle, would you call it, where
Words pass for bullets, dabbed in a scribble of ink?
Now here the hero sprawls while a little man
Purrs in a patent tone of voice and a sleek
Copyrighted smile. He has a Northern way
Of clipping his words, and with an inevitable curve
Of an arm in a business suit reveals cigars
In the tribal code. (6-7)

To a large extent, this verse encapsulates Davidson's life-long social agenda to preserve, in his opinion, southern agrarian values from the corrupting, usurping forces of northern industrialism.

Davidson sees the clash of values in the modern age as the final battleground of the Civil War. The second section of *The Tall Men*, “The Sod of Battle-Fields,” glorifies the “men in gray” and romanticizes the few old men who remember the war as “exultations made / Visible in the flesh that woke their banners” (19). He recalls the stories of Confederate heroes and the men of his own family who worshiped Lee, Jackson, and Longstreet, who told him of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Shiloh. He contrasts the Confederate heroes with base, cowardly Yankees who terrorize defenseless women and children under cover of night. In one passage he describes eight drunk Yankee soldiers breaking into a farmhouse and menacing the family with their bayonets, and a “little girl in a flannel nightgown” says, ““Shucks, I’m not afraid / Of you . . . You’re nothing but a damn Yankee”” (21). He also celebrates the folk myths of extraordinary heroism by southern soldiers, such as the story of Jim Ezell, “a Forrest scout / And a Chapel Hill boy,” who licked at least ten and maybe as many as fifty Yankee soldiers single handed (22). With these Lost Cause legends of cunning, courage, and conviction in his imagination, he views the modern generation with contempt.

In the next section of *The Tall Men*, “Geography of the Brain,” Davidson chastises his own generation for growing facile and weak. In a passage echoing the tone of Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” he says:

The modern brain, guarded not only by bone,
Afferent nerves, withering hair, and skin,
Requires the aid of a mystical apparatus
(Weights, levers, motor, steel rods, black boy)
And pyramiding dollars nicely invested
To float boredom up to the cool fifth floor
And a tiled room. (28)

Here he describes the most insidious enemy the South has faced, the faceless specter of progress. Louis Rubin explains his attitude toward the modern age as an assault on values: “The enemy the Tennesseans face now is not a hostile army, but the age of the machine, the pressure of materialistic industrial society which would strip the land of its beauty, create a wasteland of asphalt and concrete and steel, and rob the people of the old heritage of individuality and resourcefulness” (166). Davidson imagines an imminent age where the sons of proud men allow themselves to grow weak. Their muscles atrophy because machines perform labor, and, inevitably, their souls turn to worship of material items. He associates this vision specifically with urbanization, as more and more people were leaving their rural homes for the city, and he contrasts his vision of the corrupt modern city with a pastoral scene of agrarian beauty:

Over the Southern fields green corn is waving,
Husky and broad of blade. The ranks of corn
Push from the stable earth. The pollen falls,
A yellow life from shaken tassels, piercing
The seed below. Pollen falls in my heart,
A dust of song that sprinkles fruitfulness,
Mellowing like the corn in Southern fields. (30)

In this time of domestic crisis, with pioneer virtues dissipating and the nation moving toward a corrupt modern age, a foreign event alters, at least briefly, the course of events.

The fourth section of *The Tall Men*, “The Faring,” dramatizes Davidson’s own experience in this foreign event, the First World War, in the persona of McCrory, a soldier from Tennessee. For McCrory the war offers an opportunity to prove his legitimacy to the mantle of his forefathers and to establish his courage and determination in the face of enormous opposition. He imagines the irony that the son of generations of pioneers, stemming from the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons who settled England and the

English who settled America, would return to Europe to protect and defend the sons of the generations who remained in the Old World. These New World soldiers bring symbols of their land with them. On his sleeve, McCrory wears the wildcat insignia, for Davidson's unit, the 81st "wildcat" division, which he associates with the values of his pioneer forefathers: "A wildcat snarling, / Emblem of western mountains where tall men strode / Once with long rifles" (47). He imagines himself, carrying a Dechard rifle with fixed bayonet, as a tall soldier striding bravely into battle.

McCrory romanticizes his own participation in the Great War. He describes his unit's arrival at the front in grandiose terms; as his unit leaves the troop train in France he says:

Now they are going
Somewhere in France on roads where Roman eagles
Slanted to meet the Nervii or where
Napoleon, flushed with greetings, galloped from Elba
A hundred years before. The husky guns
Rumbled at twilight from the Western Front.
The slow column poured like moving bronze
And something (call it civilization) struck
In the latest battle of nations, somewhere in France. (49)

Again Davidson compares his own experience, in the persona of McCrory, to the great armies of history, and his use of the word *civilization* has significant portent. In this case, when he associates civilization with war, the word appears to have a positive connotation, but earlier, when he associates civilization with commerce, the word has a negative connotation. For Davidson, war reaffirms the virtues of a civilization—courage, honor, glory—and he castigates those at home dozing by the fire who will grow to hold their manhood cheap.

In the trenches, McCrory stands watch for German attack. While his platoon drowns with their weapons at the ready, he stands noiselessly on a parapet straining his eyes to peer into No Man's Land, shuffling his feet in the cold mud, and "remembering how a girl's / Deep eyes commanded his in a land far-off" (53). In the middle of the night an artillery barrage begins, and McCrory orders his men down into the trench while he orders a responding barrage. During a lull between barrages he looks over the parapet and "peered / While flares made blinding day along the front, / And there they were, the gray-green men, a line / Of forward wrenching shapes, careering, hurling / Lightnings and death about his head" (55). At the sight of the enemy advancing across No Man's Land, McCrory blows his whistle to signal his men to fire on the Germans. At length, the tall men repel the Germans, and, as dawn breaks over the battlefield, he finds that he has been superficially wounded in the arm and that dead Germans and dead Americans litter the trenches.

With the end of the battle, a tone of disillusionment enters into Davidson's poem. He begins to question his reason for participating in the war: "I tell you, I have come a long way, I have come / From a world that was into a world that is, / Bringing the strongest part of all that I was / Into the moment when all strong things fade / Into a fog of questions" (56). Obviously, Davidson feels conflicted about the war. On one hand, he values the opportunity to prove his courage against the standard of his forefathers, but, on the other hand, he realizes that this war has no purpose that directly affects him. He fights not to defend himself or his home or even his country but to defend a nation an ocean away from his home for purely political reasons. Under these circumstances, he begins to search for answers—"Ask the fog / For comfort? Ask for death! Ask fire to give / Water

for parched tongues”—but he realizes that his questions are in vain (57). His disillusionment leads him to despair that the race of tall men has vanished for all time. He says, “once I heard of Marathon, where men / Clutched in the tense of battle, saw great shoulders / Parting the mass, and heard the club of Theseus / Hewing immortal strokes, but shall the ghosts / Of heroes never walk our milder earth?” (57). Clearly, Davidson realizes that he does not fight for the immortal, idealized army that he imagined in his enthusiasm. The reality and horror of combat in the trenches has extinguished his vision of glory.

When the armistice comes in Davidson’s poem, no one at the front celebrates the victory. McCrory’s soldiers—exhausted, cold, and hungry—say “Thank God, we’ll build a fire at last,” ask “When do we eat,” and collapse into sleep (57). At the end of the war, Davidson shares a different idea of heroism:

Heroes are muddy creatures, a little pale
Under two days’ beard with gritty mouths that mumble
Oaths like the Ancient Pistol; or opening cans
Of messy beef with brittle bayonets;
Or winding spiral leggings with eyes alert
For cockle-burrs. (58)

This description of exhausted, dirty men contrasts starkly with Davidson’s previous descriptions of larger-than-life characters. But, for Davidson, it is not the men who have changed. They are still of the heroic cut, but the circumstances of heroism have changed. In this war men do not stand eye to eye and exchange blows. Instead, they wallow in mud while machines of deadly destruction commit cold, brutal acts of wholesale slaughter. Modern mechanization ended the era of the tall men. Years after the war, Davidson would explain his disillusionment with the war:

It was a bad war, of course; but what made it extremely bad was the totally asinine way it was managed by most higher-ups concerned, on both sides. The soldiers of the line were splendid, always. But the generalship was ineffably stupid; how can we ever explain such holocausts as the battle of the Somme or the German attack on Verdun, except as originating in the brains of military dotards. . . . The World War was the first war in history to be thoroughly mechanized, on a fully modern, presumably “efficient” basis. It was also the first war in all history to produce no great generals, no great leaders, and perhaps not a single piece of first-class strategy. In other words, the triumph of the machine! (*The Spyglass* 193)

For the rest of his life, Davidson would associate mechanization with the incipient corruption of modern civilization.

With the war over, the army demobilizes, and McCrory finally comes home. But he, like many other veterans, feels inexorably changed by the experience. He says, “We who were young / Are older now from death in a foreign land / Met and passed by” (67). With his combat service comes a new vision of life and a new sense of appreciation for home. As his ship sails into, appropriately, Charleston harbor, McCrory celebrates ecstatically. He says, “A flight of gulls! Sand streaks in the green / Tumbling waves! O greener pines! O Carolina! / Sweetly sail, ship in the harbor, home. / That is Fort Sumter—veterans hail a veteran— / Yonder the Battery, yonder the Charleston / Docks and the crowding faces. This is my own countree!” (67). Significantly, when Davidson’s persona returns home, he returns to the South. But he does not immediately find a hero’s welcome. In fact, like many veterans, McCrory finds that the influx of veterans into the job market at home has led to high unemployment rates, which quickly leads him to a new sense of disillusionment with his homeland. He has nightmares about ghastly images of carnage, and he feels isolated, alone, and alienated. Davidson reflects his persona’s alienation by distancing him from the poetic narrative and fracturing the form into brief speeches of disembodied voices, obviously drawing from *The Waste Land*. Among these

voices he includes the traveler, the mystic, a prominent citizen, a feminist, satyr in a tuxedo, bobbed-hair bacchante, an intellectual, and three expatriates. Significantly, one of the expatriates, evidently a Lost Generation figure, lives in Paris because he enjoys the freedom to think, drink, wear spats, and “read James Joyce / Without being charged with adultery” (79). Collectively, these figures represent the chaos and cacophony of the modern world that Davidson’s persona finds frustrating.

As an alternative to chaos, Davidson searches for concrete values in the traditions of his forefathers. He imagines the pagan warriors, the devout puritans, the natural scientists, and the bloodthirsty Vikings of the past who worshiped manly gods, and he reconsiders his relationship with the mutable Judeo-Christian God of his childhood. He finds religion less than satisfactory, and he finds the materialism of his generation contemptible, so he returns to the land that spawned the tall men for immutable, tangible values. In the poem’s ultimate stanza, he says, “Remember the rifles / Talking men’s talk into the Tennessee darkness / And the long-haired hunters watching the Tennessee hills / In the land of big rivers for something” (117). Davidson’s “something” carries tremendous import. It means, in one sense, the hunter’s quarry, and, in another sense, the poet’s answers to the contradictions of the modern world. Davidson, as a public intellectual, spent much of his career searching for something that he feared was vanishing.

After the war, at least partly as a consequence of his experience in Europe, Davidson developed a self-consciously defensive sectional attitude. In essays such as “Still Rebels, Still Yankees,” for example, he criticized the homogenization of American

culture often by appealing to regional distinctiveness of European nations.⁵³ So, for Davidson, the first experience of World War I confirmed the value of sectionalism. To a certain extent, this balance between ideological homogenization and regional distinctiveness continues to be a crucial issue in the discourse about southern culture. Responses to the war tend to be individualized: Percy reverted to traditionalism, Green converted to liberalism, and Davidson adhered to defiant sectionalism. But, as representatives of a larger collective of white male southerners, their responses to the war demonstrate that the war represented a moment of ideological crisis that would, of necessity, reconfigure their notions of nationalism, even if they swore against it. For many of these white male southerners, the Civil War finally ended when World War I began.

⁵³ See Davidson, "Still Rebels, Still Yankees," in *The Attack on Leviathan*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Civil Rights through Carnage: Black Southerners, World War I, and the Color Line

While World War I may have signaled the beginning of the end of the Civil War for white southerners, it signaled the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement for black southerners. By the end of the war, white southerners realized their peculiar duality of nationalism that made them simultaneously southern and American. But for black southerners, the war brought into conflict three competing identity markers—race, region, and nation—that operated in a complex, oppositional relationship. Practically, a black person born in the South would legally be a citizen of the United States and a resident of the South, but blackness had the effect of negating the black person's claims to nationalism, technically making that person both not American and not southern. White southerners, in fact, defined their own identity to contradict the presence of blackness, subjectifying and dehumanizing black bodies and, thus, obviating the need to recognize blacks as social equals. But World War I had the effect of legitimating black claims to social equality in other respects. By wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army, black southerners who served in the military made an unimpeachable claim to Americanism, thus subverting the subjectivity of blackness. After the war, black artists and intellectuals portrayed the sacrifice of black soldiers in combat and the persecution of black veterans in the South to make a case for civil rights. The modernist trope of the

black veteran asserts black nationality, threatens social constructions of whiteness, asserts an authentically southern black identity, and makes the case for social equality.

World War I complicated the already difficult issue of American nationalism. To the extent that a unified national identity existed in a nation composed primarily of immigrants and their descendents, the war in Europe, which aligned most European nationalities into opposing factions, fragmented American nationalism. The melting pot vision of America was replaced with a collection of diverse cultures, such as Italian-American, Polish American, and Anglo-Saxon American.¹ The fragmentation of American nationalism, moreover, accentuated the nation's racial bifurcation. Regardless of their national origin, white Americans could reasonably expect full rights of American citizenship, but black Americans could not. During the war, many black intellectuals and leaders clamored for black Americans to finally be recognized as citizens. In this era of fragmentary American nationalism, race united white Americans into a hegemony that subjectified black Americans, denying their claim to American national identity. After the war, black writers made a case for the recognition of black American identity both by blacks, in the form of the New Negro movement, and by whites, in the form of social equality.

In *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, Grace Elizabeth Hale explains the crucial relationship between blackness and whiteness in the South: "Southern whites constructed their racial identities on two interlocking lanes: within a regional dynamic of ex-Confederates versus ex-slaves and within a national dynamic of the South, understood as white, versus the nation. The demands and desires

¹ For an explanation of this process, see Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America."

of southern African Americans as well as the needs of America, as both a state and an identity, shaped the contours of modern southern whiteness” (9). In order to define their own identity, southern whites, in effect, created the notion of race as a criterion for inclusion—and exclusion—from the national community. This artificial bifurcation forced southern blacks into a sense of simultaneous being and nothingness, what W. E. B. Du Bois calls double consciousness. He describes this sense in *The Souls of Black Folks* as “two-ness”: “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (8). Southern identity, obviously, operates within a matrix of race, but the racial dynamics absolutely privilege whiteness. In effect, southern whiteness creates and subordinates southern blackness, and through a hegemonic system of economic exploitation, political disfranchisement, arbitrary violence, sexual degradation, and symbiotic separation whites deny blacks a national identity.

Benedict Anderson, in fact, argues that racial identity is essential to national identity. In *Imagined Communities* he defines a nation as “an imagined political community,” a vague but useful concept (6). according to Anderson’s position, a nation ideally will be a spatially, racially, historically, and linguistically consistent and unified sovereign state, but, of course, in practice no nation has complete unity, so tensions arise between peoples within a nation who define nationality and those within the same space excluded by nationality. This tension is most evident in cases where a small contingent of one nationality defines a larger pre-existing nationality in a particular space, as in the case of a colonial territory, and in the case where a diasporic people has, either by force or by choice, entered another nation, which is the case of the black southerner. Anderson

explains the psychology of nationalism and racism when he says that “nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history. Niggers are, thanks to the invisible tar-brush, forever niggers” (149). Thus, the hegemonic group in a mixed nation, in this case white American, tends to essentialize race as an ahistorical criterion for inclusion. But, as Paul Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic*, the descendents of the African diaspora—the American and European slave trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—have by force incorporated with the dominant racial group, creating a new syncretic national identity, which he calls “cultural insiderism” (3). He explains that the key to cultural insiderism is the sense of ethnic difference that allows the insider to amalgamate elements of two national cultures into a hybrid nationality. Thus, the subordinated culture, in this case black southerners, identifies with the dominant culture and aspires to national belonging.

World War I initiated a series of major social changes in American racial dynamics that propelled the movement for social equality. In 1910 ninety percent of blacks in the United States lived in the South, but by the end of the war in 1918 as many as one million blacks had moved to major industrial centers in the Northeast. This demographic shift altered the traditional nature of agricultural labor in the South, and extended to blacks, especially in the North, new economic opportunities. But the Great Migration of black southerners also had the effect of transplanting southern racial attitudes to northern whites, creating a transregional racial identity. Also as a consequence of the war, black intellectuals and artists gained sufficient cultural capital to

subvert the white racial hegemony overtly, initiating both a new, more confrontational period in the movement for civil rights—the New Negro movement—and a new form of black modernist literary production. In *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, George Hutchinson says:

the African American modernists provided the most probing questions about and the most challenging articulations of American cultural nationalism we have prior to Ellison, beginning with W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Their repeated references to “unknown soldiers” who turned out to be black, to “brotherhood” of black and white recognized only in the face of death on European battlefields, to the betrayal of kin by white men with “mulatto” sons, and to lynching not only as a crime but as a peculiarly American crime, all reflect the extent to which the Harlem Renaissance (and not just in its canonical texts) was caught up in a struggle over the meaning and possession of “America.” (15)

While I agree with Hutchinson's account of black modernism and American cultural nationalism, especially when he argues that cultural nationalism is a field for the struggle for political nationalism, I think the South as an identifying marker plays a crucial and often overlooked role in the study of black modernism.

Barbara Ladd has already argued that literary nationalism was important to white southern writers as a means of defining white identity. In her analysis, the figure who transgresses racial boundaries represents a nightmare for white southerners,² and for many white southerners, World War I made that nightmare real. In *Flags in the Dust* Faulkner portrays a black veteran, Caspey Strother, who returns from the war and demands his civil rights. He tells his father, the Sartoris family's shuffling retainer, “War unloosed de black man's mouf.... Give him the right to talk. Kill Germans, den do yo’

² In *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*, Ladd says “What the trope of the mixed blood makes possible for writers like [Cable, Twain, and Faulkner] is the configuration of the southerner as a carrier of the repressed history of the United States. The power of that trope as it is used by these writers is illustrative of the nexus of anxieties associated with both race and ‘nation’ in their work and in the culture that produced it” (35-36).

oratin', dey tole us. Well, us done it."(63) Later, Caspey adopts an even more militant tone when he says:

I don't take nothin' offen no white man no mo', lootenant ner captain ner M. P. War showed de white folks dey cant git along widout de colored man. Tromple him in de dust, but when de trouble bust loose, hit's "Please suh, Mr Colored Man; right dis way whar de bugle blowin', Mr Colored Man; you is de savior of de country." And now de colored race gwine reap de benefits of de war, and dat soon. (67)

Caspey follows this oration by treading on the South's most sacred taboo when he says, "And de women, too. I got my white in France, and I'm gwine git it here, too." Caspey's urge for civil rights coupled with his stated desire for white women represents a worst-case scenario in the minds of many white southerners. Faulkner defuses the anxiety in this case by characterizing Caspey as a blowhard and coward who quickly reverts to a submissive station.

Black modernists, however, portrayed black veterans as heroes to the nation and to the race, and in works of literature the black veteran became a recurring image to press the case for civil rights. Carrie Williams Clifford's poem, "The Black Draftee from Georgia," for example, demonstrates most of the common elements of the trope including the black man's body in the white man's uniform, the idealization of the black soldier, and the ritualized brutalization of the black veteran:

Upon his dull ear fell the stern command;
And though scarce knowing why or whither, he
Went forth prepared to battle loyally,
And questioned not your faith, O Dixie-land!

And though the task assigned were small or grand,
If toiling at mean tasks ingloriously,
Or in fierce combat fighting valiantly,
With poise magnificent he took his stand!

What though the hero-warrior was black?

His heart was white and loyal to the core;
And when to his loved Dixie he came back,
Maimed, in the duty done on foreign shore,
Where from the hell of war he never flinched,
Because he cried, "Democracy," was lynched. (217)

To the extent that blacks were southerners, the trope of the black veteran makes the case for social equality, which radically subverts white constructions of racial identity. Three black modernist novels—Victor Daly's *Not Only War*, Walter White's *The Fire in the Flint*, and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*—portray the experience of black southern veterans in France, in the South, and the North. In these representations, the displaced veteran, the black southerner who has tangibly demonstrated his right to social equality, challenges the foundation of southern identity, the color line.³

We Return Fighting

To a certain extent, the problem of America's involvement in World War I was the problem of the color line. As the war in Europe escalated in 1915, America's inevitable entrance into the war was becoming apparent. As nationalist patriotic rhetoric intensified in America, two events occurred that influenced the role of black Americans in the war. First, Booker T. Washington, whose philosophy of accommodationism normalized American race relations after Reconstruction, died, leaving a power void in black leadership. Second, W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP-sponsored magazine *The Crisis*, following a conference of black leaders and intellectuals at the home of Joel Spingarn, the white chairman of the NAACP, in Amenia, New York in 1916 emerged as

³ Soon after the war a number of other texts, most transcribed by white writers, were published that borrow from the tradition of local color to portray ignorant black soldiers as amusingly bewildered by their war experience. For examples, see Howard Odum, *Wings on My Feet*; W. Irwin MacIntyre, *Colored Soldiers*; and Charles E. Mack, *Two Black Crows in the A.E.F.*

the unofficial spokesman for black Americans. That does not mean to suggest that the conference acted as a de facto conclave or that only one voice sufficed to speak for all black Americans; rather, the NAACP, the most powerful civil rights organization in the nation, chose as a body to present Du Bois as its spokesman. More confrontational than Washington, whom he had often antagonized, Du Bois regarded the coming war as a moment of opportunity for blacks.

The issue of the color line in the military proved to be, as usual, complicated and tense. In 1917, Du Bois wrote an editorial for *The Crisis*, “Awake America,” encouraging blacks to support America’s entry into the war on the condition that civil rights be granted, including the end of lynching, the abolition of Jim Crow laws, the end of racial disfranchisement, and an integrated military (379). He evidently saw the war as the most propitious moment to make a case for racial equality, sensing that black support would be vital to the war effort. To the War Department, this was an uncomfortable position. While blacks, specifically black laborers, were important to the war effort, concessions that would alienate white southerners would be devastating. The very prospect of blacks in the military inherently agitated many racists in the South, including many at the highest levels of government. For example, Senator Vardaman of Mississippi declaimed: “Universal military service means that millions of negroes will be armed. I know of no greater menace to the South than this” (qtd. in Barbeau 34). Moreover, for many white southerners the idea of black soldiers killing white people, even Germans, roused anxieties of a massive racial revolution. In fact, as Theodore Kornweibel explains in *“Investigate Everything”: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I*, many whites feared that blacks would use the war as an opportunity to sabotage the

country in collusion with German spies, which prompted the government to begin monitoring various black organizations, including the NAACP.⁴ Most of Du Bois's demands, including an integrated military, simply would not be possible.

But white policymakers also realized that the success of the war effort depended on black labor. The war in Europe staunched the flow of new immigrants into the Northeast, depleting the labor market at the same time as able-bodied young men were registering for the draft. Industrialists, seeking the nearest source of cheap labor, sent recruiting agents into the South, promising employment and good wages in northern cities. The lure proved strong, and by the end of 1918 as many as one million black southerners joined the Great Migration to the North.⁵ Meanwhile, the Army also sought to tap this source of essential labor. Although the prospect of blacks in combat units presented a number of problems, Army officials determined that blacks should be drafted into the Army in equal proportion to whites but deliberately not trained for combat. A memo by Colonel E. D. Anderson, the recruiting officer responsible for black draftees, stated that the vast majority of black draftees were unfit for combat duty. He argued that putting large number of black soldiers in combat would have the effect of weakening the front line and giving the Germans an advantage, so he recommended that the bulk of black draftees be assigned to labor battalions. Since laborers required virtually no training, he reasoned, black soldiers could be usefully occupied immediately and white

⁴ Government monitoring of black organizations was not limited to the World War I period. In addition to "Investigate Everything," also see Kornweibel's book *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* and William J. Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left: African American Writing and Communism between the Wars*.

⁵ For more information of the Great Migration, see Florette Henri, *Black Migration*, Alferteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, and James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*.

recruits could be freed to concentrate on their training. In his opinion, labor battalions, while an obvious benefit to the American war effort, would also benefit the black soldiers: “This will be the first time in their lives that 9 out of 10 negroes ever had any discipline, instruction, or medical treatment, or lived in sanitary conditions and they should improve greatly” (qtd in Barbeau 193). Thus, Anderson states official War Department policy on the color line in the American military, which would have virtually no impact on advancing civil rights.

In spite of white fears of black sedition, “patriotism,” as David Levering Lewis says in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, “was as Afro-American as religion”(8). Truthfully, many blacks were willing to enlist regardless of the conditions, which, frankly, did not differ substantially from the ordinary conditions of life in the South, but many black leaders, including Du Bois, realizing the essential value of black labor to the war effort, saw America’s entrance into the war as a crucial opportunity to negotiate the price of black labor and, thus, to bargain for a measure of social equality. Du Bois, in fact, argued in the essay “The African Roots of War” that black labor, in the form of colonial holdings in Africa, caused the war, and he predicted that war would eventually lead to the elimination of the global color line.⁶

Joel Spingarn, meanwhile, worked within the U.S. War Department to find opportunities for blacks to contribute to the American war effort other than labor battalions. Spingarn enlisted in the Army as a Major in Military Intelligence, and he used his position to meet an achievable goal, the training of black combat officers. He initially requested that a certain number of college-educated black men be trained in integrated

⁶ See Du Bois, “The African Roots of War,” 642-651.

officer training schools to command integrated combat units. His superiors at the War Department offered a meek compromise, the creation of one segregated officer training camp—Fort Des Moines in Iowa—assuming that he could personally recruit a sufficient number of qualified candidates. Spingarn appealed to Du Bois to support the segregated camp even though it fell far from his personal goals for the war. As an enticement, Spingarn managed to arrange Du Bois's commission as a Captain in the Army, thus allowing him to take an active role within the military on behalf of racial advancement. After much consideration, Du Bois agreed to support Spingarn's plan, because he believed that success on the battlefield could lead to advances in civil rights. As David Levering Lewis explains, "Du Bois envisaged black officers fighting and dying across Flanders fields, led by Des Moines officers, as the high price of full citizenship in America—civil rights through carnage." (*W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* 530).

Du Bois printed a brief editorial in the July 1918 issue of *The Crisis* that stated his position on the war and that symbolically conceded the issue of civil rights during wartime. In the editorial "Close Ranks" he says:

We of the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome [of the war]. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly with our eyes lifted to the hills. (697)

Although Du Bois's statement appears to advocate expedient accommodationism, he implies that black soldiers in the American army will be advancing their own cause by fighting for democracy. Events following the publication of this editorial, however, suggested that blacks could expect little return for their support of the war effort. Du

Bois, for a mix of personal and political reasons, did not receive a commission.

Meanwhile, the officer candidates at Fort Des Moines, many of the best and brightest young black men, suffered humiliating insults from their white training officers. Arthur Barbeau documents in *The Unknown Soldier: Black American Troops in World War I* that senior members of the War Department conspired to undermine the role of black officers. He cites official memos that stipulate that numbers of black officers should be severely limited, that black officers should be decommissioned for any minor infractions, and that no black officers should reach or exceed the rank of major. From the beginning the prospects for military service as a means to social equality appeared bleak.

The mere presence of blacks in uniform, moreover, inflamed racial violence in several communities where black soldiers were stationed. During the summer of 1917 the number of lynchings in the South spiked, a bloody riot erupted in East St. Louis, Illinois as black laborers moved into the area to work in war industry, and, most notably, a riot involving black soldiers occurred in Houston, Texas.⁷ The soldiers stationed in Houston were in one of only two black Army units existing before the war started. Tellingly, when America entered the war, both of these units were transferred, not to France, but to the Mexican border. In Houston the black soldiers were subjected to humiliating racial discrimination, which, coupled with the other blatant violence toward blacks taking place in the South and their disgraceful banishment to border patrol, made them especially disgruntled. On August 23 that tension erupted when a black soldier attempted to prevent a white policeman from beating a black woman. The soldier was beaten and arrested. Police also beat a black non-commissioned officer when he came to retrieve the soldier.

⁷ For details on these two incidents, see Rudwick, *Riot in East St. Louis, July 2 1917* and Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917*.

Later that evening a group of armed soldiers clashed with policemen and white citizens. Two soldiers and seventeen white men, including five policemen, were killed. A battalion of white soldiers was dispatched to intercede, and the entire black regiment was charged with mutiny. Twenty-nine soldiers were sentenced to death and executed and many more were sentenced to life in prison.⁸ As a result of the Houston riot, any remaining official support for blacks in combat waned, and plans for the black officer training school were almost canceled.

The Houston riot, nevertheless, had virtually no impact on plans for a black draft. But, as Col. Anderson's report on the Disposal of Colored Drafted Men makes clear, these soldiers were never intended for combat. Of the nearly 200,000 black soldiers in World War I, only about 40,000 were trained for combat; the balance served in labor battalions, which General Pershing euphemistically named Services of Supply, where they worked in what Arthur Barbeau calls the "military equivalent of chain gangs" (90). According to official documents, the Services of Supply, or SOS, in fact, was designed to mimic the normal experience of a black man in the South. Col. Anderson writes:

It is recommended that the question of race prejudice be not considered at all in the assigning of labor battalions to camps. These camps are mainly situated in the southern states. The negroes come mainly from the southern states. The saving of transportation to assemble the drafted negroes in camps nearest their homes and organize them into labor battalions and put them to work. Each southern state had negroes in blue overalls working throughout the state with a pick and shovel. When these colored men are drafted they are put in blue overalls (fatigue clothes) and continue to do work with a pick and shovel in the same state where they were previously working. If it is assumed that trouble will occur between whites and colored, that encourages it to occur, but if negroes are sent where they are needed and the possibility of trouble ignored there is not much probability of trouble occurring. (qtd. in Barbeau 199)

⁸ For details about the Houston riot, see Arthur Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldier*, 26-32 and Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917*.

Officially, the War Department intended for the U.S. Army to be as segregated as the U.S. South, thereby denying black soldiers the opportunity to symbolically earn civil rights in combat.

To a great extent, this approach to military segregation served its intended purpose. Black laborers in uniform contributed greatly to the war effort, building camps, loading and unloading ships, digging trenches, and burying corpses. To reinforce the essentially southern nature of black military service, most labor battalions were led by white southerners. In “An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War,” Du Bois characterizes the officers assigned to labor battalions as “southern men of a harsh, narrow type,” and he says that soldiers are “worked often like slaves.”⁹ He does, however, note one critically positive consequence of black service in labor battalions in France: “they saw the vision—they saw a nation of splendid people threatened and torn by a ruthless enemy; they saw a democracy which simply could not understand color prejudice.” In this sense, the promise of civil rights through carnage may have inadvertently been realized. Although the Army attempted to deliberately southernize the experience of black draftees and thus maintain the racial status quo, France itself suggested the practical possibility of racial equality on a national level.

The schism between degree of black agency and national identity in war time becomes more apparent when comparing the two units of black soldiers who did serve in combat. Although most black draftees were assigned to labor battalions, a small number joined pre-existing black National Guard units that received training for combat. The 93rd

⁹ Du Bois, “An Essay Toward the History of the Black Man in the Great War,” 700-701. After the Armistice, Du Bois intended to write a full-length history of black soldiers in the war, but he became involved in the Pan-African Conference, which occupied too much of his time to complete the project.

division, called Harlem's Hellfighters, consisted mostly of National Guard troops from New York,¹⁰ plus a small number of National Guardsmen from Chicago and some black draftees. Since most of the troops in this division had training before the war, they mobilized quickly, but the War Department initially hesitated to deploy the division. After a scuffle in Spartanburg, South Carolina between the black soldiers and white civilians threatened to become another riot, the War Department hastily shipped the unit to Europe. However, rather than placing the troops under the command of the American Expeditionary Force, which continued to field an all-white combat force, the War Department attached the division to an integrated unit of French Sengalese soldiers. Under French command, the 93rd division distinguished itself for bravery, serving 191 days under fire with no soldiers captured. Many members of the division won decorations for valor, including the Croix de Guerre, France's highest commendation.

The 92nd Division, nicknamed the Buffaloes, on the other hand, served with the American Expeditionary Force and received few commendations. In fact, the 92nd received little beyond consistent discouragement. Composed mostly of black draftees, the unit received little training. Initially, most of the unit's officers were black graduates of the training school at Ft. Des Moines, but over time they were replaced with white officers.¹¹ The 92nd was one of the last divisions deployed to Europe, where it was placed under command of General Robert Bullard of the 2nd Army. Bullard berated the division publicly and privately, and hesitated to place them in combat. When a German offensive forced Bullard to place the 92nd Division in the trenches, their lack of training and support

¹⁰ Stephen L. Harris notes that the black troops were rejected from New York's famous rainbow division because "black is not a color of the rainbow," *Harlem's Hellfighters* 98.

¹¹ For a short time, William Alexander Percy served as a training officer with the 92nd.

showed when the soldiers withdrew from their positions. The extent of the division's losses have been debated, but General Bullard labeled them cowards, declared black officers unfit for duty, and limited their service to intermittent patrols. Ironically, the black soldiers who literally fought for America faced enough challenges in the form of racial prejudice to ensure their failure, but the black soldiers who fought for France succeeded. This dichotomy illustrates the complexity and the promise of black nationalism, demonstrating that artificial constructions of race prevent black social equality and that civil rights could have beneficial effects for white Americans.

After the war, the problem of black exploitation in the military became brutally apparent. In the editorial "Returning Soldiers" Du Bois challenged America to realize the promise he had alluded to in "Close Ranks," the notion that racial solidarity during wartime would lead to civil rights in peacetime.¹² Cataloging the grievances of black Americans, he noted the ills of the racial status quo—lynching, ignorance, exploitation, and segregation—and he exhorted the returning soldiers to continue their fight:

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is *our* fatherland. . . . we are cowards or jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

We return.

We return from fighting.

We return fighting.

Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why. (380-381)

Du Bois's martial rhetoric reflected a new widespread militancy emerging among blacks following the war, a sense of practical yet impatient optimism that blacks would soon

¹² For details about the postwar movement for civil rights, see Mark Robert Schneider, "*We Return Fighting*": *The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age*.

enjoy the rights they had defended with their sweat and blood. John Hope Franklin describes this attitude as a “vague hope.” He says, “Both at home and abroad [blacks] had supported the war that was to make the world safe for democracy. Perhaps it was too much to hope that there could be the full realization of democracy within the foreseeable future. It was not too much, most Negroes reasoned, to hope that the war’s end would usher in a new period of opportunity both in the area of economic life and the sphere of civil rights” (343). But the democratic ideals that black soldiers imported from France were soon met with the realities of southern racial discrimination. In fact, as C. Vann Woodward argues in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, “in the postwar era there were new indications that the Southern Way was spreading as the American Way in race relations” (115). As a result of southern black populations spreading into northern industrial centers, racial tensions after the war actually became more inflamed than they had been before the war. And many southern whites openly worried that blacks who had served in France might have brought home radical ideas about racial equality.¹³

Racial tensions erupted in the summer of 1919. Returning white soldiers and an upswing in European immigration crowded black workers out of northern factories, raising unemployment levels among blacks in spite of postwar prosperity. But southern blacks continued to move north seeking the vague hope of opportunity. In June of 1919 the Red Summer began. By the end of the year approximately twenty-five race riots occurred, including major events in Longview, Texas and Chicago, Illinois that left many

¹³ A white man speaking to blacks in New Orleans quoted in Arthur Barbeau’s *The Unknown Soldier* summarizes the attitude of the southern racial hegemony: “You niggers are wondering how you are going to be treated after the war. Well, I’ll tell you, you are going to be treated exactly like you were before the war; this is a white man’s country and we expect to rule it” (175).

people—black and white—dead.¹⁴ Additionally, more than seventy blacks were lynched that summer, including ten black men in uniform. But racial violence against blacks after the war often met with a new response, retaliation. “In the post war racial strife,” says John Hope Franklin, “the Negro’s willingness to fight and to die in his own defense injected a new factor into America’s most perplexing social problem. It was no longer a case of one race intimidating another into submission. Now it was war in the full sense of the word, and the Negroes were as determined to win as they had been the war in Europe.”¹⁵ The war in France demonstrated to black Americans that nationalism itself was a cause worthy of fighting for, and crucial demographic changes taking place during the war concentrated black populations sufficiently to launch a meaningful offensive. In the postwar period, the crucial issue for blacks seeking American nationalism—social equality with other American citizens—was the nature of nationalism. Many blacks after the war saw French race relations as the model America should emulate and, thus, sought to reverse the creeping southernization of American race relations.

Nell Irvin Painter argues that “the senseless carnage of the First World War dealt white supremacy a tremendous blow,” making way for the emergence of black cultural forms, such as jazz, as signs of American culture, as opposed to a racially-subordinated subculture (132). At the critical juncture between increasing black social militancy and growing black cultural currency emerged a new, more confrontational generation of black writers. Many of these writers contributed to Alain Locke’s 1925 anthology *The New*

¹⁴ For a provocative, contemporary study of the Chicago riot, see Carl Sandburg, *The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919*.

¹⁵ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 350. In *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro*, Barbara Foley analyzes the connection between black postwar nationalism and the emerging American Communist Party.

Negro, which, notably, blends artistic production with social agenda. In his essay “The New Negro,” Locke explained the necessity of black art to black American identity, “this forced attempt to build [black] Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions” (12).¹⁶ For many writers who contributed to *The New Negro*, art was a primarily social act calculated to achieve the broken promise of World War I, civil rights through carnage, either literal or literary. Claude McKay’s poem “If We Must Die,” which became a rallying cry during the early Civil Rights movement, exemplifies this approach: “If we must die, let it not be like hogs / Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot ... Though far outnumbered let us show brave / And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow! / What though before us lies the open grave? / Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack, / Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” (*Complete Poems* 177-178).

After the war, black artists and intellectuals answered Du Bois’s rallying cry to return fighting. They asserted their American nationalism by creating a new distinctly American form of cultural production that blended traditional folkways rooted primarily in the South with new intellectual currents emanating from Europe and the North. For blacks, World War I, especially the exposure to social equality in France, was absolutely crucial to advancing the cause of civil rights. Blacks in uniform made tangible the rightful claim to full citizenship in America. During this aesthetic revolution, the image of the South became a signifier for black separatism and a metaphor for segregation. The

¹⁶ In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker says, “*The New Negro*, like the valued documents from which we grasp iconic images and pictorial myths of a colonial and frontier America, is perhaps our first *national* book, offering not only a description of streams of tendency in our collective lives but also an actual construction within its pages of the sounds, songs, images, and signs of a nation” (85).

trope of the black southern veteran, thus, became a symbol of black dispossession within the United States. The black veteran tangibly proved his right to full citizenship as an American, but in the South, his traditional home, the black veteran was exploited, marginalized, and brutalized. When aestheticized by a black artist, the brutalization of the black soldier became an act of rhetorical violence in the name of social equality.¹⁷

Not Only War is Hell

Victor R. Daly portrays the brutalization of a black soldier in the novel *Not Only War: A Story of Two Great Conflicts*. In fact, the two conflicts to which the title alludes are the war and the experience of being black in the South. The story features an interracial-doubled pair of protagonists from South Carolina who both happen to romance the same woman and who both happen to enlist in the Army and serve in the same area of France. The parallels between the white southern soldier and the black southern soldier make the tensions across the color line painfully, and sometimes tediously, apparent. The characters essentialize their respective racial identities so that they become near minstrel-like caricatures of blackness and whiteness, but the characterization serves a crucial purpose in this novel, to make the case for black nationalism. Curiously, considering the book's overtly racial theme, Daly does not depict the white protagonist, Robert Lee Casper, as a direct antagonist; instead, Daly suggests that the real conflict in the story, other than the war, stems not from individuals but from deeply-ingrained social values, which he, optimistically, suggests the war may serve to

¹⁷ The trope of the black World War I veteran continues to hold cultural capital. In Ernest Gaines novel, *A Gathering of Old Men*, for example, one of the old men, Coot, who claims to be the only veteran in the parish, wears his World War I uniform for apparently the first time since the war. He recalls being told by a white man "I better not ever wear that uniform or that medal again no matter how long I lived. He told me I was back home now, and they didn't cotton to no nigger wearing medals for killing white folks" (104).

change. His fictionalized account of black war experience supports the agenda of civil rights through carnage.

The novel takes place in the South, and, with the exception of a few French characters, all of the characters come from the South, but at the time he wrote the novel Victor Daly claims to have never been to the South. Born in New York City, Daly exemplified the ethos of the talented tenth, the segment of the black population that Du Bois exhorted to be the vanguard for the race. When the war began, Daly was a student at Cornell University; he enlisted in the Army and trained at the black officers' training camp at Ft. Des Moines. After training he served with the 93rd Division in France, where he saw combat. He returned to Cornell after the war, graduated in 1922, published *Not Only War* in 1932, and worked as managing editor of Carter Woodson's *Journal of Negro History* until 1934, when he joined the U.S. Department of Labor, where he worked until his retirement in 1966. Although not usually associated with the Harlem Renaissance, Daly knew James Weldon Johnson and Alain Locke, and he published three short stories in *The Crisis* between 1928 and 1932. Daly turned from writing to public service after his one novel, which has been called the "principal Afro-American fictionalization of the Great War experience."¹⁸ Although a few other novels fictionalize the experience of black soldiers, Daly's is the only novel that portrays black soldiers in combat, making his book unique and extremely valuable to a consideration of the war and the struggle for black nationalism.

¹⁸ Payne, "A MELUS Interview," 87.

But this leads back to a perplexing question. Since Daly had no personal experience in the South at the time he wrote the novel, why did he choose to set the story in the South? He suggests a possible answer to this question in the book's epigraph:

William Tecumseh Sherman branded War for all time when he called it Hell. There is yet another gaping, abysmal Hell into which some of us are actually born or unconsciously sucked. The Hell that Sherman knew was a physical one—of rapine, destruction and death. This other, is a purgatory for the mind, for the spirit, for the soul of men. Not only War is Hell. (7)

In this passage Daly juxtaposes the Civil War with World War I, and he connects war with the experience of racism. For black Americans, the objectives of World War I are the same as the Civil War, the realization of social equality, so the linkage between these events may be more than coincidental. Lee Greene, in fact, says that Daly “foregrounds racism as the ideological nexus between the American Civil War and World War I” (136). But that nexus may be as much geographical as ideological. Daly suggests that the South functions as an essential locus for the experience of blackness in America. Since most black Americans have direct personal or familial connections with the South and since blacks in the South experience social marginalization in the most overt way, the South itself acts as a complex antagonist in the novel. One could speculate that Daly's personal agenda in this novel is to humanize blacks and to press the case for social equality, and, as an educated northern black himself, he may realize that the most effective means for making that case is to address the experience of most black Americans rather than a small segment of blacks.

Therefore, Daly does not characterize the conflict in *Not Only War* as a solely racial issue; it is also a geographical issue. He portrays Bob Casper, the white character who serves as the antagonist, for example, as naturally kind and generous, but bound by

southern tradition. In the novel's opening scene Bob Casper's father shares the news that his efforts on behalf of the school board to build a new school for black children have been successful, which makes Bob proud of his father. The Caspers in Daly's book are one of the leading families of Upstate South Carolina, similar to the Robertsons in *Red Hills and Cotton*: Bob Casper's ancestors fought in the American Revolution, built a prosperous plantation, fought in the Civil War, rebuilt the home during Reconstruction, and successfully managed the politics of the New South. Thus, Bob Casper is not merely a white American. He is, as Daly says, "a true southerner" (7). When America entered the war in Europe, he enlisted immediately, largely out of allegiance to the typical southern ideology. Daly summarizes this ideology astutely: "[Bob Casper] was faithful to his creed. He believed in the Baptist Church, the supremacy of the white race and the righteousness of the Democratic Party" (13). In a sense, Casper resembles the idealized southerners in Thomas Dixon's novels, but Daly is careful to connect Casper's racism with his regionalism, not with an absolutist belief in the Great Chain of Being.

Daly parallels the characterization of Bob Casper, the scion of the white aristocracy, with Montie Jason, an ambitious, intelligent young black southerner. Jason is a student at an unnamed black college in the South, and he, like Daly, appears to be a member of the talented tenth. In other words, he has devoted his intellectual development to the advancement of his race. Jason's ideology obviously conflicts with the ideology that Casper embodies, but Jason, like Du Bois, feels optimistic that the war can lead to social equality. When his roommate calls World War I a "white man's war," Jason replies, "I think that if we roll up our sleeves and plunge into this thing, that the Government will reward the race for its loyalty" (20). Jason takes virtually the same

position that Du Bois articulates in “Close Ranks,” but, where Du Bois makes a bargain based on national security, Jason seems profoundly naïve. Or, perhaps, Daly may mean to subtly criticize Du Bois’s position on closing ranks, after all the idea of earning civil rights through carnage seems absurd. The sacrifice of innumerable black bodies to a foreign enemy could not even remotely serve to change domestic ideology. But a more tractable idea rests beneath this naivety. By serving in the Army black southerners gain an incontrovertible identity as soldiers in a nationalist cause, a tangible validation of their American identity. Jason may intuit that the uniform of an American soldier implicitly bolsters the case for American social equality, so he enlists at the first opportunity. Initially he applies for the black officers training camp at Fort Des Moines, although he realizes that older candidates are preferred. But for him, as for others in the black leadership at the time, the idea of black officers gloriously leading black soldiers into battle under an American banner epitomized racial equality.

Although Bob Casper and Montie Jason apparently come from the same area of South Carolina, because of the strictures of racial segregation in the South they have not met. They are indirectly connected, however, through a romantic triangle with Miriam Pinckney. Beautiful, with skin “like burnished gold” (24), and orphaned, Pinckney’s character invokes the tragic mulatta trope, similar to the heroine in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*. Pinckney’s case, however, is mitigated by the fact that her uncle, a tailor, has arranged for her education, first at a convent school in North Carolina and then at Oberlin in Ohio, where she has studied music. As a result of her education, she learns that racism has a unique regional basis. At the school in North

Carolina, she developed a close relationship with a young, white teacher from New England, which, as Daly says, affected her perception of racism and regionalism:

Miriam's friendship with Frieda Bentley, her teacher, had made an indelible impression on the young southern girl. It had cured her of the awe and fear of white people which she had brought to school with her from her home in South Carolina. Furthermore, she soon learned that all white people were not the ogres and beasts that she had been taught to believe; and finally, it had effectively destroyed the inferiority complex which she had attached to herself and her own people. (36)

Yet, with the exception of her experience with Frieda Bentley, Miriam Pinckney lives in a segregated environment, and virtually all of her interactions have been with other black people. The previous summer she had met and developed a flirtatious friendship with Montie Jason at an all-black beach community called Buckroe. When Jason encounters her again in Spartanburg, he evidently wishes to advance their relationship. But, before reconnecting with Jason, she meets Casper, which begins a complicated relationship that reveals much about the color line in the South.

Although they both realize the impropriety, Pinckney offers Casper a ride to the train station so that he will not miss his entrance interview to Officer Training School. Casper becomes infatuated with her. While on the train, he visits with her in the Jim Crow car, where she is obligated to remain, and, when he finds that she wishes to be a teacher, he tells her that his father is chairman of the county school board before hinting strongly that he wishes to see her again. Clearly, while Casper makes no overt sexual demands of her, she understands the typical nature of a relationship such as theirs. "Southern white men," she thinks, "could only seek friendship with comely colored girls for one purpose—a social equality that existed after dark" (40). Nevertheless, they do develop a relationship, which, though brief, appears to become physical. On one

occasion, in fact, Jason discovers Casper and Pinckney in a parked car at night on a dirt road. He draws the logical conclusion, and he blames Pinckney for being foolish. Daly uses the relationship between Casper and Pinckney to illustrate the racial double standard for interracial relationships. As Joel Williamson explains in *The Crucible of Race*, white men who desired black women generated the myth that “Negro women were especially lusty creatures, perhaps precisely because white men needed to think of them in that way” (307). So, from the antebellum period on, the taboo on sexual relationships between white men and black women went unenforced, but the myth of black female sexuality generated a corollary perception, the myth of the black beast rapist. In general, white southerners projected hypersexual characteristics on black men and women, and, to a great extent, the elaborate customs and mores of the color line were designed to prevent the possibility of sexual contact between white women and black men, primarily by demeaning and infantilizing black men. Thus, black men in uniform posed a significant threat to the southern way of life.

Rejected from Officer Training School because of his age, Jason enlists in the 93rd division while it trained briefly in Spartanburg. He aspires to earn a commission through the ranks, but his ambitions begin to dampen when he learns “that all of colored officers had either been left behind or had been transferred to other units” (60). A few days later, the division receives orders to return to New York to prepare for deployment at which time all of the existing officers were reassigned. Jaded that no black soldiers have been promoted, Jason comments, “It’s a darn shame that they don’t give some of us fellows a chance. I’ll bet we’ll pick up a bunch of crackers, too, from around these parts” (61). One of the new officers assigned to the unit is Lieutenant Bob Casper. Soon after joining the

unit, Casper speaks to the battalion commander on Jason's behalf, without Jason's permission and even though he still does not know Jason personally. He tells the Captain that Jason would "make a darn good non-com," which results in Jason being promoted to corporal (62). Casper's sponsorship seems unusual within the context of the narrative, since the two have had no personal contact and no events to this point indicate that Casper should be aware of Jason. Yet the sense of noblesse oblige inherent in Casper's sponsorship seems consistent with his character as paternalistic southern patrician.

The soldiers of the 93rd Division are deployed hastily, but, curiously, Daly omits from the text the actual reason for their deployment, a series of events that illustrates the practical effects of the color line in the South. In October of 1917, Noble Sissle, an officer in the 369th Regiment of the 93rd Division, entered a hotel lobby to purchase a newspaper.¹⁹ A white civilian patron of the hotel demanded that Sissle remove his hat. When Sissle did not comply quickly enough, the white man knocked his hat off his head, which caused a scuffle between the white civilians and black soldiers. A black officer stopped the fight before it escalated farther, but later that evening a group of armed black soldiers marched on the town, threatening to incite a riot such as the one that had happened in Houston a few months earlier. The Division Commander managed to restore order before violence erupted, but the situation prompted the War Department to defuse tension in the most expeditious manner, by sending the division overseas. At the time the War Department employed Emmett Scott, former personal secretary to Booker T.

¹⁹ The two black soldiers involved in the initial incident were Noble Sissle, who purchased the paper, and James Reese Europe, who quelled the crowd. Europe, before the war, had been a famous bandleader in New York, and during the war he became quite famous throughout France and England for playing jazz. Sissle played in his orchestra. After the war, Europe was considered one of the most prominent black artists in America. For more about his role in the Spartanburg incident and his role in the war, see Harris, *Harlem's Hellfighters*, 113-136.

Washington as Special Assistant to the Secretary of War, whom was dispatched to Spartanburg to ease racial tension in the camp. After the war, he described the event in his *Official History of the American Negro in the World War* as primarily a conflict of geography. “Spartanburg is a small southern city,” he says, “which closely follows what are usually regarded as southern traditions and prejudices in the treatment of the Negro. Some of its citizens rather felt that something was needed to let the jaunty Negro soldiers from New York ‘know their place’” (79). According to Scott, who appears to qualify as an expert on southern race relations, the prospect of southern blacks learning new ideas about the color line from outside influences threatened southern whites. Whites were, therefore, understandably nervous about black soldiers serving in France.

Jason and Casper serve in different regiments of the 93rd Division under French command near the Argonne Forest. Daly, curiously, abbreviates the experience of combat in the book with the exception of a short scene that portrays Jason acting heroically and earning—of his own merit—a promotion to sergeant. Instead, he focuses on relations between the black soldiers and the white French civilians. Jason, who happens to speak some French, finds himself assigned as the billeting officer for his unit. Strict protocols governed the quartering of black soldiers, but a lieutenant, noting an excess of suitable quarters, authorizes Jason and the other black non-commissioned officers to sleep in the home of an elderly French woman in the town of Laval. Daly describes Laval as a “hick” town by American standards, implicitly comparing it to Spartanburg (74). The reception Jason receives when he arrives at his billet even reminds him of home. The old woman recoils at his appearance and declares that her home is only available to officers. When the woman’s granddaughter asks who is at the door, the woman replies, “Un noir.... Un

American” (77). Her comment makes Jason dishearteningly aware of his fragmented nationalism. “The world over,” he thinks, “a nigger first—an American afterwards” (77).

His experience of prejudice in France, however, proves to be brief when the woman’s granddaughter, Blanche Aubertin, welcomes him into the home. She convinces her grandmother to allow Jason and the other black soldiers to stay in their home, but her presence unnerves Jason, who has been thoroughly conditioned by the taboo on white women. He deliberately avoids the home during waking hours, until one day an errand takes him there in the afternoon. When he enters the house, he hears her playing the piano, which reminds him of Miriam Pinckney and implicitly establishes the two women as a doubled pair. Aubertin asks Jason to help with her English, which he reluctantly agrees to do. During their first lesson, Jason also teaches her about racism and the South:

Montie Jason was the first Negro, as well as the first American, that Blanche Aubertin had ever spoken to in her life. Now that he had lost some of his reticence, there were certain questions she was burning to ask him. Montie had a great deal of difficulty in making her understand that South Carolina was just as much a part of the continental United States, as Normandy was a part of France. Then she wanted to know why he was light brown in color, and had soft, wavy, black hair, while the other sergeants were all black, with funny, crinkly hair. Montie was amused at this; but he realized that the amusement was not due to the question itself, but to his own inability to answer it. She was so naïve. Then she wanted to know why all the officers were white men. (82)

The sequence of revelation in this paragraph suggests much about black identity and the color line. Since Blanche has no previous experience with Americans, she has no understanding of the color line, but Jason teaches her first about how geographic region defines his identity and then about how race defines his identity, and then about how the customs of the color line are enforced. This passage makes two crucial implications: first,

race relations are socially determined, and, second, geography acts as the most significant social determinant.

Theoretically, race relations between blacks and whites in France, then, should bear virtually no similarities to race relations in the South, which means that within the space of wartime blacks could be Americans, but, ironically, only on foreign soil. This anomaly may explain why primarily white southerners were placed in charge of black units, to normalize race relations according to southern standards. A confrontation takes place between Jason and Casper over Aubertin, inverting the romantic triangle between the two involving Miriam Pinckney and illustrating the function of the black beast rapist syndrome. Upon finding Jason in Aubertin's home, Casper immediately concludes that a sexual relationship has taken place. When Jason, insulted by Casper's insinuations, responds with asperity, Casper becomes incensed: "he felt like striking the insolent nigger" (89). Ironically, this moment marks the first actual meeting between Jason and Casper, and for both men their roles are dictated by the racial and regional identities. Casper's accusations enrage Jason, who realizes that his identity as a soldier has been replaced with his identity as a black southerner, a man without an identity. "I see," [Jason] said at length, slowly and deliberately, between his teeth, 'you carry your dirty southern prejudice everywhere you go'" (90). Jason's reference to the color line as a southern characteristic suggests that blackness as a constructed social state is a transregional phenomenon. Casper's response to this statement reinforces his sense of racial entitlement as a white southerner. "Listen to this nigger," he shouts, "I had those chevrons put on your sleeve, and I'll be damned if I don't have them ripped off again!"

(90). Casper evidently sees Jason as a subject to be defined according to his own criteria based on southern tradition.

Casper, however, acts as a signifier for a deeply-ingrained set of attitudes and social practices that had become institutionalized. In fact, while most Americans, at least in Daly's depiction, regarded the color line as a southern institution, during World War I the War Department made efforts to establish the color line as official policy among the Allies. While in Europe after the Armistice gathering information on black soldiers, W. E. B. Du Bois discovered a document produced by the American Expeditionary Force to inform French military and civilian officials about how to treat black soldiers. The document, titled "Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops," articulates the "position occupied by Negroes in the United States," explaining, with amazing clarity, the problem of black national hybridity:

[Americans] are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations which to them appear intolerable.... Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible.... The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. For instance, the black American troops in France have, by themselves, given rise to as many complaints of attempted rape as all the rest of the army. (17)

To mitigate the possibility of egalitarian ideas arising as a result of contact with French social equality and, more threateningly, to control the black beast rapist, the document includes a number of guidelines for relations between French people and black Americans. French soldiers, for example, should not eat with or shake hands with black soldiers, and French soldiers should take pains not to praise black soldiers in the presence of white soldiers. Finally, French citizens are admonished that "Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women and black

men” (17). The document makes no mention of the degree to which white Americans typically display their outrage.

In the context of military service, spectacle lynching, the most likely punishment for Jason in South Carolina, is not feasible since the bloodthirsty mobs of white men to carry out the act could not be found on foreign soil. Instead, Casper has Jason charged by a court martial, an ersatz lynching. He receives a relatively light sentence, demotion to private, but the experience leaves him completely disillusioned about the place of black soldiers in the war. He hears the phrases used to legitimate this war in his head, but he realizes that they do not apply to him: “make the world safe for democracy—war to end war—self determination for oppressed people. But they don’t mean black people. Oh no, black people don’t count. They only count the dead” (92). Jason’s comprehension of the black soldier’s actual role in the war foreshadows the experience black soldiers will face upon returning to the United States. He essentially states that the acquisition of civil rights through carnage is a myth, meaning that black soldiers have been deliberately deceived into fighting for a national ideal they cannot attain, thus underscoring his own naivety.

Yet Daly’s fictionalization of the black soldier does not devolve into cynicism. While Jason recognizes that social equality is, at least for now, a myth, he maintains enough idealism to believe in common humanity. Soon after the court martial proceedings a German offensive begins that forces the entire division to the front to repel the attack. Although stripped of rank, Jason continues to lead his troops into battle. As he charges a heavily-fortified machine gun emplacement, he is forced to take cover in a trench littered with American corpses. From beneath the bodies he hears a weak voice

groaning, which happens to be that of Bob Casper. This moment forces Jason to the ultimate test of his identity. For a moment he waivers, filled with outrage at the southern racist who has already subjectified him, but he intuits that abandoning Casper will have the effect of justifying his subjectification. Jason nurses Casper's wound, but the irony of the situation preoccupies his thoughts. "This same man had preferred charges against him," he thinks, "that had caused him to be court-martialed and reduced to the ranks. And only because he, Montie, was a Negro—and Casper was a southern white man" (103). The desperation of the situation allows both men to overcome their racial essentialism; Casper even avers enigmatically that since he had Jason charged "war isn't the only hell that [he has] been through lately" (104). If Daly's novel has an outward social agenda, it crystallizes at this moment in the text as both men share a racial conversion experience. However, their mutual brotherhood and the message of social equality are only momentary. After a burst of machine gun fire, the two men fall together, "two bodies slumped as one" (106). The book's final line underscores Daly's message: "They found them the next morning, face downward, their arms about each other, side by side" (106).

The novel's ending suggests that social equality is possible only on the battlefield and even then only actualized among the dead. Black soldiers who survived the war, whether they had served in the Service of Supply or in the trenches, found when they returned to the United States that their war for nationalism had only just begun. While in one sense black soldiers did make their case for civil rights through carnage, Jason's humiliation and his court martial indicate that the argument has, except in isolated cases, been moot. The War Department deliberately segregated the ranks and intentionally maintained a state of race relations that mimicked race relations in the South. Clearly,

black veterans who returned to their homes in the South after the war expecting to find social equality or even respect were mistaken. In fact, black veterans faced even greater animosity from white antagonists who intended to deliver the message that any social equality they experienced in France would not be found in the South. In Blakely, Georgia, for example, Wilbur Little, was met at the train depot by a group of white men the moment he returned home and forced to strip off his uniform. A few days later, he defied their warning not to wear the uniform again in public, and he was killed.²⁰ After the war, black veterans were more likely to find carnage in the South than civil rights.

The Lynching of Dr. Kenneth Harper, A. E. F.

Walter White's first novel, *The Fire in the Flint*, uses carnage to make the case for civil rights. Born in Atlanta in the 1890s, White had personal memories of the Atlanta riot of 1906, which led him to pursue his life's work in civil rights, eventually earning the nickname "Mr. NAACP." During World War I, White used his ability to pass for white—genealogically, his black ancestors were distant, and he had light skin, blond hair, and blue eyes—and his knowledge of southern racial customs to investigate lynchings and race riots for the NAACP. In *Fire in the Flint* White portrays the experience of Kenneth Harper, a black native southerner who studied medicine in the North and who served as an officer in the Army in France. Although poised to be a leader of his race, Harper returns to his hometown in South Georgia to open a segregated clinic, initially hoping for a prosperous career as an accommodationist professional. But he finds himself drawn into the nascent post-war movement for civil rights, and, because he presents a threat to the

²⁰ See Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 248.

white racial hegemony, he is lynched. White invokes the trope of the black veteran, in this case the single most accomplished member of the community, to illustrate the arbitrary, violent, dehumanizing nature of race relations in the South after the war.

Unlike Daly, White did not serve in the Army during the war, although he did attempt to enlist. In his autobiography, *A Man Called White*, he recounts that he took a required physical examination to qualify for the officers' training camp at Fort Des Moines, but he and two other light skinned recruits were summarily flunked, while a frail, dark skinned applicant was accepted. Later, White learned why light-skinned applicants were denied. "Wild rumors," he says, "born of guilty consciences no doubt, were sweeping the South that the 'Huns' were industriously at work among Southern Negroes to spread unrest. These German agents and spies, so the tales ran, were capitalizing on Negro bitterness against lynching and race prejudice" (*A Man Called White* 36). White southerners feared that blacks capable of passing could coordinate an attack of black southerners on their white oppressors, a fear rooted in Nat Turner's insurrection of 1831. White dismisses the notion of black treachery against whites, but he, as well as anyone, knew that blacks had ample reason to resent white southerners. Since he was exempt from the draft due to his skin color, he went to work for the NAACP investigating lynchings in the South. In the same way that the narratives of fugitive slaves help to make the case for emancipation, the NAACP hoped that descriptions of lynchings would raise support for anti-lynching laws.²¹ After the war, H. L. Mencken suggested that he write a novel that dramatized race relations in the South

²¹ After a few years of investigating lynchings for the NAACP, White wrote one of the most provocative and insightful studies of race relations in the South, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*.

and that drew upon his experience as an investigator of lynchings. Inspired, he wrote *The Fire in the Flint* in twelve days.

White's novel may be one of the clearest, most accurate descriptions of racism in the early twentieth-century South from the perspective of a black southerner, a testament to White's unquestioned expertise on the nuances of racial stratification in the modern South. White uses Kenneth Harper as a lens through which to examine the post-war fluctuation in racial dynamics in the region. Initially, upon his return from the war to Central City, the fictional South Georgia community of his birth,²² Harper accedes to the accommodationism of his father's generation. He, in fact, calls upon his father's mantra which had been Booker T. Washington's mantra—"Any Negro can get along without trouble in the South if he only attends to his own business"—when he opens his own clinic (17). But Kenneth's story reveals two obvious problems with this ethos. First, as southern blacks moved into northern cities during and after the war, southern race relations were increasingly becoming the norm for American race relations, a condition which, as White says, "greatly accentuated the race problem as a national, instead of merely a Southern, tragedy" (*A Man Called White* 72). In other words, World War I made the problem of the color line a national, rather than regional, problem. Second, increasing tensions between whites and blacks in the postwar South made it inherently impossible for a black man, especially a black intellectual, to mind his own business. Because of his education and his experience outside the South, Harper both posed a perceived threat to the southern white racial hegemony and represented the most likely catalyst for meaningful advances toward social equality.

²² Kenneth Robert Janken notes that Central City appears to be based primarily on Albany, Georgia, the city that W. E. B. Du Bois explored in *The Souls of Black Folk*; see Janken, *White*, 106.

Harper's exposure to racial dynamics in the North and in France makes him incompatible with accommodationism. Before the war he attended Atlanta University and then studied medicine in New York, but that limited exposure did not necessarily make him a subversive agent. Central City, in fact, already had a black doctor who had studied in the North a generation earlier who managed to navigate the contradictory avenues of accommodationism. Harper, however, had the additional element of military service in France, which complicated his place in the community. After residency he trained at the segregated officers' training camp at Fort Des Moines, received a commission as a First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps, and deployed to France with the 92nd Division. He served as a combat surgeon near the front line, where he learned enough of man's inhumanity toward man to abhor violence, and then he studied for six months at the Sorbonne, although military red tape made French universities much more difficult to enter for black soldiers than for white soldiers. As a result of his education and his experience in France, Harper seems uniquely fitted to be a leader for his race, even though he initially resists the idea of racial antagonism. But, when racial violence erupts in Central City, he reflexively begins to see national racial integration based on his experience in France as an ideal objective:

Maybe in time the race problem would be solved just like that ... when some great event would wipe away the artificial lines ... as in France ... He thought of the terrible nights and days in the Argonne ... He remembered the night he had seen a wounded black soldier and a wounded white Southern one, drink from the same canteen ... They didn't think about color at those times ... Wouldn't the South be a happy place if this vile prejudice didn't exist? (226)

Harper's idealization of equality calls upon precisely the same imagery as Daly's depiction of social equality in no man's land. Perhaps, in both cases, the key to civil

rights is transcending place and nation as components of racial identity. Perhaps if there were no South, then there would be no racism.

But that equation proves to be insurmountable. As the Great Migration indicates, black southerners cling to their regional identity as tightly as white southerners do, even though that identity includes an enduring legacy of racial subjectivity. Black southerners in the North, like many other immigrant populations, tended to live in insular communities and to maintain their traditional religious practices, foodways, language, and social mores. This behavior, of course, may be as much involuntary as voluntary, but the fact remains that at least during the first half of the twentieth century black southerners living outside the South duplicated the typical practices of displaced communities. The connection between place and identity for black southerners, however, may be more complicated than for other immigrant populations. In most cases, Old World immigrants came to America seeking economic opportunity, but they maintained their original citizenship or naturalized as American citizens. Black southerners did not have either option available, so they existed as a displaced population within their native nation, a brutal irony of racial identity. Kenneth, for his part, realizes that he has greater claims to belonging, if not equality, in the South where he has family and an established community than in the North. Even though he could, hypothetically, earn more and enjoy a relatively greater degree of social equality in the North, he feels a greater connection to and sense of responsibility for the people in his hometown.

Central City after the war, however, shows signs of increased racial tension, especially among returning black soldiers. During the frenzied patriotism of war time, white and black southerners had been mutually interested in military preparations, but for

different reasons. White southerners like Paul Green and William Alexander Percy had gone to war to make the world safe for democracy, supporting the overt agenda for America's entrance into the war, so their readjustment after the war, except for the occasional grisly flashback, had been relatively easy. Black southerners had a suppressed agenda for supporting the war for, as Du Bois said, closing ranks with their fellow white citizens, which made their readjustment to racial subjectivity after the war excruciatingly difficult. White explains the cognitive dissonance returning black soldiers felt as the result of a suppressed ideology:

Many [black southerners] entered the army, not so much because they were fired with the desire to fight for an abstract thing like world democracy, but, because they were a race oppressed, they entertained very definite beliefs that service in France would mean a more decent regime in America, when the war was over, for themselves and all other who were classed as Negroes. Many of them, consciously or subconsciously, had a spirit which might have been expressed like this: "Yes, we'll fight for democracy in France, but when that's over with we're going to expect and we're going to get some of that same democracy for ourselves right here in America." It was because of this spirit and determination that they submitted to the rigid army discipline to which was often added all the contumely that race prejudice could heap upon them. (43-44)

While most black soldiers intended to return fighting, Kenneth sublimated his racial ideology beneath his intellectual abstraction. Rather than ponder the struggle for racial equality during the war, he preferred to occupy his mind with works of literature. In effect, he fails to see his race as a key component of his identity as an American.

That attitude begins to change after he returns to the South and experiences racial subjectivity again. The white racial hegemony forces him to recognize his racial identity by challenging any latent aspirations toward equality that he may have developed during the war. On one occasion, Kenneth meets a white doctor leaving a black patient. The paternalistic doctor warns Kenneth not to spread any "No'then ideas 'bout social

equality” because racial tensions have already escalated since “these niggers who went over to France and ran around with them French women have been causin’ a lot of trouble ‘round here, kickin’ up a rumpus, and talkin’ ‘bout votin’ and ridin’ in the same car with white folks” (53). The white doctor’s bigotry exemplifies white southern animosity toward notions of social equality, but it also reveals that white southern identity is embedded in a matrix of regional and racial attitudes. As Grace Elizabeth Hale explains in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, white southerners defined themselves in opposition to white northerners and southern blacks, so the junction of those two oppositional identities—black southerners converging with white northerners—caused white southerners great anxiety. Animosity toward blacks blurred with animosity toward northerners and, even worse, foreigners, which combined with generalized anxiety about the pace of social change taking place in the region: violence toward blacks was the inevitable outcome.

Meanwhile, largely as a result of white supremacy, Kenneth begins to identify as a black southerner and, both in spite of and because of warnings to mind his place, he develops a vision of racial equality. Soon after his return to Central City, Kenneth realizes the flaw in his father’s mantra; he cannot mind his own business in the South. After personally witnessing the cruelties and absurdities of the color line, including treating white men for syphilis contracted from black prostitutes, treating black patients ignored by white physicians, and treating a dying black man murdered by a white man, he finds himself compelled to act as representative of blacks in his community, abandoning the self-interest that initially dominated his attitude toward the black community. He becomes involved with a movement to incorporate black farmers in the

area for their common economic and social protection, The National Negro Farmer's Co-operative and Protective League. In contemplating the objectives for this organization, he imagines the end result of civil rights:

Though his interest was in the Negro tillers of the soil, success in their case would inevitably react favorably on the white—just as oppression and exploitation of the Negro had done more harm to white people in the South than to Negroes. Kenneth felt the warm glow of the crusader in a righteous cause. Already he saw a new day in the South with white and colored people free from oppression and hatred and prejudice—prosperous and contented because of that prosperity. He could see a lifting of the clouds of ignorance which hung over all the South, an awakening of the best in all the people of the South. (146)

From Kenneth's perspective, racial equality would benefit whites as much as blacks and have an uplifting impact on the entire region. He, of course, realizes that the white hegemony does not necessarily share his optimism.

After World War I, several grassroots organizations, such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, agitated for labor equality and civil rights.²³ White bases his description of The National Negro Farmer's Co-operative and Protective League on The Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America, a group of black sharecroppers in Phillips County, Arkansas who attempted to incorporate in 1919.²⁴ In an effort to intimidate the organization, a group of white farm owners and police officers fired on a meeting of the Progressive Farmers held in a church. The sharecroppers shot back, a response that apparently surprised the white mob. Within hours, a riot erupted: many panicked whites fled, mobs randomly attacked and murdered blacks, soldiers just

²³ For details on the emerging black labor movement, see Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*.

²⁴ Richard Wright briefly lived with his aunt and uncle in Elaine, Arkansas, the seat of Phillips County, until his uncle was murdered by a white mob in 1916. He describes his life there in his autobiography *Black Boy*.

returned from Europe were mobilized to quell the violence, and the governor personally oversaw the restoration of order and the execution of justice.²⁵ Dozens of blacks were killed during the riot, and seventy-nine more were tried by a summary tribunal sanctioned by the Governor, which sentenced a dozen to death and the remainder to harsh prison sentences. White visited Phillips County to investigate the riot on behalf of the NAACP. Using his usual technique of passing as a white journalist, he interviewed the Governor, who blamed the violence on northern agitators, and met with several prominent members of the white community in Phillips County.²⁶ White himself came close to being lynched during this episode; only a timely warning prevented him from walking into a gruesome death.²⁷

White knew from personal experience the danger Kenneth faced. Opposing white supremacy could have serious, even deadly, consequences for any person, whether black or white. But Kenneth also knew that his organization needed the support and the indirect protection of respected members of the white community. To that end, he approaches Judge Richard Stevenson, a liberal white lawyer in Central City, to act as legal advisor for the organization.²⁸ White describes Stevenson as “a curious combination of contradictions” (151). Now quite elderly, he had served with Stonewall Jackson during the Civil War, but, rather than valorizing the Lost Cause and the New South Creed, he

²⁵ For details about the Phillips County riot, see Grif Stockley, *Blood in the Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres of 1919* and Phillip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, 237-245.

²⁶ White describes his experience in Phillips County in his autobiography, *A Man Called White*, 46-51.

²⁷ White narrates his escape in “I Investigate Lynchings,” an article originally published in *American Mercury* in 1929.

²⁸ White may have based Judge Stevenson on Will Alexander, head of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, who, while liberal on race matters, discouraged racial subversion. For details about Alexander, see John Edgerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 47-51.

became disenchanted with the direction of change in the region as greed, in his opinion, displaced integrity. Therefore, he agrees to prepare the legal documents necessary to incorporate the organization, but he realizes that any attempt on the part of blacks to oppose the white racial hegemony would be greeted with suspicion and resistance. He warns Kenneth to beware of the Ku Klux Klan, which, as Kenneth already knows, is especially active in that area and which has been known to lynch black men on the flimsiest of pretexts. Judge Stevenson and Kenneth Harper agree that racism has nearly as many deleterious effects on whites as on blacks, but, as Stevenson explains, racism has become entrenched as a crucial component of white southern identity. To oppose racism, as Stevenson explains, is as much anathema in a region governed by the savage ideal as opposing Christianity or the Democratic Party.

Warned but undeterred, Kenneth spearheads the organization, arranging meetings with the founding members, raising money, and recruiting members. The plan behind the Co-operative League calls for black sharecroppers, who have long been economically exploited by white land owners, to pool their meager resources to purchase farm supplies at a fair price and to provide legal representation to enforce fair contracts. But the organizations' overt labor objectives implied subversive—in the opinion of white supremacists—civil rights objectives. In fact, although Kenneth represents the organization as an economic collective, he subconsciously sees it as an effective means of achieving civil rights through peaceful, legal means. While speaking to a church congregation Kenneth momentarily loses his reserved demeanor as he exhorts the crowd to fight for social equality. “You husbands and sons and brothers,” he says to the crowd, “three years ago you were called on to fight for liberty and justice and democracy! Are

you getting it?,” to which the crowd responds, “No!” (179). Echoing the rhetoric of the labor movement and the civil rights movement, he tells the crowd that only collective, nonviolent action will secure the rights that have been denied them, and he warns them that continued passive resistance will produce no results. The war, significantly, acts as a key signifier for citizenship in Kenneth’s speech. By making this speech, Kenneth realizes that he will become a target for intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan and that the men and women who join his organization will also be taking a serious risk.

The next night after Kenneth’s organization holds its meeting, a Klan rally takes place, underscoring the inevitable tension between racial equality and white supremacy. The Klan leaders accuse the Co-operative and Protective League of plotting violent insurrection and warn that only preemptive violence will deter a massacre of white women and children. Walter White, who had infiltrated numerous Klan meetings while investigating lynchings for the NAACP, describes the nuances and ceremonies of the clandestine agency in great detail, which, in part, makes *The Fire in the Flint* a subversive text from the perspective of the white social hegemony. In the book, most of the community’s elected officials, including the sheriff, are also members of the Klan. Therefore, any black person targeted by the Klan could expect to find no protection or redress from any quarter, except, perhaps, the federal government. So Kenneth’s position is extremely precarious when the Klan determines that he must be prevented from promoting the Co-operative and Protective League.

Violence first erupts when Kenneth is away from town. In an attempt to provoke a response from Kenneth, a group of white Klan thugs abduct and rape his younger sister, Mamie. In Kenneth’s absence, his younger brother Bob, a Harvard-bound law student,

seeks vengeance. Arming himself, he confronts the white thugs and, much to their surprise, shoots two of them dead and then flees. Bob, always more militant than his brother, may be a more accurate personification of the New Negro—the ethos expressed in McKay’s poem “If We Must Die”—than his more assimilationist brother. After the shooting, a lynching party, originally intended for Kenneth, convenes to track and eventually torture and kill Bob. But Bob, personifying McKay’s poem, refuses to die like a hog. Calculating the number of bullets he has left and reserving one for himself, he faces the murderous, cowardly pack and shoots as many of them as he can before killing himself. His suicide, thus, reinforces his resistance by denying the white supremacists the chance to dominate him in any way. By refusing to be lynched, he asserts a radical, subversive form of agency.

While away from town, Kenneth meets with a group of white liberal businessmen who agree to sponsor his organization, which promises to make his vision an actuality, but when he returns to Central City the news of his sister’s rape and his brother’s death forces him into an unmitigated rage. In his rage, he recalls the shibboleths of democracy that he idealized, and he finally realizes the absurdity of American racism and the arbitrariness of the color line:

“Superior race”! “Preservers of civilization”! “Superior” indeed! They called Africans inferior! They, with smirking hypocrisy, reviled the Turks! They went to war against the “Huns” because of Belgium! None of these had ever done a thing so bestial as these “preservers of civilization” in Georgia! Civilization! Hell! The damned hypocrites! The liars! The fiends! “White civilization”! Paugh! Black and brown and yellow hands had built it! The white fed like carrion on the rotting flesh of the darker peoples! And called their toil their own! And burned those on whose bodies their vile civilization was built! (271)

Juxtaposing the viciousness of the attacks on his family with the vacuity of the abstractions of white civilization, Kenneth's tirade reveals the utter futility of accommodationism. When he first returned to Central City, he intended to observe the tenets of the color line, and when he organizes the Co-Operative and Protective League he intended to advocate for economic and social justice, but only after his brother's death does he actually understand the full implications of racial equality. Now, rather than elevating blacks to the station of whites, he sees that equality means transcending the ruthlessness of the white racial establishment.

His first impulse, naturally, is to follow Bob's example and kill every white person in sight, but his mother pleads for him to relent lest she lose both her sons in the same week. As soon as Kenneth begins to regain his composure, he receives a call that forces him to attempt to transcend his contempt for white people. For the previous few days he had been treating Mary Ewing, the daughter of a white storekeeper, for gynecological hemorrhage. Hers had been a difficult case, and the white physicians in the community actually deferred to his superior training in the case. Under his care, Mary had made progress, but on the evening of his return to Central City her mother calls, telling him that she has had a turn for the worse and begging him to attend to her. For a time, Kenneth refuses, cursing the entire white race. Eventually, when his anger subsides, he realizes a sense of common humanity—true racial equality—and, in spite of apparent danger, he goes to treat Mary. White himself describes the climactic scenario as “melodramatic,” which may be an understatement, but it serves an effective purpose, challenging virtually all the taboos of race relations in the postwar South. (*A Man Called White* 67). In addition to forcing Kenneth to recognize a white person as an equal, the

scenario places him in a home with two white women without the supervision of a white man, since Roy Ewing, Mary's father, had ironically gone to Atlanta the previous day to ask the governor to provide protection for Kenneth. Even though Kenneth and the Ewings manage to find a momentary sense of equality in a moment of crisis, their situation does nothing to change the culture of racism.²⁹

Klan thugs watching Kenneth realize their pretext for lynching when they see him enter the Ewings's house. Tellingly, they assume that he has come for sexual purposes, which they attribute to his exposure to French women. "I allus said these niggers who went to France an' ran with those damn French women'd try some of that same stuff when they came back!," says one of the thugs, "Ol' Vardaman was right! Ought never t' have let niggers in th' army anyhow!" (286). This statement encapsulates both the most common justification for lynching and the most pernicious reason for preventing black soldiers for serving in the Army. With this rationalization, representatives of the white social hegemony act to restore their artificial social order through violent means. They ambush Kenneth as he leaves the house. Although unarmed, he fights back until overpowered. Rather than describe the macabre details of the lynching, White concludes the novel with a terse press release that affirms the norms of the white social hegemony by dehumanizing Kenneth. The release names him as "Doc Harper," reducing his profession and his education to a casual nickname, and charges him with criminal assault on the wife of a prominent white citizen. Moreover, the release suggests that he was a coward, saying that he "became frightened before accomplishing his purpose," and that he was guilty, saying that he confessed (300). The press release says that he was "put to

²⁹ In *Rope and Faggot*, White explores the sexualized rationale for lynching; see 54-81.

death by a mob which numbered five thousand. He was burned at the stake” (300). In the case of the lynching of Dr. Kenneth Harper, white supremacists act as a collective entity to prevent the development of racial equality through a violent, ritualistic spectacle of black degradation.

This ritualization, Trudier Harris argues in *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, is essential to preserving the culture of racism. Any subversive action, real or imagined, on the part of black people constitutes an act of evil, defined as a transgression against the white social hegemony. “In order to exorcise the evil and restore the topsy-turvy world to its rightful position,” Harris says, “the violator must be punished. . . . Symbolic punishment becomes communal because the entire society has been threatened; thus the entire society must act to put down the violator of the taboo.”³⁰ A lynching, therefore, is not a mere punishment; it is a ritual designed to convey a message that the white people control southern society by dominating black people.³¹ The rope and faggot as extensions of socially-constructed whiteness control and define blackness.

But White’s aestheticized depiction of a lynching actually subverts the white social hegemony. His literary portrayal of lynching rituals undercuts the rationale for preserving and maintaining white supremacy. As a military veteran, a skilled doctor, a reluctant and cooperative race leader, a sensitive son and brother, and a charming love interest, Harper plays an idealized multiplex role in the text, but his idealization has a clear purpose. He, who once fought to preserve democracy, has been denied the most

³⁰ Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, 12.

³¹ For additional studies of lynching in the South, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death*; Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence*; and James Allen, *Without Sanctuary*.

fundamental right granted to American citizens, the right to life, much less liberty and the pursuit of happiness. His brutal murder exposes for the literary audience the absurdity and arbitrariness of life in the wrong side of the color line. In effect, his story, like his actions, promotes the cause of social equality, using literary carnage to achieve civil rights.

Races and Nations are Skunks

Racism inherently complicates the claim to national identity. The subordinated race in any hegemonically-constructed racial binary must, in order to achieve a degree of political agency, recognize its cultural hybridity. Black Americans, certainly, are a hybrid race, simultaneously same and other within the American racial milieu. Hybridity destabilizes identity construction both by forcing the hybrid person to choose between potential nationality and by allowing the hegemonic entity to exclude the hybrid individual. In the United States, World War I made the issue of hybridity especially problematic. The wave of hyper-patriotism that swept the nation essentially fragmented the immigrant nation's international collective, segmenting the population along lines of national ancestry into newly hyphenated categories such as Italian-American, Irish-American, Franco-American, and German-American.³² The fragmentation of American nationalism further alienated the nation's most prominent racially-hybridized group. Black Americans found themselves subjectified according to their race, even when new immigrants could assert the hegemonic force of national inclusion simply because they shared the phenotypical characteristics of white Americans. "As black intellectuals

³² For a discussion of American nationalist fragmentation in the context of World War I, see Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," 248-265.

became increasingly aware that the principle of national self-determination did not apply to them,” Michelle Stephens says, “the underlying imperialism of the League of Nations became more and more apparent.... Black radicals in Harlem who had taken up the banner of self-determination used internationalism and revolution to modify and transform black nationalist ideologies.”³³ Perhaps few other individuals understood the problem of racial hybridity and black identity during World War I as well as Claude McKay.

Born in Jamaica in 1889, McKay moved to New York 1912. From his vantage point as a foreigner living among black southern immigrants in the North, he could observe the alienation and dispossession of his fellow blacks. Although McKay continued to identify himself as a West Indian, he spent most of his life wandering, seeking a physical or spiritual home. In the biography *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, Wayne Cooper says he “began to face the highly personal yet broadly representative problems of black identity and alienation during World War I” (82). For McKay, like many other black intellectuals, the war was a watershed moment that exposed both the absurdity of American racism and the prospect of nationalism, or, perhaps more precisely, transnationalism. After the war he went to England where he met George Bernard Shaw, then he spent a year in Russia studying socialism. Disenchanted with communism, he then spent a few years during the 1920s in France, where he wrote two novels before returning to America. McKay’s writings betray his preoccupation with nationality and identity, and, while he occasionally idealized Jamaica, his books reveal his sense of dispossession and his search for home. For example, he titled his first novel

³³ Stephens, “Black Transnationalism and the Politics of National Identity,” 598.

Home to Harlem, and he titled his autobiography *A Long Way from Home*, but the text of both these works suggests that home both for his characters and himself may be chimerical.

McKay may be an example of extreme hybridity, a racially subjectified foreigner living, at least for part of his life, among displaced black southerners in the North. McKay, thus, has an especially keen insider-outsider perspective on American race relations. While in Russia, McKay wrote a short analysis of racism in America at the request of Leon Trotsky to be used as a training manual for communist agitators attempting to spark proletarian revolution in the United States. The book, *Negroes in America*, briefly explains the history of racism since the end of the Civil War. Originally published in Russian, the book was translated into English in the 1970s. The text juxtaposes socialist rhetoric with amateur sociological analysis, creating a curious capsule of post-World War I black nationalist ideology. McKay, significantly, locates black identity primarily in the South, where he says that blacks have been blamed and punished by white southerners for their defeat in the Civil War. He describes the South's post-Reconstruction white hegemony as vindictive, coercive, and cruel. And he describes black southerners as trapped between the arbitrary violence of the Ku Klux Klan and the stultifying vocationalism of Booker T. Washington: in other words, as a fertile ground for socialist revolution.

However, McKay notes that World War I has already had a significant impact on race relations in the South, primarily as a result of the Great Migration. The loss of cheap labor caused white southerners to realize the importance of black southerners and led white southerners to design methods for preventing black migration. Yet white

northerners continued to recruit black southerners to fill low-paying factory jobs in the North. This antagonism, in McKay's account, is the critical issue complicating race relations in the United States. Exploited by both southern farmers and northern industrialists, black Americans have no reasonable outlet for economic self-determination save revolution. This overly simplistic equation effectively explains McKay's fascination with communism, a fascination he shared with many other black intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁴ Even more importantly for my purposes, McKay self-consciously establishes a baseline description of the American racial status quo in the United States that, drawing from his inherently hybrid nationalist position, situates black American identity primarily in the South. This essential point illuminates his depiction of post-war black nationality and the elusive quest for home.

Home, in fact, is the central theme in McKay's first novel, *Home to Harlem*. Arguably the first novel written by an African American to receive wide critical acclaim, the story focuses on Jake Brown, an Army deserter who, for a time, returns to Harlem. But Harlem, strictly speaking, is not his home. In fact, as the novel makes clear, he has no actual home. Harlem only happens to be a place he enjoys visiting as he migrates from place to place. Jake, like the majority of black people in Harlem during and after World War I, actually comes from the South, specifically Petersburg, Virginia. He moved to Harlem just before the war to find work in the shipyards, and since the war he has lived in France, England, Harlem, Pennsylvania, and Chicago. Even though the novel ostensibly concerns home and Harlem, Jake has no enduring sense of attachment to any

³⁴ For a discussion of the connection between black intellectuals and communism, see William Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* and Katherine Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*.

place. He has, instead, been socially and economically displaced. Since he cannot realistically and reliably make a consistent living at any particular job, he must nomadically roam between jobs, working for a few weeks at a time at any unskilled position until circumstances or market forces force him to leave. As an unskilled black laborer, Jake occupies the bottom rung on the nation's socioeconomic ladder, which means that he, like most all other black southerners who migrated North, has the smallest degree of personal agency of any other Americans. He is free, in other words, to the extent that he has nothing left to lose.

When America enters the war, Jake, with no other obligations to attach him to Harlem, enlists in the Army. But he quickly realizes that the reality of his military career would not equal his dreams. He quits his job as a longshoreman to enlist in 1917, but instead of becoming a soldier, he becomes a laborer in uniform. McKay writes:

In the winter he sailed for Brest with a happy chocolate company. Jake had his own dreams of going over the top. But his company was held at Brest. Jake toted lumber—boards, planks, posts, rafters—for the hundreds of huts that were built around the walls of Brest and along the coast between Brest and Saint-Pierre, to house the United States soldiers.

Jake was disappointed. He had enlisted to fight. For what else had he been sticking a bayonet into the guts of a stuffed man and aiming bullets straight into a bull's-eye? Toting planks and getting into rows with his white comrades at the Bal Musette were not adventure. (4)

For the vast majority of black soldiers who enlisted voluntarily, Jake's experience is emblematic. To the Army he had precisely the same value he had to any other employer, labor. Disenchanted and disillusioned with military service, Jake follows his typical pattern of behavior: he deserts. When the Armistice is signed, he is working on the docks in London's East End, where he sees racial violence with a cockney accent. "Why did I ever enlist and come over here?" he asks himself, "Why did I want to mix mahself up in

a white folks' war? It ain't ever was any of black folks' affair" (7-8). Despairing of the racial conditions in Europe, which approximate the racial conditions in America, he decides to return to the only place where he felt happy. But, notably, his return to America has no nationalist overtones. It is not a place for which he longs; rather, it is a lifestyle.

Jake ships aboard a freighter bound for New York as a coal stoker, working in the dirtiest, most inhumane position in the shipping industry until he reaches Harlem. Once home, figuratively speaking, Jake plunges back into the black subculture he missed. McKay's description of Harlem emphasizes the neighborhood's seediness, which may have much to do with the book's popularity. His settings are speakeasies, nightclubs, and buffet flats and his characters are prostitutes, gamblers, and sweetmen. Even though Harlem had a thriving artistic and intellectual community and a large black middle class, these elements of the neighborhood do not appear in the story. Instead, McKay's book, much like Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, emphasizes the exotic, primitive elements of Harlem that, in Nathan Huggins's words, appeal to the white heart of darkness, the urge to see blackness as a condition of sexual and dangerous otherness.³⁵ Jake's Harlem, thus, is a space for uninhibited expressions of black desire that primarily serve to fuel voyeuristic white preconceptions of uninhibited black desire. The story's picaresque structure, its lack of a cohesive plot, and Jake's underdeveloped characterization establish an atmosphere of aimlessness in the text. Just as Jake meanders through the city and along the eastern seaboard, so do other characters float into and out of the narrative, in some cases with no apparent connection to Jake's story. McKay, for instance, inserts into

³⁵ See Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 84-93.

the novel a discrete short story about a black pimp and a prostitute with a fur coat that has no direct relation to the novel. All of these structural concerns lead to a troubling question: does Harlem represent a place of black identity?

While the artistic movement associated with Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s acts as the first unified, irrepressible call for black self definition in American history, the actual space of Harlem proved to be more problematic in the black imagination. Lee Greene explains, “Novels that incorporate World War I as a theme or trope typically follow the genre’s conventional depiction of Harlem as a debilitating social and psychological space. This picture contradicts the idyllic image of Harlem (and the North generally) that prevailed in southern black society” (149). Harlem is a problem for two reasons. First, to the extent that place defined blackness during the World War I period, the South, even for blacks living in Harlem, defined their identity. Since most of the black characters in *Home to Harlem* come from the South, they maintain a transregional southern identity that complicates any attempt to develop a purely nationalistic American identity. Second, for all black Americans in the World War I period, race, not place, primarily defines identity. So a black person, whether born in Virginia or born in Harlem, would be by birth a hybrid American, both same and other, and, to the extent the black person was other, he or she would be excluded from American citizenship. As a physical space, therefore, Harlem was virtually irrelevant to the movement for racial equality, with one crucial exception. The aggregate mass of black bodies in a small space allowed a slightly greater degree of individual agency or relative freedom from the subjectification of American racism. For people accustomed to absolute subjectification, any degree of

freedom must have been, as Jake thought, like “contagious fever . . . burning now in Jake’s sweet blood” (15).³⁶

The primary cause of the fever in Jake’s blood appears to be his desire for black women. In Europe and on the voyage back to Harlem he repeatedly voices his desire for “the brown-skin chippies ‘long Lenox Avenue” (3). Most of the episodes in the novel, moreover, involve Jake seeking, finding, or extricating himself from sexual relationships with black women, activities which reinforce preconceptions of black men and women as hypersexual. Contrary to Daly and White’s depictions of relatively chaste romantic relationships, McKay’s novel revels in erotic, yet inoffensive, vignettes. Also, unlike Daly and White, who use the sexual color line as a critical plot device, McKay appears to flaunt the most taboo of American mores. Although Jake voices only an urge for black women, he makes a number of comments that suggest that he had relations with white women in Europe. At one point he says that women are alike regardless of their race or nation—“Sometimes they turn mah stomach, the womens. The same in France, the same in England, the same in Harlem” (34)—and he claims to have no interest in mulatto women after having white women because “they’s so doggone much alike” (36). He sounds a similarly jaded chord later when he says, “It’s the same ole life everywhere . . . In white man’s town or nigger town. Same bloody-sweet life across the pond. I done lived through the same blood-battling foh womens ovah theah in London. Between white and white and between black and white. Done seen it in the froggies’ country, too” (285). Jake does not say explicitly that he has been with white women, but he implies that he has. And he further implies that he strongly prefers black women. McKay understood

³⁶ For a discussion of McKay’s experience in Harlem as a form of exile, see Carl Pedersen, “The Tropics in New York: Claude McKay and the New Negro Movement.”

well the dynamics of racist sexual anxiety,³⁷ so he must have also understood that a black male character who disavows white women subverts the white social hegemony. For Jake to say that he feared having a white woman would reinforce the culture of racism, but repudiating white women undercuts the entire construction of the color line.

Soon Jake's numerous romantic entanglements force him to leave Harlem, at least temporarily. He takes a job on the Pennsylvania Railroad as a cook, which allows him to spend a couple of nights a week in Harlem and the rest of his time on the train or in other black neighborhoods along the railroad track. This pattern of leaving and returning underscores Jake's transregional racial identity. Every place the train stops, Jake and the other black servants on the train find a virtually identical set of segregated, filthy accommodations. In Pittsburgh, for example, the railroad crew sleeps in a nearly uninhabitable bunkhouse filled with bugs and garbage. To avoid the bunkhouse, Jake slips into the town's black neighborhood, where he finds the same types of amusement that he left in Harlem: nightclubs, gambling parlors, and prostitutes. Although Jake feels at ease in this bottom stratum of society, he realizes that he has no freedom to ascend above this level. Every place he goes, he can expect the same existence: he experiences it in the South, he experiences it in New York, he experiences it in Europe, and he experiences it in the North. But, unlike both Montie Jason and Kenneth Harper, Jake does not openly agitate for social equality. In fact, Jake has hardly any interactions with white people at all. The white characters that do appear briefly in the book are usually members of the managerial class, foremen, stewards, bosses, and cops. On the occasion when Jake

³⁷ McKay includes in the volume *The Negroes in America* a description of a black man lynched for allegedly attacking a white woman. Under excruciating torture, he confessed to the crime, but it was later proven that the attack never occurred; see pages 83-87.

encounters any resistance from these people, he leaves, continuing his nomadic journey through the places of the black underclass.

McKay contrasts Jake, who is relatively racial unaware, with Ray, a black intellectual from Haiti. Jake and Ray meet on the railroad where Ray works to make money to fund his return to Howard University, but Ray is obviously different from the other blacks on the railroad. The other blacks, in fact, shun him because he spends much of his time reading. Considering that only a few members of the black working class found educational opportunities, he may have been one of the few literate blacks Jake encounters. But this difference makes him contemptuous of the other blacks. Looking at the sleeping railroad crew one night he thinks, "These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature had put them in the same race. He ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything). He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him. They were all chain-ganged together and he was counted as one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room, except Jake. Race...why should he have and love a race?" (153). Ray, in effect, confronts the most confounding element of black identity, the false construction of community. He recognizes his own individuality, and he shudders to realize that because of his skin color he is forced into the bottom stratum of society. Where Jake seeks refuge in this stratum, Ray finds only increasing alienation and frustration. Ray, McKay's evident doppelganger, may be the most modernist character in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to his social alienation, he admires the experimental aesthetics of modernist writers, and he praises James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, D. H. Lawrence, and Henri Barbusse, whose *Le Feu* "burnt like a flame in his memory" (227). To express his disaffection and

disillusionment, Ray desires to write, to make something with words. As a foreigner, a black person, and an intellectual, Ray may be the ultimate hybrid: both inside and outside on multiple levels. But, as a hybrid, like McKay, he has a more critical perspective on black American identity than Jake.

Jake's friendship with Ray makes him relatively more aware of his racial hybridity. When Jake learns, for example, that Ray comes from Haiti, he exclaims, "Aint'chu one of us?" (131). Ray explains that he is black, like Jake, but that he comes from a place where black people rule themselves, a concept that Jake finds amazing. Listening to Ray talk about Toussant L'Ouverture, pan-Africanism, and Liberia, Jake feels his attitudes to America shift: "Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was a jungle, and Africans bush niggers. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world" (134). As a result of his contact with Ray, Jake begins to understand that his transregional racial identity may, in fact, be apart of a larger transnational racial identity. Although Jake had lived in Europe for a time during the war, he never found a connection between himself and foreigners, whom he, ironically, regarded as other. But Ray allows him to conceptualize their common hybridity. Notably, Jake and Ray come together as a result of the war. Jake tells Ray that he learned a bit of street French while in the Army "way ovah there after Democracy and them boches," but he retained his isolationist attitudes, even after he "turned [his] black moon from the A.E.F." (130). Ray later explains to Jake that he came

to America because the U.S. seized Haiti during the war and that his father, a government official, protested, so his family was exiled to America.

Life in America for both Jake and Ray is a form of exile. While Ray's displacement has a direct political cause, Jake's is more subtle, but it has roots in the vicious nexus of race and sex. When his former army friend and drinking buddy Zeddy Plummer, jealous over Jake's relationship with his estranged girlfriend, threatens to report him to the authorities as a deserter, Jake has a moment of realization:

Yet here he was caught in the thing that he despised do thoroughly ... Brest, London, and his America. Their vivid brutality tortured his imagination. Oh, he was infinitely disgusted with himself to think that he had just been moved to the same savage emotions as the vile, vicious, villainous white men who, like hyenas and rattlers, had fought, murdered, and clawed the entrails out of black men over the common, commercial flesh of women. (328)

Leaving aside the issue of Jake's misogyny, when forced to a crisis, Jake sees that the construction of the color line has a specifically sexual function designed to prevent his access to the bodies of white women. He also sees that this cartography of race and sex functions in the same way regardless of his place—Virginia, New York, Brest, London, or Pittsburgh. His black body determines his place.

Initially, when confronted with the prospect of jail for desertion, Jake responds in the same way he responds to every other crisis: he plans to leave. After the confrontation with Zeddy, Jake and Felice—the woman over whom Jake and Zeddy have fought—discuss their plans. But Jake feels the necessity to explain to her why he deserted from the army; “I didn't run away because I was scared a them Germans,” he says, “But I beat it away from Brest because the wouldn't give us a chance at them, but kept us working in that rainy, sloppy, Gawd-forsaken burg working like wops. They didn't seem to want us

niggers for no soldiers” (331). Apparently, Jake feels a nationalist interest in the United States, but he also understands when he has been deceived. Curiously, Jake seems to be relatively satisfied as a menial laborer when he understands the terms of his employment and when he can terminate his employment at will. So his decision to desert the Army does not signify that he feels totally alienated from the United States, just that he feels dissatisfied with his employment. The prospect of internment as a deserter prompts Jake to consider disavowing his nationality and returning to Europe, but Felice argues against it. Curiously, she invokes the language of nationalism to make her point: “What you wanta go knocking around them foreign countries again like some swallow come and swallow go from year to year and neva settling down no place? This heah is you’ country daddy.... This heah country is good and big enough for us to git lost in” (332). In other words, as long as they, as black Americans, do not assert their rights to social equality, they can manage to find new opportunities for economic exploitation among the black underclass in any city in the country. So they go to Chicago.

Obviously, this expedient course of action simply averts the more important issues of race and nation. Ray, the hybrid intellectual, feels the constraints of race and nation and is better able to articulate his frustration. “Races and nations were things like skunks,” he thinks, “whose smells poisoned the air of life.” He goes on to explain the attraction of nationality:

Civilized mankind reposed its faith and futures in their ancient, silted channels. Great races and big nations! There must be something mighty inspiring in being the citizen of a great strong nation. To be the white citizen of a nation that can say bold, challenging things like a strong man. Something very different from the keen ecstatic joy a man feels in the romance of being black. Something the black man could never feel nor quite understand.

Ray felt that as he was conscious of being black and impotent, so, correspondingly, each marine down in Hayti must be conscious of being white and powerful. What a unique feeling of confidence about life the typical white youth of his age of his age must have! Knowing that his skin-color was a passport to glory, making him one with the ten thousands like himself. All perfect Occidentals and investors in their grand business called civilization. That grand business in whose pits sweated and snored all the black and brown hybrids and mongrels, simple earth-loving animals, without aspirations toward national unity and racial arrogance. (154-155)

Ray makes an especially apt diagnosis concerning nationalism. More than simply a marker of identity, nationalism is a hegemonic force. In any imperialistic or racial power dynamic, the stronger entity will assert nationalism as a means of excluding and defining the subjectified entity. Therein lies the problem with post-war black identity. Allowing blacks social equality as American citizens would dissolve the power of the white social hegemony.

Blacks wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army, therefore, presented a difficult problem to the white social hegemony. American military success, like American economic success, depended upon black labor, but extending the opportunity for military service to blacks inadvertently implied fitness for social equality. In many cases, black veterans were intimidated into repudiating their uniforms and their military experience by white Americans who feared that black soldiers would, to use Du Bois's phrase, return fighting. While in the Soviet Union, at apparently the same time that he wrote *Negroes in America*, McKay wrote a series of short stories, *Trial by Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in North America*. The three brief vignettes describe for an audience, presumably, of communist agitators the most likely occurrences of violence along the color line and, thus, the issues most likely to stir the passion for racial rebellion. The first two stories dramatize the most obvious incidents, the lynching of a black man for presumed sexual

violence and the sexual victimization of a tragic mulatto woman. The third story, "The Soldier's Return," complicates the typical sexual dynamic of the lynching story with an overt reference to black military service and the idea of the New Negro.

In the story Frederick Taylor, an octoroon soldier able to pass for white, returns to the ominously named town of Great Neck, Georgia. McKay notes the separate and unequal welcome celebrations for the returning soldiers; the mayor and local dignitaries address a throng of gaily decorated supporters on the day the white soldiers return, but only five black ministers and family members able to miss work meet the fifteen returning black soldiers. As the single act of civic significance, the mayor addresses the soldiers from his porch, telling the black soldiers "that the war was over, and so now they must take off their uniforms and return to the work which they had done before the war" (38). Trouble erupts a few days later when Taylor, still in his uniform, encounters "the half-witted daughter of the postmaster," who runs screaming from him completely unprovoked (39). When Taylor gets to town, he is arrested, accused of attacking the girl, and held in jail. Meanwhile, a mob gathers with "torches, lanterns, a rope, and a can of kerosene" (39). The crowd drags Taylor from his cell and beats him as onlookers cry "lynch him!" At the last moment the mayor manages to quiet the crowd sufficiently to explain that he witnessed the incident and that Taylor had done nothing wrong, which, fortunately, manages to disperse the crowd and abort the lynching. Then the story takes a bizarre twist.

Rather than release Taylor, the innocent victim in this melodrama, the sheriff tells him that he is to blame. "Pauline was frightened by seeing you wearing [your] soldier's uniform," he says, "You know that in our town we don't like it when niggers wear

soldier's uniforms" (40). The mayor, who just saved Taylor's life, interrupts to explain precisely the white community's position on social equality:

in our town there's plenty of work, thank God, and work clothes don't cost much. My brother has splendid work clothes in his store. But for some reason, you don't like to do anything and, moreover, you drive a buggy. One would think you were really some white gentleman. It seems to me, Frederick, that it's still necessary to place you under arrest and try you for vagrancy. We will take the uniform of a soldier of the U.S. off you and give you an outfit which is more appropriate for you. In any case, we have to set an example. Niggers never learn prudence by themselves until we show them, good and proper, their place. There is still plenty of work for niggers in Great Neck. We won't put up with even one of them loafing without work and putting on airs, even if he was in France, and they treated him there just like a white man. You'll have to work in a chain gang for a few months, Frederick. (40-41)

The dynamics of the relationship between white supremacy and the subjectified black body are imbricated with issues of labor and control. The presence of the "uniform of a soldier of the U.S." distorts the power dynamics in this relationship, so to reestablish the paradigm and to prevent the assertion of nationalism—here construed as such subversive actions as riding in a buggy—the white social hegemony preemptively dominates the black subject.

Frederick Taylor, whose name may allude to Frederick Douglass, symbolizes the condition of black American World War I veterans in the South. But, while the wave of post war lynchings and the violence of the Red Summer of 1919 suggest that white supremacists continued to subordinate black Americans, the defiance of the New Negro also suggests that the movement for equality had emerged as a major force in American race relations. Black veterans did, in fact, return fighting in many subtle and subversive ways. The depiction of the black veteran—repudiated, brutalized, and alienated—in literary texts by black writers represents one of these means of fighting back. In the poem

“A Roman Holiday” McKay brandishes one of the most effective rhetorical weapons available: hypocrisy. “Black Southern men,” he exhorts, “like hogs await your doom! / White wretches hunt and haul you from your huts, / They squeeze the babies out of your women’s womb, / They cut your members off, rip out your guts / ... Bravo Democracy! Hail greatest Power / That saved sick Europe in her darkest hour!” (*Complete Poems* 137). For black southerners fighting for democracy, the battle did not take place in Europe, but in America.

CHAPTER FIVE

Blood and Irony: World War I, Southern Women's Fiction, and the

Fiction of Southern Womanhood

Identities and histories are constructed from rhetoric. By the time of World War I several rhetorics converged to alter the identities of virtually every population segment in the western world. Otto von Bismarck's nationalist rhetoric of blood and iron led to German expansion, which initiated World War I. The war intersected with the rhetoric of southern womanhood, the fictional idealization of femininity associated with the cult of the Lost Cause, leading to the emergence of new, problematic forms of gender identity in the South, which Ellen Glasgow, alluding to Bismarck, regarded with an attitude of blood and irony. Immediately after the war, the United States ratified the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote. As a rhetorical device, the amendment suggests that the struggle for gender equality attained more tangible success during World War I than the struggle for racial equality did. The movement for women's suffrage, however, enjoyed far more success in the Northeast than in the South, where gender roles continued to follow a strictly codified Victorian model well into the twentieth century. The masculinist enterprise of war disrupted the southern family's domestic space, allowing southern women a slightly greater sphere of personal agency, a small but important advance. The idea of southern womanhood, for both white women

and black women, was primarily a rhetorical construct, a function of a social structure invested in hierarchical relations that subordinated women by simultaneously praising them and demeaning them. The fiction of southern womanhood, the image of the idealized feminine being entombed in marble, is largely the product of masculine discourse, analogous, in some respects, to the discourse that resulted in the war. Southern women writers appropriated the fiction of southern womanhood, alternately reinforcing and subverting the feminine ideal.

As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe in *The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic*, “dissonance between male and female responses to crucial socio-historical events like the suffrage movement, World War I, and the entrance of women into the labor market [led to the evolution of] two entirely different versions of the world, visions so different we felt we had to speak not only of male and female modernisms, but of masculinist and feminist modernisms” (2). Gilbert and Gubar are correct, I think, when they assert that social position informs aesthetic response; in fact, one could safely argue that modernisms proliferate so that there is no one monolithic form of modernist creative production. So far, I have attempted to describe the forms of white male southern modernism and black male southern modernism by tracing the literary representation of a socio-historical event through specific social categories. The issue here, meanwhile, is the characterization of southern women’s modernism, the impact of a particular type of social dissonance on the literary production of female southern writers. This is a relevant point because most studies of modernist southern writers have focused on only one form of production, either the work of white male southern writers associated with the Southern Renaissance or the production of displaced black male southern writers

associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones observe in the introduction to *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* that studies of the Southern Renaissance have notoriously marginalized women writers: Rubin and Jacob's *The Southern Renaissance* mentions only Katherine Anne Porter and Ellen Glasgow, Richard King's *A Southern Renaissance* mentions only Lillian Smith, Daniel J. Singal's *The War Within* mentions only Ellen Glasgow, and Michael O'Brien's *The Idea of the American South* mentions no women writers.

This persistent lacuna diminishes the impact of changing gender roles in the South on southern literature. During the war, women gained a new degree of freedom, many took jobs outside the home, earning their own income and playing public roles. Many more gained greater authority over the home in the absence of male heads of household. Others took on civic and political responsibility as the war movement allowed greater opportunities for female involvement. Even more significantly, after the war women retained a sense of increased agency as the liberation of the suffrage movement and the Jazz Age licentiousness associated with the flapper, an incarnation of the New Woman, subverted traditional gender roles. In "Gender and the Great War," Anne Goodwyn Jones notes that William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter offer competing portrayals of the New Woman. Faulkner's Narcissa Benbow Sartoris and Belle Mitchell Benbow in *Flags in the Dust* are self absorbed and immoral, and, thus, they threaten both the family and the social order. Porter's Miranda in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," takes on a traditionally masculine occupation during the war, newspaper reporter, but, after surviving the influenza pandemic, she relinquishes her job at the end of the war. Jones concludes that "wars shake up traditional structures, but only temporarily" (146). While it is true that

women conceded some of the social gains made during the war after the Armistice, a domestic surrender of sorts, I find Jones' conclusion here problematic. Because of the war, southern women gained and maintained a new sense of self definition reflected in their literary portrayals of domestic life.

Jones' thesis applies perfectly to the post-Civil War era. The novels of Augusta Jane Evans and E. D. E. N. Southworth, for example, portray women during and after the Civil War as the angel in the house, an obedient and self sacrificing figure who affirms the cult of true womanhood.¹ But novels by black and white southern women writers set during World War I portray women as subverting the patriarchal order, even if they do so reluctantly or unintentionally. In some cases the acts of subversion are subtle and expedient; in other cases the acts of subversion are intentional and liberating. These representational acts contribute to the emergence of an enduring critical domestic voice in the work of southern women writers. The war, in effect, exposed the fiction of southern womanhood, leading to the emergence of the new southern woman, a figure portrayed in several texts depicting black women taking on political roles during the war in novels by Ellen Glasgow, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Frances Newman, and Zelda Fitzgerald that reconfigure southern female identity.

World War I and the New Southern Woman

The fiction of southern womanhood is a socially-constructed gendered rhetoric. Partly embedded in Victorian culture, gender roles in the South well into the twentieth century involved the public and legal marginalization of women. Through the nineteenth

¹ Twentieth-century southern women writers reimagined the Civil War era, undercutting the cult of True Womanhood. Evelyn Scott, Caroline Gordon, and Margaret Mitchell each recast the southern heroine as independent and complex. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937*.

century, women were not allowed to vote or to own property; their bodies, in fact, were considered the property of their fathers until their marriage at which time they became the property of their husbands. The southern household, especially in slaveholding families, followed a paternalistic, patriarchal model with all authority invested in the dominant male figure, to whom all female, filial, and labor relations were subject.² Yet, even as southern society categorically marginalized women's roles, it paradoxically celebrated and vaunted the virtue of southern women, primarily the virtues that reinforced and masked subordination. Thomas Nelson Page's encomium to southern womanhood, for example, sets the tone: "Her life was one long act of devotion—devotion to God, devotion to her husband, devotion to her children, devotion to her servants, to the poor, to humanity" (qtd in Scott, *The Southern Lady* 5). The praise of virtues such as devotion, humility, charity, commitment, sacrifice, loyalty, and chastity inscribed an image of southern women as the angel in the house, an image that became a cultural icon and a cultural problem.

In *The Southern Lady*, Anne Firor Scott notes that the reality of southern women's lives rarely matched the image of southern womanhood. In some cases, in spite of severe social limitations, individual women achieved a significant degree of agency, often through the alternate employment and sacrifice of social station. In *Revolt Against Chivalry*, Jacquelyn Hall describes the career of Jesse Daniel Ames, a white southern woman who crusaded against lynching. But cases such as these were exceptional. In many other cases, southern women themselves enforced and encoded gender roles. Anne

² Several feminist scholars have elaborated on the construction and function of the southern patriarchy, including Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*; Jean Freidman, *The Enclosed Garden*; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*; Minrose Gwin, *Black and White Women of the Old South*; and Lucinda MacKethan, *Daughters of Time*.

Firor Scott quotes from numerous diaries and documents that represent southern women struggling to attain, not defy, the ideal of southern womanhood. The image of the apotheosized feminine entity presented a challenge as well to southern men. W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* describes the cult of gyneolatry, the worship of white female virtue that effectively inscribed white male gender roles, enforcing the function of chivalry, desexualizing white women, sexualizing black women, and generating the image of the black beast rapist. In his psychohistory of the South, Cash links the practice of lynching with the preservation and defense of southern womanhood. Gender roles for black southern women and, for that matter, for working class white southern women were even more complicated and demeaning. Denied the protection of class, these women were frequently sexually objectified and exploited for domestic and commercial labor, a position epitomized in Zora Neale Hurston's comment in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that the black woman "is de mule uh de world" (14). Ultimately, as Anne Goodwyn Jones argues in *Tomorrow is Another Day*, "the image wearing Dixie's Diadem is not a human being; it is a marble statue, beautiful and silent, eternally inspiring and eternally still. Rather than a person, [she] is a personification, effective only as she works in the imagination's of others. Efforts to join person and personification, to make self into symbol, must fail because the idea of southern womanhood specifically denies the self" (4).

World War I complicated both the selfhood and the symbolism of the southern woman. The exigencies of war-time and the sudden loss of labor in the exclusively male

workplace allowed women temporary entrance into the labor force.³ Susan Zeiger comments that "[t]he war heightened and thus made visible the underlying contradiction between prevailing definitions of womanhood on the one hand and women's increasing participation in the waged labor force on the other" (173). Women even served auxiliary roles in each branch of the armed forces, marking the first large scale enlistment of women in the American military.⁴ The war forced female identities into masculine roles. Women played traditional roles of mother, lover, and supporter in the war effort, but they also play traditionally unfeminine roles of worker, provider, and leader. Peter Filene documents in *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America* that the change in social roles had an impact on sexuality, creating tension between mothers of the True Woman generation who valued absolute chastity until marriage and their daughters of the New Woman generation who valued sexual liberation. In many respects the issue of sex, the underpinning for gender construction, became the central, if frequently unstated, issue in modernist southern women's fiction, and changes on sexual relations led, as Anne Goodwyn Jones explains, to a change in gender ideology after World War I. She says, "This revolution in gender ideology, a revolution that was by no means confined to the South, took on special intensity there, where rigid gender boundaries had always been part of a network of racial and class boundaries as well. To shake the pedestal, or even more disturbing, to refuse the phallus, was to put the entire structure of Southern thinking at risk" ("Work of Gender" 43).

³ Histories of women in the labor force during World War I include Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919*; Carrie Brown, *Rosie's Mom: Forgotten Women Workers of the First World War*; and Maurine Weiner Greewald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*.

⁴ For more on women in the military, see Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I*.

Feminism, in other words, was antithetical to southern social norms. Before World War I, southern women were both subject to and enforcers of strict social codes. In *New Women of the New South*, Marjorie Spruill Wheeler describes white southern women at the turn of the century as “hostages” to the lost cause. She explains that “the commitment to preserving the traditional role of Southern womanhood was not just an isolated, idiosyncratic whim of nostalgic Southerners; it was part of an intense, conscious, semi-religious drive to protect the South against the ‘ravages’ of Northern culture during a period of massive and often unwanted political, social, and economic change” (5). To the extent that gender became intertwined with regional identity, southern womanhood became a cultural bulwark preventing both the erosion of traditional southern values and progress toward gender equality. Wheeler’s characterization of southern women as hostages, however, may not be entirely accurate, as women appear to have been partially, even if unintentionally, complicit in the cult of the lost cause. The emergence in the 1890s of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which would by the 1920s be the largest and wealthiest women’s organization in the United States, suggests that southern women freely propagated the image, if not the reality, of southern womanhood.⁵ White southern female identity, thus, became incorporated in a racist, masculinist social hierarchy, leaving southern women in the often irrational position of enforcing and encoding their own subordination. The penalty for feminism in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century continued to be social exclusion, the same penalty the Grimke sisters faced in the 1830s.

⁵ See Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*.

The South, then, was an unlikely and unwelcoming place for any political agenda promoting gender equality. Southern women did participate in the suffrage movement, although in less visible ways than their northern counterparts. But by 1913, just before war erupted in Europe, every southern state had an active chapter of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, an organization often affiliated with the Women's Christian Temperance Union that agitated for women's right to vote. While the organization gained strength in the Northeast as the United States moved toward war, the activity of this organization in the South resulted in a somewhat surprising response. In *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question*, Elena C. Green documents the presence of a large female anti-suffrage movement, led by the Anti-Ratification League and other organizations. The anti-suffragists argued that Biblical edict placed the woman in the home and, perhaps more persuasive at the time, that women involved in political activity, either voting or running for office, would result in the moral decline of southern society, the ascendancy of Yankee domination, and the end of white supremacy. Southern men, less surprisingly, were disinclined to support the suffrage movement and many prominent southern businessmen and politicians encouraged and funded the anti-suffrage movement. When the time came for the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, most southern states voted against it. The South clearly was not a promising landscape for women's liberation.

Yet the New Woman did inhabit the South, although in a primarily private, rather than public, incarnation.⁶ Slowly at first, southern women did begin to register to vote and then to cast ballots, but the most evident changes in southern gender roles took place

⁶ Specific histories of the New Woman in southern states can be found in Mary Martha Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama* and Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*.

within the home and between the generations. The generation of southern women coming of age during the war took greater advantage of social and political freedoms than their mothers. In the South, the New Woman, who personified the sexual and personal liberation of Jazz Age, intersected with the Southern Belle, who personified the virtue and repression of southern culture. These images of femininity collided perhaps most dramatically in Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, a southern belle from Montgomery, Alabama who captivated F. Scott Fitzgerald, then a soldier training in Alabama. Zelda and Scott became the embodiment of the Jazz Age, the archetypal modernist couple. Zelda's roman a clef, *Save Me the Waltz*, portrays the tension between the new southern woman's traditional southern family and her modern, transatlantic lifestyle. Thomas Dixon, in contrast, represents the New Woman as a direct threat to southern society and, more evidently, to herself in *The Way of a Man*. Considering Dixon's retrograde attitudes toward race, his attitude toward feminism is not surprising, but his perspective on gender may have been representative of the attitudes of the southern population, at least the male portion of the southern population. Regardless, as both these works indicate, the presence of the New Woman complicated and problematized the representation of southern womanhood. In *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, Kathryn Lee Seidel explains that southern women writers after World War I employed the figure of the belle as an indicator of changing women's roles and that during this period "the portrait of the belle darkens" (26). Indeed, female characters in southern literature after the war lose the veneer of virtue as the idealized image entombed in marble and imprisoned on a pedestal reveals feet of clay.

But the post-World War I darkening of the belle and, thus, the deromanticization of southern femininity may signify both social and artistic progress. The simplistic construction of the angel in the house gave way to complex, problematic depictions of female characters in literary texts that reflected the sophistication and anxiety of modernity. In *No Man's Land*, Gilbert and Gubar note that World War I exacerbated gender tension, or “radical sexchanges”:

All of the metamorphoses of sexuality and sex roles, that we have so far discussed—the gender transformation connected with the decline of faith in a white male supremacist empire, with the rise of the New Woman, with the development of an ideology of free love, with the revolt against the discontents fueled by a widespread cultural “feminization” of women, and with the emergence of lesbian literary communities—seem to have been in a crisis that set the “whispering ambitions” of embattled men and women against each other. (258-259)

Gilbert and Gubar trace these metamorphoses through a number of works primarily by British writers that portray changing gender roles during the war. Indeed, works such as Siegfried Sassoon's poem “For the Glory of Women” and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* overtly address the social and artistic changes taking place in the context of the war, but relatively little attention has been given to impact of war-time gender tension on the work of American writers, much less the work of writers from the American South, a place where gender identities were of particular consequence.⁷

In *The Gender of Modernity* Rita Felski explains that the literary and artistic movement of modernism is based on the social and historical movement of modernity,

⁷ Many studies of British women's writing and World War I have been published in recent years. A partial list includes Sharon Oudit, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*; Claire Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*; Deborah Rae Cohen, *Remapping the Home Front*; Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism, and the First World War*; Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War; Women Writers and the Great War*, edited by Dorothy Goldman; and *Women's Fiction and the Great War*, edited by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate.

and she argues that the woman's place within both these movements is problematic. To the extent that women are excluded, the movements are masculinist; to the extent that women are involved, the movements are feminist. But she emphasizes the point that gendered responses are based on the unique variables of each form of social change. Southern women's modernism, therefore, is based on the unique variables of southern womanhood: the angel in the house, white supremacy, Confederate veneration, suffragism and anti-suffragism, the New Woman, and World War I. Southern women's modernism involved a set of issues and challenges that involved the complex interrelation of gender identity, southern identity, and racial identity, all of which made the terrain of modernism even more precipitous and perilous. Anne Goodwyn Jones describes the challenge facing southern women writers in the wake of modernity as follows:

The South's confrontation with modernity, and with modernism, evoked conflict and resistance as much as it did emulation and imitation. 'Modern' (and 'modernism') seemed to many to mean precisely what was not southern, what was even antisouthern. Could an identifiable South survive such radical change? If not, did southerners need to retreat into the past? As for gender, could there be a modern southern woman, or was the very idea an oxymoron? For others, modernity (and modernism) seemed not only incompatible with, but in some senses to have emerged from, the South: the Civil War had shaken some southern hearts and minds as profoundly as World War I was to shatter European confidence a half-century later. (Jones, "Women Writers" 276)

Jones raises some excellent questions, to which I would like to add one: how did World War I itself alter southern women's identity and the representation of southern womanhood?

Carol S. Manning, for one, has argued that southern women writers initiated a period of artistic and social change that antedates World War I. She argues in "The Real Beginning of the Southern Renaissance" that masculinist critics have arbitrarily marked

World War I as the beginning of the Southern Renaissance, overlooking the artistic advances of southern women writers, including Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Anna Julia Cooper, and Belle Kearney, who were actively writing about and criticizing the South in the decades before the war. She concludes that “recognition of the earlier beginning takes nothing away from the writers who came to the forefront following World War I, except the distinction of being first” (52). Manning, notably, does not use the term modernism when dating this early beginning, but it leads to an important point. Neither artistic nor social movements have clear and distinct beginnings and endings. Some writers may span multiple periods, or they may evolve between periods, or they may foreshadow a coming period, or they may evoke an earlier period. Ultimately, periodization is, like gender and history, a rhetorical construct based primarily on patterns and correspondences. Social events of enormous magnitude, nonetheless, are more likely to resonate in the work of multiple writers and intellectuals and, as such, they may be useful indicators of artistic response. Because World War I caused evident social changes that affected every segment of Western society, it naturally caused changes in artistic production, but even the war cannot be used as a bright line to differentiate modernist writing from pre-modernist writing.

To return to my previous question, how did World War I itself alter southern women’s identity and the representation of southern womanhood? To the extent that the war destabilized the myth of southern womanhood and allowed women political and economic agency outside the home, it greatly altered southern women’s identity. But after the war the U.S. South continued to be a dominantly masculinist—and racist—

society.⁸ So the social changes for southern women, while significant, were not radical. The changes in literary representations of southern womanhood were more progressive, but social categories—race, age, class, and place—affected artistic experimentation. Social changes taking place during the war had the greatest social impact on young, upper middle class, white women, who were born in but lived or traveled extensively outside the South. The writing of women in this group, including Frances Newman and Zelda Fitzgerald, is most likely to show signs of anti-traditional literary experimentation indicative of modernism. Change affected older middle class white women living inside the South, but these women, such as Ellen Glasgow and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, had a greater personal investment in southern identity, and, thus, their writing shows fewer signs of experimentation even while criticizing southern cultural norms. Black women writers from the South, most of whom lived outside the South, are problematic. Their social concerns typically, and understandably, address issues of racial identity over issues of regional identity, and their aesthetic sensibilities typically show fewer signs of modernist experimentation. So, in an equation of social change and rhetorical change that bears out Felski's theory of gender and modernity, the war's impact on the representation of southern womanhood reflects the war's impact on the southern woman writer.

I Sit and Sew: Black Southern Women and World War I

Ann Shockley argues that black southern women faced the same restrictive gender conventions as white southern women. She quotes Alice Dunbar-Nelson by way of example, who comments that black husbands and fathers enforced “the white male’s

⁸ Jennifer Haytock explores the intersection of the domestic novel and the war novel during World War I in *At Home, At War*.

attitude of woman's place built on the rock of southern chivalry" (128). Gender roles for black women in the South—at least for middle-class black women and, thus, for the women most likely to have opportunities to write—reflected the cult of gyneolatry, although black women were not identified with the Lost Cause. Instead, gender roles in the black community suggest the valorization of whiteness. Just as the pervasive use of hair straighteners and skin bleaching agents indicates an obsession with imitation of the white body, the drive to imitate the white household, even to the degree of employing black domestic servants, indicates an obsession with the white lifestyle. But the white middle-class version of the American dream was a reality for a relatively small segment of African Americans, especially African Americans in the South. There, because of institutionalized economic disparity, black women often found themselves in a double bind. In *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of Race, 1895-1925*, Cynthia Neverdon-Morton explains that black men, as Dunbar-Nelson's quote suggests, believed that the woman's place is in the home, but many black women were forced to work outside the home to supplement the family's income, often working a full day as a servant to a white household before returning, exhausted, to their own neglected household (3).

Traditionalism and patriarchy were strong in the black southern community, and opportunities for black women to write creatively were correspondingly rare. Therefore, it is not surprising that the critical sensibility that Carol S. Manning finds in the work of many white women writers is less evident in the work of black women writers. Even Anna Julia Cooper and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper continued to write in sentimental forms while Kate Chopin and Ellen Glasgow employed the techniques of naturalism and

realism. During the World War I era black women's writing demonstrated a Victorian sensibility predicated, at least in part, on traditional patriarchal gender roles. Although, just as young white women living outside the South were more likely to use experimental forms, representation of World War I by younger black women writers were more likely to share modernist characteristics than the work of older writers. This phenomenon has much to do with social distance. Because relatively few black men fought in World War I, outside the Services of Supply, and because the war's most significant direct impact on black southern families was the migration from rural communities to urban centers, mostly in the North, the war and many of the other changes affecting gender identity associated with the war had relatively less impact on black southern women.

Black women in the South, for example, generally played a small role in the suffrage movement, but that does not mean that they were totally uninvolved or uninterested. In *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote*, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn explains that black women faced many more obstacles during the movement than their white counterparts: they faced both racism and sexism simultaneously, some factions of the white suffrage movement excluded black membership, fewer black women had financial means to allow involvement, black male support for suffrage eroded by the beginning of the twentieth century, and black codes in the South effectively made black political involvement impossible. Nonetheless, some black women did campaign for the vote, including a few in the South. One of these was Maggie Shaw Fullilove, an educated woman and wife of a doctor in Yazoo City, Mississippi, who wrote a novel, *Who Was Responsible?*, that depicts a woman becoming involved in the temperance movement and the suffrage movement. As a woman of

intellect and means, Fullilove was among those best positioned to advocate for black women's rights, but, other than writing the novel and a few essays, she does not appear to have been involved in organizing or recruiting black women in the movement. The novel, moreover, does not have an explicit race theme. The book's characters, in fact, are not racially identified, so a reader could easily assume that the protagonist is white. And the protagonist's political involvement is a means to an end, the abolition of alcohol. The title's question refers to the death of the protagonist's husband, an alcoholic, and suggests that both the protagonist specifically and the social structure generally are responsible. After his death, she joins the Women's Christian Temperance movement and campaigns for prohibition, later becoming involved in war preparedness and suffrage. So, while a significant indication of black southern women's engagement with political affairs, even this representation of social change from the perspective of a black southern woman is embedded within a framework of traditional social values.

In many respects, black women's involvement with the war follows the same pattern as black women's involvement with the suffrage movement. For the most part black women played limited roles in the war effort. While some white women found work in factories and munitions plants, black women were mostly excluded. While some white women served in Europe as nurses and support staff with organizations such as the YMCA, black women were almost, but not quite, completely excluded. While a few white women actually served in the American military, black women were excluded. Black women were active in the Red Cross and in various war preparedness movements, and black women, like white women, played a crucial role in motivating male participation in the war. But this role—the gold star mother, the devoted wife, the

virtuous lover—was partly a function of jingoistic propaganda and partly a function of patriarchal family ordination. For black women, the war was not an effective vehicle for advances toward race and gender equality.

Yet, although black women's public roles in the war effort were limited, a few exceptional women created important public roles for themselves. Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson were the first black women to serve with the YMCA supporting troops near the front line, and they describe their experiences in *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces*. Their document records the experiences of black soldiers living among the French people, and a recurring theme in the book is the contrast between American racism and French equality. They observe the irony that “colored soldiers were greatly loved by the French people” yet consistently reviled, abused, and oppressed by their fellow Americans (85). During the war, Hunton and Johnson provided one of the few support centers available to thousands of black American soldiers. They provided an essential connection to home for these soldiers, spending much of their time reading and writing letters for illiterate soldiers, and guarding their Christian and moral character. Echoing a theme in Victor Daly's novel about black soldiers in France, Hunton and Johnson reinforce the sexual separation between black American soldiers and white French women, appealing to Christian virtues, and they also show great concern for their own virtue, commenting frequently on lustful advances from the soldiers. They, thus, play two roles simultaneously, both advocating for the equal treatment of black men and reinforcing the image of devoted and dependent female.

While Hunton and Johnson supported the war effort in France, Alice Dunbar-Nelson acted as one of the more outspoken black female supporters of the war effort in the United States. Gloria T. Hull relates Dunbar-Nelson's fascinating and unorthodox experience in *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, although in her case orthodoxy is hardly a relevant consideration. Born of racially-mixed Creole descent in New Orleans, she attended college, married Paul Laurence Dunbar, married twice again after his death, had numerous lesbian relationships, and published works of poetry, fiction, and drama while maintaining an active career as a public speaker and journalist. During the war she organized rallies for black enlistment, including a massive Flag Day event in 1918, and she had an affair with Emmett J. Scott, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of War and former personal secretary to Booker T. Washington. And she wrote the chapter on "Negro Women and War Work" in Scott's *History of the American Negro in the World War*. Her account of black women in the war suggests that they were able to forget their special grievance against the white race, echoing the tone of W. E. B Du Bois' call to close ranks for the duration of the war. She claims, for example, that "into [the] maelstrom of war activity the women of the Negro race hurled themselves joyously. They asked no odds, remembered no grudges, solicited no favors, pleaded for no privileges. They came by the thousands, hands opened wide to give of love and service and patriotism" (375).

The same propagandistic tone can be found in her play *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, originally published in *The Crisis* in 1918. The play depicts a dispossessed family of southern blacks who fled their home after their father's lynching to find work and safety in New York. There, like thousands of other black families, they are crowded into a

tenement, and their illusions of security and prosperity are shattered. When the family's younger son, Chris, receives a draft notice, he initially refuses to accept his assignment, which, considering the family's situation, provokes a surprising response. His older brother, who has been maimed in an industrial accident, calls him a coward, and a chorus of tenement dwellers, overhearing the heated discussion, add their voices to the argument. This chorus constitutes a cross-section of America's most destitute citizens: an the widow of an Irish soldier, a Russian Jewish refugee, and an Army Mule Driver on leave. They each in turn exhort Chris to do his duty, and then, as the chords of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" lilt into the room, his brother makes a final passionate speech:

It is not for us to visit retribution. Nor to wish hatred on others. Let us rather remember the good that has come to us. Love of humanity is above the small considerations of time or place or race or sect. Can't you be big enough to feel pity for the little crucified French children—for the ravished Polish girls, even as their mother must have felt sorrow, if they had known, for OUR burned and maimed little ones? Oh, Mothers of Europe, we be of one blood, you and I! (247-248)

Finally convinced, Chris agrees to do his ostensible duty, imploring his mother and his girlfriend not to fear for him. Claire Tylee observes that the play "assumes . . . that citizenship is dependent on a masculine notion of self-worth based on strength and courage to do one's patriotic duty" (158). She is correct that Dunbar-Nelson trades heavily on gender roles in the play, appealing primarily to senses of masculine duty and responsibility. The only character in the play, curiously, who does not encourage Chris to fight is his girlfriend, and her attitude implies that shirking is a feminine response.

Dunbar-Nelson's best known poem, "I Sit and Sew," reveals deeply-ingrained patriarchal gender roles. The poem's persona is a woman working in war relief knitting

and sewing for soldiers at the front, in effect, engaged in gender appropriate war-time domestic tasks. But she longs to be involved in a more significant way:

I sit and sew—my heart aches with desire—
That pageant terrible, that fiercely pouring fire
On wasted fields, and writhing grotesque things
Once men. My soul in pity flings
Appealing cries, yearning only to go
There in that holocaust of hell, those fields of woe—
But—I must sit and sew. (84)

The persona expresses a sense of frustration with her socially-inscribed role, feeling inept and inadequate as she labors over her “useless task.” Dunbar-Nelson’s friend Georgia Douglas Johnson projects a less critical attitude in a short selection of war poems in her collection *Bronze*.⁹ The poem “Soldier,” for example, portrays a mother sending her son into combat. She weeps for him, but she realizes that other mothers have made the same sacrifice. So she asks him to “step proud and confident, worthy your mother; / Be firm and brave, O Son of Mine, be strong, / For terror waxeth” (144). The contrast between Johnson’s orthodoxy and Dunbar-Nelson’s unorthodoxy on the issue of gender is evident. These two poets are, in a sense, indicative of the changes in black women’s writing in the 1920s. One group of writers would persist with the uplift theme, producing texts that imitated white social behaviors, and another group of writers would explore the artistic possibilities of black folk culture.

This tension between black traditional literary forms and black modernist literary forms became more evident after the war. In the wake of both W. E. B. Du Bois’s call to return fighting and the racial violence of the Red Summer of 1919, the New Negro

⁹ Gloria Hull describes *Bronze* as “obligatory race poetry” (160) and Claudia Tate categorizes Johnson as “a member of the old guard of Negro writers” (xi) so her uncritical attitude toward the war is consistent with her literary career.

Renaissance valorized black cultural forms. Thus, works of literature that portray returning black soldiers project a radically different attitude from Dunbar-Nelson's jingoism. Mary Burrill's play *Aftermath*, for example, portrays a returning soldier as armed and ready to meet violence with violence. In the play John Thornton returns to South Carolina with a medal for courage he won in France. When he reaches the family cabin, he immediately asks for his father, but, rather than the joyous homecoming he expected, he finds that his father has been lynched during his absence and that his sister has shielded him from the news. John takes his Army revolver and explains to his sister and grandmother the lessons he learned during the war:

I've been helpin' the w'ite man git his freedom, I reckon I'd bettah try now to get my own!... I'm sick o' these w'ite folks doin's—we're "fine trus'worthy feller citizuns" when they're handin' us out guns, an' Liberty Bonds, an' chuckin' us off to die; but we ain't a damn thing when it comes to handin' us the rights we done fought an' bled fu'! I'm sick o' this sort o' life—an' I'm goin' to put an end to it!... This ain't no time fu' preachers or prayers! You mean to tell me I mus' let them w'ite devuls send me miles erway to suffer an' be shot up fu' the freedom of people I ain't nevah seen, while they're burnin' an' killin' my folks here at home! To Hell with 'em! (90-91).

Burrill's play projects a new, defiant racial attitude, the same tone found in Claude MacKay's poem "If We Must Die," but the play, much like *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, continues to portray women as passive. John's grandmother begs him to pray rather than fight, and his sister hugs him and warns him that he will be killed. This suggests a curious dichotomy in the relationship between gender and violence. Women in a traditionalist society may condone violence in the name of nationalism, such as the speaker in Johnson's poem who sacrifices her son to patriotic idealism, but black women should not or would not condone violence in the name of racial equality. Partly because of black

women's social distance from the war, their attitudes, even in representations by black women writers, continued to reflect traditionalist notions about appropriate gender roles.

In truth, the war had less of a social impact on black women, especially in the South, than any other group in the United States. The most significant effects on black women were a vague interest in nationalist politics, a noticeable improvement in the labor market, and the large migration of southern blacks to the North. Perhaps the best example of a modernist representation of the war by a black woman writer comes from Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In this novel, the war's actual impact on the southern family is minimal—it occupies about five pages of text—but it creates an atmosphere of change that Hurston portrays in a technique similar to John Dos Passos's newsreels, a montage of decontextualized images and disembodied voices. To be more specific, the war spans five paragraphs of disjointed narrative, such as “Conscription, uniforms, bands, strutting drum-majors, and the mudsills of the earth arose and skipped like the mountains of Jerusalem on The Day. Lowly minds who knew not their State Capitols were talking glibly of France. Over there. No man's land” (148). Hurston captures whirling cacophony of war-time for those removed from the war: the excited young men, the old men discussing Wilson, Roosevelt, and Du Bois, the anxious mothers, the braggadocio of the returning soldiers claiming white female conquests in France, and finally “the world gone money mad” (149). Hurston's depiction contrasts African American folk culture with the onrush of modernism, both the infrastructural changes and the superstructural changes, yielding a unique literary form.¹⁰

¹⁰ For discussions of Hurston's combination of modernism with African American folklore, see Eric Sunquist, *The Hammers of Creation*; John Lowe, *Jump at the Sun*; and Anthony Wilson, “The Music of Man, God, and Beast: Spirituality and Modernity in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.”

While Hurston evades the sentimental traditionalism that characterizes the writing of many of her contemporaries, her portrayal of gender roles in the black southern community inscribes women's marginalization. The novel's protagonist, John Buddy Pearson, ministers to the largest black Baptist congregation in Florida while philandering notoriously, which suggests the presence of a strongly masculinist social order. Within this order, women struggle for the role of Pearson's wife. The best wife, based on Hurston's text, is the one who most closely conforms to the image of the angel in the house. Hurston, who would complicate gender roles and women's agency in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, seems to affirm and to enforce the same virtues associated with the fiction of southern womanhood: loyalty, charity, chastity, and sacrifice. This circumstance in context with the even more traditionalist portrayals of black women's roles by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Mary Burrill and with the significant challenges limiting black women's involvement with the suffrage movement and war preparedness, leads me to conclude that World War I had only a negligible direct impact on black southern women's writing. But the combined effects of the post-war New Negro movement and the emergence of the New Woman would eventually result in modernist literary forms by black women. Among black women writers from both the North and the South the theme of racial uplift would continue to overshadow aesthetic development well into the 1930. It is not surprising, therefore, that black northern writer Jesse Redmon Fauset's novel *There is Confusion*, which uses the war as a primary dramatic background, shows many of the same signs of social traditionalism and literary sentimentalism as the work of black southern women writers. For black women the

boundaries of race increased the limitations of gender, putting them at a greater social distance from the domestic effects of the war.

Dispossessing the Angel in the House: Ellen Glasgow and Elizabeth Madox Roberts

World War I had a relatively greater impact on the domestic roles of white southern women than black southern women. Because white women had more freedom to take on new social and economic opportunities during the war, they experienced a significant degree of progress toward gender equality during the war. But after the war, as men returned to their homes and to their jobs, gender dynamics regressed somewhat. Many women lost the opportunity to work outside the home, for example, but women had demonstrated a capacity for major economic growth, thus breaking a persistent barrier. And, even though the suffrage movement virtually disbanded during the war, women received the right to vote after the war. Within the home, meanwhile, new mechanical devices, such as iceboxes and indoor plumbing, were changing the nature of domestic labor, particularly for women living in and moving to America's growing cities. In the South, the cycle of progression and regression is particularly evident in the contrast between women's living conditions before the war and after the war. Ellen Glasgow's *Vein of Iron* and Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *He Sent Forth a Raven* both represent southern women during this period, and their portrayals challenge the notion of the angel in the house. They present southern women living within the rigidly patriarchal social construct acquiring personal agency during the war, including new social, economic, and sexual freedoms. At the same time, however, these texts suggest that the sociocultural

system in the U.S. South is actually a patriarchal veneer supported by a matriarchal core, implying that women have greater authority within the social order than may appear.

Ellen Glasgow may be the best example of the contradictory and complex social position of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period when modernity encroached on the South. Raised in a prominent family from the Virginia tidewater region, she observed the strictures of traditional southern gender roles within her own home. Her father played the role of the patriarch, defining and dominating his family's lives. While he showed signs of devotion to his church and his company in public, he had affairs with several black servants and tyrannically brutalized his wife and children in private. Glasgow regarded him as "a consummate hypocrite" and "a fraud," and one could speculate that her attitude toward her father propelled her into behaviors out of keeping with the myth of southern womanhood (Goodman 20-21). Glasgow, in fact, was one of the most visible suffragists in Virginia. Beginning in 1909 she was involved with the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and she later wrote in her autobiography, "If women wanted a vote, I agreed they had a right to vote, for I regarded the franchise in our Republic more as a right than as a privilege; and I was willing to do anything, except burn with heroic blaze, for the watchword of liberty" (Glasgow, *The Woman Within* 187).¹¹ During the war, the suffrage movement in Virginia, never as well organized as its northern counterparts, dispersed. Glasgow, who had spent several years in England between her involvement with the suffrage movement and the beginning of the war, returned to her home in Richmond in 1916. Upon her return she began a relationship with Henry Anderson that resulted in an engagement. Before they

¹¹ Catherine G. Peaslee accounts Glasgow's role in the suffrage movement in "Novelist Ellen Glasgow's Feminist Rebellion in Virginia—the Suffragist."

were married, however, Henry received a commission to lead the Red Cross relief effort in the Balkans. While there he had a relationship with Queen Marie of Romania, gossip of which reached Glasgow. She and Henry never officially ended their engagement, but they were never married. In her later years, Glasgow became increasingly conservative about social matters, even becoming a supporter of the Southern Agrarians, and she reversed some of her earlier feminist ideals.¹²

Considering her perspective on gender in the South, her evolving portrayals of southern women's identity are both connected to her personal experience and indicative of broader social trends. In *Virginia*, Glasgow embodies the ideal of southern womanhood in Virginia Pendleton, a woman taught to valorize her own subservience to men.¹³ When her love interest, however, abandons her, she is incapable of independent life. In *The Romance of a Plain Man*, Glasgow dramatizes the suffrage movement in the South in the character of Mataoca Bland, a woman who defies her family's Victorian conventions and actually gives her life to the suffrage movement. *Barren Ground*, arguably Glasgow's finest novel, portrays Dorinda Oakley, who manages to unlearn the lessons of gender subordination and fashion herself into an independent and successful businesswoman. In *Vein of Iron*, which follows the Fincastle family of Virginia from the turn of the century to the Great Depression, Glasgow provides the most comprehensive image of changing gender roles and the progression and regression that accompanied the war.

¹² For details about Glasgow's changing political opinions, see Ellen M. Caldwell, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Agrarians."

¹³ For a feminist analysis of *Virginia*, see Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day*, chapter 6.

In part because of her study of Darwin and natural philosophy, she understood the evolutionary principles that affected southern society. Julius Raper observes in *Without Shelter* that social Darwinism “implied the total annihilation of southern ideology, replacing its emphasis upon hierarchical order, stability, uniformity, and the protection of the innocent with an emphasis on change, diversity, and struggle” (43). Her interest in Darwinism is particularly relevant to her attitude toward the war. Daniel Singal says that the war was “an immense watershed in Glasgow’s intellectual development” (102). She worried that the war signaled an attempt by man to hurry evolution and that the effects would be more harmful than beneficial. Her representation of these changes in *Vein of Iron* certainly casts the evolution of southern society in a problematic light. It is unclear if she sees the progress that took place during the war as positive or if she sees the regression that took place after the war as negative. Unlike her portrayals of southern femininity in other texts, this appears to be a book without a moral.

The book’s heroine, Ada Fincastle, comes from a traditionally patriarchal southern family. The entire family depends upon the father, John, for economic support, and he makes all decisions concerning the family’s welfare. But he is a problematic patriarch, not because he is domineering and hypocritical, but because he is idealistic and ineffectual. He had once been a promising Presbyterian minister renowned for his eloquence and his brilliant mind, but the church excommunicated him because he wrote a philosophical treatise that defied established dogma. In spite of his heresy, strict Calvinism continued to define his worldview and his family relations. In opening chapters of the book, Glasgow describes an episode that epitomizes Ada’s relationship with her father. When he goes into town to sell the family’s harvest and to pay the

mortgage, he promises to bring Ada a doll with real hair. Partly because of his inefficiency as a farmer, the crops bring a low price, and little money remains after settling accounts and purchasing essential supplies. So he brings Ada a cheap china doll. She learns through her disappointment not to rely upon her father or any other person for fulfillment. Later in the novel, he allows Ada's fiancé to marry another woman out of a sense of chivary, "a tradition in which he did not even believe... Her father," she thinks, "was a martyr to truth, but it was his own truth, not her's, not anothers" (138). In spite of these incidents, Ada does not resent her father; instead, she regards him with an aspect of resignation that eventually develops into pity. In a sense, this attitude reflects Glasgow's own attitude toward patriarchy in general.

Glasgow contrasts Ada's ineffectual father with her resilient grandmother, the woman who embodies the vein of iron ethos. While Ada's father ruins his career and eventually his health with his commitment to abstraction, her grandmother manages to keep the family together through her commitment to faith and fortitude. Although thoroughly and unquestioningly Calvinist, Ada's grandmother manages to adapt to change, including the changes accompanying the war that seem to threaten the annihilation of southern society. When Ada gets pregnant out of wedlock, for example, her grandmother, though displeased, sees past the inherent sin to accept the sinner. She, much more than the father, becomes Ada's role model. Indeed, the true test in the novel is not a struggle between Ada and her father or between Ada and her husband, but a test of Ada's ability to cope and persevere with change according to her grandmother's example. Lucinda Mackethan argues that this novel "envisions a matriarchal design" because it represents men sharing responsibility with women and because it emphasizes

community over individuality. She goes on to define a matriarchal design as “a structure of relationships based on sharing rather than competitiveness, on negotiation rather than self-assertion, and on integration rather than exclusion (Mackethan, “Matriarchal Design” 90). Mackethan sees the same characteristics in *Barren Ground*, but I see *Vein of Iron* as a significantly more matriarchal narrative, partly because Dorinda Oakley competes, by force if not my choice, with her male neighbors for her right to self assertion. In fact, one of the concerns I have with *Vein of Iron* is that Ada frequently chooses not to assert herself, instead choosing to follow her grandmother’s example and adapt to new conditions while maintaining the spirit of tradition. In effect, her story reveals how matriarchy actually supports patriarchy.

Although the novel begins in an insular community named Shut-In Valley, the events of the modern world intrude on the Fincastle family, first in the form of World War I and later in the form of the Great Depression. In the preface to the novel, Glasgow comments that the book is not about either the war or the Depression, rather that those events are part of the setting and that they “were scarcely more than an incident in the larger drama of mortal conflict with fate” (xiii). Although her comment seems dismissive, she places the majority of the novel’s action within the context of the war and the Depression, as opposed to placing those events at the margins. The war, moreover, directly causes both Ada’s sexual relationship with Ralph and the family’s move from the isolated mountain community to the piedmont city of Queenborough, a depiction of Glasgow’s native Richmond. So the war is evidently relevant to Ada’s story. She, in fact, attempts to avoid war hysteria at first, following her grandmother’s example of placing the war at physical distance. Her grandmother comments that “war isn’t real to me if it

leaves a window-pane in your house” and she recollects the Shenandoah Valley campaign of the Civil War that passed by the family’s home (156). The war comes closer to Ada, however, when Ralph enlists. By this time he has married another woman, a manipulative person who accused Ralph of seducing her and forced him into marriage, but he and Ada retain their feelings at a distance. In the meantime, Ada’s grandmother becomes more involved in the war movement. “She approved of a righteous war,” Glasgow writes, “and what war could be more righteous than the war to defend little Belgium?” (157). She even forces her son, Ada’s father, to support the war, thus saving him from a second ostracism, and she “presides impressively” over the local Red Cross (158).

As the maelstrom of war hysteria creeps into the mountain community, Ralph enlists and is commissioned as a second lieutenant. This, more than any other event, makes the war near for Ada. Although married at the time, Ralph and his wife have begun divorce proceedings by the time of his debarkation, and he secures a brief furlough before shipping to France. He and Ada spend this time together living in mock domesticity in an abandoned cabin. Their affair runs absolutely counter to their religious values and social mores. By this point Ralph has already arranged a divorce from his wife, who has abandoned him, and Ada has been content so far to wait patiently. If Ralph’s mobilization were not imminent, this episode would not have occurred and they would not have violated the community’s Victorian standards for romantic relationships. The war, in effect, forces Ada to assert her social and sexual independence, but she does so in a way that reinforces traditional gender relations. While in the cabin with Ralph she even plays the role of wife as much as lover, providing for his domestic needs as well as

his sexual needs. This episode is an example of Anne Goodwyn Jones' contention that "Glasgow used gendered definitions and romantic love as a way of exploring the tension between romanticism and realism" (*Tomorrow* 265). Jones does not mean, however, that Glasgow explores Romanticism, rather she uses the term to describe the romanticized notion of southern womanhood, the ideal of the angel in the house that Ada affirms even while fornicating with her lover.

Under ordinary circumstances, since Ada and Ralph planned to be married soon, their liaison would present only minor risks, but these are not ordinary circumstances. Ada gets pregnant during their two-day affair in the cabin, and she is left alone while Ralph serves in France for a year. Of course, she endures the disapproval of everyone in the community, including her grandmother, but she is not cast out as she might have been ordinarily, which suggests a special war-time dispensation or a general weakening of social mores. Although she and Ralph maintain consistent correspondence during his absence, she actually conceals the pregnancy from Ralph until the time of her delivery. The letters themselves become symbolic of the distance between Ada and the war, signifying her close personal connection and the vast space separating her from Ralph. Even when she grows despondent, she continues to write "in the hope that her letters might follow him to France and even, if it were necessary, into No Man's Land" (198). The letters, thus, act as an ersatz domestic arrangement. Consider, for example, the tone of the letter she uses to inform Ralph both of her pregnancy and the implicit birth of their child: "By the time you read this, I shall be sitting up, perhaps walking about, and thankful anyway that the long waiting is over. Nothing in this world is so bad as waiting for it. That is why I couldn't bear war. But nothing else matters if only you will come

back and we can all be happy together in the same place” (216-217). In this letter she suggests that the performance of traditional southern gender roles will constitute a return to normalcy, but several changes occur that make the performance of traditional gender roles difficult if not impossible. Ada’s grandmother dies, leaving her to care for her now ailing father and her child, thus inverting the order of patriarchy. She moves the family to Queenborough where, as she tells her father, “nobody will know about us” and where she can find work (227).

In the city, Ada experiences the new space of female agency that accompanied the war. She works in a department store, earning just enough to care for the family, but she is glad for the opportunity:

After two months, she was astonished afresh whenever she remembered the abundance of work and the ease with which she had found a position in the autumn of nineteen hundred and eighteen. The prejudice against women as workers had not survived the economic urgency of a world conflict. There had been no eager preference, immediately after the Armistice, for returned soldiers. Women in industry would always be cheaper than men, and since the war was won, prosperity was more agreeable, if not more important, than patriotism. The first place she had sought in November was hers for the asking. Now, at the end of January, she felt secure at least until Ralph’s return, or as long as she needed security. (231)

Ada’s attitude toward work and her sense of security proves to be overly optimistic, but the opportunities she finds for employment demonstrate the most significant outward change in southern gender roles during the war.¹⁴ Women who earned their own incomes also gained a significant degree of independence from their male supporters, enabling them, at least hypothetically, to make their own decisions about how to use their incomes, how to spend their time, and how to use their bodies. Women in the workforce, in effect,

¹⁴ Pamela R. Matthews explores Glasgow’s representation of feminism in “From Joan of Arc to Lucy Dare: Ellen Glasgow on Southern Womanhood.”

sowed the seeds of feminism in the South. When Ralph returns, however, Ada leaves her job, they get married, and her life assumes many of the characteristics of traditional southern womanhood, which suggests that pattern of progression and regression that typically follows wartime change.

The city around her, meanwhile, changes rapidly, and the social infrastructure makes radical permanent changes, leading to more long-lasting changes in social structure. In relatively urban Queenborough, contrasting with the rural South, the streets are paved, the houses have electricity and indoor plumbing, and the postwar economic boom drives a wave of consumerism. One of the fastest growing segments of the economy and most obvious signs of modernization is the automobile industry as cars become as common as carriages, and Ralph takes a job selling cars when he returns. Ralph tells Ada, “You must let me take care of the household. I’ll have a salary of three thousand dollars besides a commission after I sell a number of cars. I’ll be sure to sell cars. Everybody who has money is buying” (246). Indeed, Ralph does manage to support the family well at his job, until he crashes a car while giving a woman a test ride, leaving him bedridden for several weeks. The incident raises suspicions that Ralph and the woman were engaged in an affair, but the rumors are never substantiated, and Ada resigns herself to care for her husband during his convalescence. He does eventually recover and return to work, but his illness depletes the family’s savings. When the stock market crashes, Ralph’s job becomes unsteady and Ada returns to work at the department store out of necessity. But the precedent of women’s labor established during the war made her return possible, even though she does not exactly embody the ideals of feminism.

The idea of change made many southern traditionalists nervous, an attitude that extended far beyond the Agrarians in Nashville. Ada's father voices his own concerns about the post-war South in a monologue that captures the sense of southern conservatism:

Would the young always and everywhere confuse change with progress? Did every new age evolve from a ferment of centrifugal forces? Had it been like this in his youth? He tried to look back, but the view was too far and too faint. Still, it seemed to him that his generation had held, however loosely, to some standard of living. Nobility of motive had not then become a lost issue.... Everything, from the aimless speeding of automobiles down to the electric dust in the sunlight, appeared to whirl on deliriously, without a pattern, without a code, without even a centre.... A few weeks before he had stumbled upon one of his own pupils, a girl of seventeen, locked in an embrace in a parked car down a country lane. All this he reminded himself, was merely the foam of transition, and would disappear as it came. (249)

John's abstracted ruminations are consistent with his character, and his idealism contrasts with Ada's pragmatism. But he asks important questions about the nature and direction of change that point to the consistency of social evolution and the key principle of adaptation. One could speculate that traditionalists, such as John, and the traditions they value, such as the fiction of southern womanhood, are threatened with extinction.

The New Woman, the species that appears most likely to endanger the traditional southern woman, plays a role in *Vein of Iron*. Ada, herself a transitional figure, does not identify with them, but she seems to understand what they represent.¹⁵ She first encounters them at her job, where she observes that they are "all alike... all wore that stare of bright immaturity, all moved with flat bosoms, with narrow hips, with twisting ankles on French heels" (235). She deplores their behavior, their drinking, their jazz

¹⁵ For a brilliant analysis of Glasgow's contentious relationship with feminism and feminist criticism, see Pamela R. Matthews, *Ellen Glasgow and a Woman's Traditions*.

music, and their licentiousness, but they are the natural product of change in the South. Although Ada herself does not become a feminist, in spite of Glasgow's earlier feminist ideals, these women will unwittingly unravel the construct of southern feminine identity. Then again, social change does not happen unilaterally, for southern men changed just as significantly during this period. Glasgow notes in the preface to *They Stooped to Folly* that "the years since the First World War are becoming the dark moon for a number of exalted illusions. It is at least open to question whether women would ever have rebelled against their confining attitude had they not observed a diminishing humility in the novels written by men. At all events, after the War, male disillusionment with virtue, which had thickened like dust, invaded the whole flattened area of modern prose fiction" (Glasgow, *A Certain Measure* 232). Perhaps male disillusionment with virtue, which Glasgow sees in the work of many male writers, reflects the southern patriarchy's waning interest in gyneolatry, a shift concurrent with the growing agency of southern women and consequent to the domestic changes taking place in southern cities as a result of the war.

While the changes in southern gender roles during the war were highly evident in the cities, changes also took place in rural areas as well, which, considering the demographic composition of the South, affected many more women. Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *He Sent Forth a Raven* chronicles the effects of the war on an isolated farm near Wolflick, Kentucky.¹⁶ Roberts portrays the farm, a metonym for the South, as a patriarchal regime dominated by the egomaniacal despot Stoner Drake. Similar to Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, arguably the most domineering patriarch in American

¹⁶ Remarkably little critical work about Roberts exists. The most significant examples are a pair of monographs, Earl Rovit's *Herald to Chaos* and Frederick McDowell's *Elizabeth Madox Roberts*, and a special issue of *The Southern Review* in 1984.

literature, Drake determines the lives of his entire extended family, but Roberts characterizes him as more eccentric than monomaniacal. In the novel's opening, Drake rails at God, vowing that if his second wife dies that "he would never set his foot on God's earth again" (3). When his wife dies, Drake keeps his vow, continuing to run his farm and his family from within his home. Self confined but "master of his house," Drake uses a horn to give commands to his overseers, and he relies on his daughter, Martha, and his granddaughter, Jocelle, for contact with the outside world. Roberts' ludicrous depiction of Drake, including his penchant for hollow prophecy and his bizarre cosmographic texts, casts him as a caricature of the patriarchal tradition, an image that invites comparisons to Milton dictating to his daughters and Captain Ahab pursuing the white whale. Drake imagines himself as an incarnation of Noah, piloting his ark amid the flooding decay of the modern world, which implies that Jocelle is the Raven to which the title alludes. Although Drake's presence dominates the text, Jocelle is the protagonist, and the novel's primary tension is her struggle to find self-definition.

The key to her struggle is the unlikely encroachment of the outside world on Drake's dominion. Ironically, the emergence of automobiles and new highways, which made much of the rural South accessible and effectively signified the emergence of modernity, makes Wolflick more isolated, as no one goes there except "those who had some urgent need to go there" (18). News of the war in Europe, however, does reach the farm, one of the first indications that global events may affect even the most isolated locations. Drake regards the war in Europe as a millennial sign heralding the imminent apocalypse, but most of the other inmates on the farm reach a more pragmatic conclusion: the war means a boost in the market for agricultural products. At first the

increase in production is the only noticeable sign of a war taking place on another continent and ocean away from Kentucky, but eventually the war becomes more evident. Drake, who consistently looks for cosmic signs in terrestrial events, asks Jocelle on several occasions to interpret the war for him, to explain its significance. Each time she answers him blankly, suggesting that the war in itself has no meaning for her. In time, however, the war does come to have a significant meaning for her, although it begins indirectly.

Jocelle's cousin Walter sees the war as an opportunity to escape Wolflick. He is a troublesome character in the novel, irascible and easily agitated. His eagerness for combat has as much to do with his desire for action as his belief in American idealism. To that end, however, he voices a strong sense of patriotism minus the lingering sectionalism associated with most southern males, but his agitation is his defining characteristic. When America enters the war, he enlists in the Marines and leaves the farm for basic training. He returns on a brief furlough before mobilization, and his presence upsets the farm's ordinary routine. He has become an outsider and a transgressor. His language is filled with military jargon and hellish images of combat, a rhetoric that mimics and amplifies Drake's apocalyptic vision. Jocelle finds his presence ominous and disturbing, and her foreboding proves to be well-founded when Walter rapes her. Roberts sublimates the rape, perhaps the most crucial action in the text, so that it is barely discernible. It never actually happens in the narrative; in one scene Walter and Jocelle walk to a creek and in the next scene she returns to the house "faintly delirious" and "trembl[ing] with exhaustion," and she hides in her room while the rest of the family wishes Walter farewell (162).

For Jocelle, Walter brings the war, and the terrors of the outside world, to Wolflick. When he leaves, “Jocelle, falling asleep at last, contrived a picture of ease, in which the war had left her and had gone on to some farther battlefield” (163). But when she awakens, she feels that “the war had rolled its waves forward to include herself” (163). Afterward, she feels herself to be three people, suggesting a Freudian psychic fragmentation, and her incarnations, in fact, reflect a Freudian division. She sees the “person of yesterday,” a manifestation of the ego, the girl who cared for her aunt and heeded her grandfather; she sees a “person with ordered thinking,” a manifestation of the superego, the woman who will persevere through the chaos; and she sees a third person, a new-found id, who “arose from moment to moment, stepping through the confusion in strong rhythmic stride, asserting itself, unafraid and unashamed, saying nothing but biding her time” (163-164). This fragmentation indicates that for southern women on the homefront the trauma of war is psychological, but Jocelle’s trauma is more a product of southern gender dynamics than the war itself. The war acts as a catalyst of sorts, allowing Walter to act out his misogynistic fantasies, but the order that subordinates women renders Jocelle helpless. The new image of herself that emerges, the one who bides her time, suggests that Jocelle has a will to independence and an urge to break free from the patriarchal order.

At first, she looks for a sense of matriarchal community in her aunt Martha, Walter’s mother. She tells Martha that Walter “wiped his dirty filth” on her the day he left, but, rather than being outraged, Martha calls Jocelle a “war bride, a holy woman” (173). Martha, who lost her only opportunity for a romantic relationship to her father’s whim, has lost the part of herself that seeks independence. So she affirms the patriarchy

and fails to offer Jocelle a sense of community, and later she attacks Jocelle, accusing her of having a wholeness that Drake denied her. Jocelle finds greater sympathy in Logan Treer, a county extension agent with socialist beliefs. He tells her of the possibility of a fellowship of all people, a community with no class or gender divisions. She finds his ideas romantic, but the lingering image of the war and global discord makes it impossible for her to believe. She fears that this war, both the war in Europe and the psychological war in her home, will continue forever, transmogrifying from battle to battle. She gets a small bit of resolution when word comes that Walter has been killed in battle, which means that she will not encounter him again, but she does not find the psychological relief she expected. The war, which has become an extension of Walter in her imagination, continues, altering her perception of reality. On the farm she raises war chickens and war corn and the farmers discuss the prices of war land, and the events of the war become more immediate and real than the events on the farm itself. After Walter's death, Martha, using this new lexicon, taunts Jocelle as a "war-bride, war-witch, war-widow" (212). Jocelle sees herself as outside the normal, patriarchal order, and she imagines that the end of the war may have the effect of instituting a new order closer to Logan's vision of collective fellowship.

When the Armistice comes, Jocelle wonders "what would it be for war to cease? ...having been for so long a time pitched to the fervor of war" (215). With the end of hostilities, her inner conflict resolves. She realizes that she is in love with Logan Treer and that he is in love with her. When he returns from the war, she and Logan are married, but Drake expels them from the farm. But his expulsion is merely symbolic because her marriage to Logan signifies a new form of egalitarian gender relations that

displace the tyrannical patriarchy. She and Logan move to a farm of their own and have a family, but a new type of change stemming from the war threatens to destabilize their family. Post-war prosperity, the same economic tide that made Ada Fincastle's family temporarily prosperous in *Vein of Iron*, causes serious land inflation in rural Kentucky:

A great disaster had begun to sweep the country. Farms were being bought and sold at prices far in excess of those which the returns from the crops would now justify. The war-madness had come into the fields. From farm to farm, there was now too much yield, too many stock animals, too many plowed fields.... The cataclysm that had centered at Wolflick seemed now to have spread outward into every surrounding mile, and Jocelle looked abroad over the country in Logan's look, seeing what he saw. (245)

What Logan sees, presumably, is the ripening of conditions for a socialist revolution, although he never actually plays a role in agitating or organizing for such a revolution. The time for the traditional southern economy based on labor-intensive agricultural production clearly has passed. However, what may be most significant about this passage is that it represents Jocelle as looking outward; the internal conflict that plagued her on her grandfather's farm seems to have dissipated. With the birth of her child, a girl, she achieves a sense of psychological integration, and she forgives her isolated pitiful grandfather, who sits alone by the hearth at his farm, unable to set foot again on God's earth.

Roberts and Glasgow both depict southern women adapting to war-time change in the South by finding a degree of social and economic agency, so their works clearly reflect social changes taking place as the region moves toward modernity. But do their works reflect the aesthetic changes associated with modernism? Both writers have been

labeled realist, which suggests that they represent pre-modern forms.¹⁷ Beyond benignly dismissive comments, critics have been for the most part silent about every aspect of Roberts' work up to and including evaluations of her technique, but a spirited debate has taken place about Glasgow's relationship to modernism. While many aspects of her technique are consistent with realism, including her preferences for third-person limited narration and linear chronological narrative structure, Glasgow imagined herself as a modernist. In the essay "The Novel in the South," she includes herself among practicing modernist writers, writing "to those of us who are and who have been always in accord with the artistic impulse we pleased to call Modernism it is a relief to find that the horizon even of the American novel is fluid, not fixed" (74). Her valorization of fluidity seems curious, considering that her own forms were relatively fixed compared to the work of other female modernist, such as Virginia Woolf and Evelyn Scott among many others. Catherine Rainwater explains that Glasgow saw herself as an intellectual and artistic revolutionary and that the critical urge to reclassify Glasgow is at best reactionary and at worst regressive.¹⁸ She notes that Glasgow obviously incorporated modern ideas into her work, including copious references to Darwinism, Freudianism, and socialism, and that Glasgow employed subtle, yet complex, forms of multiple narrative voice. Ultimately, however, Rainwater concludes that Glasgow was more concerned with the issues of modernity—specifically the tension between her latent southern traditionalism and her progressive notions about race and gender—than the finer, experimental nuances

¹⁷ George Brosi offers a brief estimation of Roberts' literary technique and her contribution to southern literature in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*.

¹⁸ See Rainwater's essay "'That Abused Word, Modern' and Ellen Glasgow's 'Literature of Revolt.'" Also see Helen Fiddymont Levy's essay on Glasgow's technique, "Mining the *Vein of Iron*: Ellen Glasgow's Later Communal Voice."

of modernism. This position largely applies to Roberts as well, although she does employ more experimental, anti-traditional forms than Glasgow. They are, ultimately, transitional writers, bearing vestiges of realism into their engagement with modernity.

The Ideal of Southern Womanhood: Frances Newman and Zelda Fitzgerald

The fiction of Frances Newman and Zelda Fitzgerald demonstrates more characteristics associated with modernism, and their works portray a different aspect of modernity in the South. The sense of euphoria that accompanied military victory and post-war financial prosperity led to the relaxation of strict moral codes for sexual behavior associated with the Victorian period. Even in the South, arguably the most sexually-repressive region in the nation for women—at least for middle-class white women—flappers and other new women appeared after the war. For a time, at least, women appeared to gain more personal freedom and to defy the fiction of southern womanhood. But the extent of this freedom—and the duration of this freedom—may be problematic, as women’s roles in the South regressed more to the pre-war norm by the 1930s. A more enduring change may be the emergence of modernist form in southern women’s fiction; by the 1930s and 1940s Katherine Anne Porter, Lillian Hellman, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O’Connor were producing literary texts that clearly incorporated modernist forms into depictions of the U.S. South. Newman and Fitzgerald were, in effect, the forerunners of southern women’s modernism, and the representations of World War I in their respective novels *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* and *Save Me the Waltz* portray the problematic relationship between modern sexuality and modernist literary experimentation.

Based on her personal history, Frances Newman seems to be an unlikely modernist iconoclast. Born the youngest and, by her own account, homeliest daughter of a prominent family in Atlanta, Georgia, she grew up among the highest circles of southern society. Her father was a Confederate war hero who later became a U.S. district court judge, and her mother was a direct descendant of the founder of Knoxville, Tennessee. She was raised by a former slave, Susan Long, to whom she referred as “Mammy” and with whom she lived for most of her life. Although her parents used every available means of marrying her off, even sending her to finishing school in Washington D.C. and New York City where she could meet eligible men, she never married. She did, however, have several affairs, usually with much younger men, and she used one of the few lines of work available to women to make an independent career. She worked as a librarian, spending most of her career at Georgia Tech, and she wrote free-lance articles and reviews for newspapers. While clearly raised on the fiction of southern womanhood, Newman lived much of her life outside the usual parameters of accepted southern femininity. As both an insider and an outsider, she was perfectly positioned to satirize southern social patterns, but her primary interest was not gender but literature. She read incessantly, and her many book reviews were perceptive and biting.¹⁹ She attracted the attention of James Branch Cabell and H. L. Mencken, both of whom encouraged her to produce her own work. Her novels are perhaps the strongest indicators of her interests. Although provocative and perplexing, both of her novels, *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* and her later novel *Dead Lovers are Faithful Lovers*, are filled with allusions to other

¹⁹ Her review of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Side of Paradise*, for example, prompted Fitzgerald to write her an outraged letter. She paraded the letter before James Branch Cabell, saying she felt like she had “pulled a spoiled baby’s curls and made him cry.” The exchange can be found in *Frances Newman’s Letters*, edited by Hansell Baugh, 40-45.

books—a technique that in itself alludes to *Emma Bovary*—and they reveal her fascination with literature for literature’s sake.

This, however, does not mean to suggest that the novels have no gender awareness. As the titles themselves indicate, the books are about women and relationships and sex, but Anne Firor Scott’s assertion that *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* is a “pervasive and corrosive” feminist text is somewhat problematic (xvi). Scott does supply the important qualification that Newman did not imagine herself as a feminist, but, regardless, feminist characteristics have been attributed to her. In fact, Reginald Abbott argues that Newman’s works have been recovered primarily to serve as markers of early twentieth-century feminist ideology in the South, which implies that the books have relatively little aesthetic value. As Barbara Wade explains, the books, especially *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*, are based on a premise involving the inherent tension between southern womanhood and modernity, but the novel itself undercuts a feminist reading of this trajectory. Ultimately, the protagonist, Katharine Faraday, appears to affirm the values of southern womanhood without actually ascribing to them. In other words, while she does not marry, she does not assert herself as an independent entity. Even when she loses her virginity she appears to do so without embracing her sexuality. In *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, Anne Goodwyn Jones suggests that the novel reflects Newman’s own social ambivalence; she simply did not care deeply about the usual social institutions that dominated southern women’s lives, such as family, feminism, and the South itself. Jones addresses the issue more directly in the foreword to *Dead Lovers are Faithful Lovers*, where she asserts that “like many southern feminists, Newman eschewed the label feminist because it connoted political advocacy. And like many southern women, she

showed little interest in the political and social issues that gripped her milieu” (xxxii). To the extent that she was a feminist, she was a feminist in spite of herself. It simply would be impossible for an independent, intellectual woman in the 1920’s to fully endorse the gender values of the U.S. South. But her primary objective was to be an artist, a thoroughly modern, provocative artist.

By the standards of Atlanta society, she succeeded in her first attempt to provoke. *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* caused a major scandal in the city, one reviewer described it as “grounds for lynching,” and it was banned in Boston (qtd in Scott, foreword xii). Consequently, it sold well. The quality that attracted attention to the book and that offended the prurient sensibilities in Atlanta, Boston, and most of the rest of the country was the book’s references to female sexuality. Although not nearly as explicit as the pulp novels that would dominate the literary marketplace in the 1930s and 1940s, by the standards of the 1920s any novel that suggested female sexual behavior caused outrage. Newman’s novel, in other words, had the same impact on Atlanta that D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterly’s Lover* had on London and that James Joyce’s *Ulysses* had on Dublin. Her impact may have been even greater, however, because she was both female and southern and, thus, expected to be completely ignorant of sexuality. She accurately assesses that “in Georgia no lady was supposed to know she was virgin until she had ceased to be one” (174). As the title suggests, nonetheless, Katharine Faraday knows what a virgin is, and she knows that she is one. In several scenes in the novel she accidentally, almost chastely, discovers aspects of her sexuality. On one occasion in the bath she discovers her vulva, but, as the depiction demonstrates, she does not regard it as a source of pleasure:

Between her flat chest and her thin legs, she noticed a line she had never noticed before—a delicate line which was slightly browner than the area she thought was her stomach, and which began just below the curious little dent her mammy called a navel. And she had a sudden revelation that when her first child—of whose advent she had so little doubt that she had already baptized her Violet, with Diana reserved for her little sister—came into the world, the part of herself which she thought was her stomach would burst along the delicate brown line, and that she would naturally shriek, and that her daughter would dart into the world like Pallas Athena darting from the brain of Zeus, and that a doctor would then give her ether and sew her up. (35-36)

Her clinical, metaphorical description is indicative of the remaining discussions of female sexuality in the text. Other than the fact that she recognizes that female sexuality exists, nothing about her book depicts actual sexual behavior, much less eroticism. This fact, coupled with the extreme reaction to the text, reveals that taboos on women's sexuality were still in force in the South even during the so called Jazz Age following World War I.

The war plays a curious role, or lack thereof, in the novel. Although set during the war, it makes remarkably little reference to the war. Compared to war's impact on the lives of women in the novels by Ellen Glasgow and Elizabeth Madox Roberts set during the war, this seems anomalous. Considering that Katharine Faraday's relationships mostly involved soldiers and that she was in Europe when the war began, it seems even more unusual. It is in the depiction of the war that Newman's social ambivalence, the same attitude that makes her images of female sexuality politically inconsequential, becomes evident. Katharine Faraday remains purposefully disinterested in and disengaged from the war:

Katharine Faraday was always able to enjoy saying that she had lost all confidence in her own intelligence on the day when a war followed the assassination she had enjoyed so much, and she was able to enjoy feeling that she was completely different from all the American women who enjoyed the war so much even after it ceased to be a merely European war. She thought that her reason was entirely responsible for her convictions,

and when she enjoyed feeling broad-minded because she did not believe that all the little boys in Belgium had been deprived of their right hands or that all the women in Belgium had been found raving and naked and breastless and virtueless in abandoned German trenches, she knew that she was remembering the night when Lothar Falkenhayn had held her hand until morning without offering her the indignity of a kiss. (225)

Her self-absorbed attitude toward the war is consistent with her lack of social engagement. In spite of her close proximity to the war, she discusses it only briefly, which implies that it has only minimal impact on her life or, rather, that she barely recognizes its impact on her life.

Katharine Faraday, however, is not oblivious to her surroundings, neither is she unintelligent or solipsistic. As a young woman in school, she recognizes the differences in gender expectations. “She knew,” for example, “that any boy is born to a more honourable social situation than any girl” and that a pretty girl has definite advantages over an ugly girl (30). She also realizes that her intelligence is a liability, not an asset. Her education at finishing school is a process of stupefaction, as her teachers feel it is their “duty to southern womanhood” to leave “the brains of young ladies in a state of paralysis” (58). Considering that the fiction of southern womanhood depended on women playing submissive and dependent roles, mental acuity, beyond the ability to make charming conversation and manage a household, would have been at best superfluous. To a certain extent, Newman’s portrayal of women’s roles and the process of inculcating submissiveness on southern women is an exercise in irony. Dismissive comments about women’s education from an obviously erudite and sophisticated writer cannot be taken solely at face value. Clearly, Newman values education for women, and her comments are meant to satirize gender roles in the South. But her satire is tempered with a degree of sincerity. As an intelligent woman living in the South who has been socially demeaned

for not following the ordinary course of southern womanhood, she realizes that these institutions have real meaning. In Newman's case, her social status diminished from her family's upper-class pretensions—they were members of both the Capital City Club and the Piedmont Driving Club—to near poverty as she struggled to support herself and her dependents on the meager income available to her as an independent woman in the South. So judging Newman's attitude toward her subject is problematic. Her personal experience places her outside the norms of southern womanhood, but her artistic sensibility affords her a sense of ironic detachment.

Newman's social ambivalence greatly complicates interpretations of her texts. In a sense, her representations of southern womanhood appear to be consistent with feminist ideals, as her satire suggests the impracticality and injustice of gender inequality. She does, however, appear to be sincere about her southern identity. While it would be difficult to argue that she affirms the conventions of southern womanhood, she, like many southern intellectuals, had a conflicted relationship with the South.²⁰ She projects this same relationship on Katharine Faraday, who explains to a European gentleman that “she had already discovered that a southern lady's charms are estimated entirely by their agreement with tradition and that her intelligence is judged entirely by her ability to disagree with tradition,” and she tells him “that she thought there was a great deal to be said for the Old South, but not nearly as much as had already been said” (244). Although she feels constrained by the conventions of southern womanhood, she has, for the most part, internalized the standards even while living outside them. Actually, the degree to which she lives outside them is questionable. Newman herself lives as a nominally

²⁰ Newman told an interviewer that she “loved the Southland which was her birthplace and her home for most of her life, and she was proud of the chivalry and the gallantry” (qtd in Jones, *Tomorrow* 277).

independent woman, but Katharine Faraday seems more like Daisy Miller than Edna Pontellier. Reginald Abbott argues that “what is important to remember at the novel’s conclusion is that Katharine Faraday has not become a rebel to convention. She is still a lady, a southern lady” (63). This sense of southern identity may be the novel’s most frustrating characteristic; the highly experimental style does not match the relatively traditional subject.

Newman’s style, in and of itself, definitely qualifies as antitraditional.²¹ Each chapter of the book is a single paragraph, and, while the narrative follows a roughly chronological line, the form is fragmentary and disjointed. The narrative voice is detached, yet omniscient. The narrator always refers to the protagonist, who appears to be equivalent in experience with the narrator, by her full name, Katharine Faraday, which creates a sense of formal distance. And Newman uses numerous allusions to other texts, creating an intertextual narrative that invites comparison to *The Waste Land*. Her strongest influences were Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, and she attempted in her novels to capture a sense of interiority. Strictly in terms of style and form, Newman may be the most modernist southern writer after Faulkner, but, ultimately, her characters lack interest and coherence and the narrative does not develop a sense of dramatic tension. Newman’s eccentric style becomes the literary equivalent of witty conversation, a dissembling exercise in intelligence and charm. Anne Goodwyn Jones hypothesizes that Newman’s style reflects its subject, which is not southern society or social change or any other particular event but an attitude based on a certain set of principles. Jones explains, “Newman’s subject—the minds of the southern elite—is written purposefully in the

²¹ The most thorough consideration of Newman’s style and her literary antecedents is chapter five of Barbara Ann Wade’s *Frances Newman: Southern Satirist and Literary Rebel*.

language those minds so assiduously used and tried to preserve, the King's English, which they saw as correct. Yet it is precisely this formality—the complexity of sentences, the repetition of phrases and clauses—that makes her writing seem difficult. The style of the novel thus becomes a metonym for the novel's social preoccupations as well as the representation of the protagonist's subjectivity" (xxvii). Jones' explanation seems plausible, and it further suggests that Katharine Faraday is herself a metonym for a certain type of mind in the South, the paralytic mind of the southern socialite. If that is the case, then *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* may actually be a corrosive feminist text, but finding the actual feminism requires a reading beyond the text.

Because of its strangeness and complexity, *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* has received a mixed critical reception. At the time of its publication, it created a stir and sold fairly well, but reviews were inconsistent. Predictably, traditionalists, such as Donald Davidson, found the book unsettling. He regarded it as a direct attack on southern tradition and described it as having "hardly a page without its malignant attempt of puncturing some convention, especially the conventions of the Old South" (*The Spyglass* 28). Southern progressives, on the other hand, championed Newman's work, and she received support from James Branch Cabell, Emily Clark, and H.L. Mencken, all of whom regarded her as revolutionary. In spite of the furor over her initial publication, Newman's work fell into obscurity until resurrected by feminist critics of southern literature, most notably Anne Goodwyn Jones. In *Tomorrow is Another Day*, Jones writes that "[Newman's] life, expressing as it did the changed mores of the post-World War I period, and her works, concerned as they so obsessively are with the role of the southern lady, deserve to be reexamined" (272). While I find her perception of the southern lady in

the post-World War I period to be excessively inward looking, Newman has experienced a renaissance.²² Both of her novels have been reprinted, several articles have been written about her work, and Barbara Ann Wade has published an excellent monograph on Newman. Her works may thus be an accurate barometer of southerners' attitudes toward feminism as her reception has measured shifts in gender roles in the South, first with the expansion of women's agency immediately after the war, then the contraction of women's agency by the 1930s, and finally the feminist intellectual movement in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.

As a writer, however, Newman clearly demonstrates the difference between modernity and modernism. Her work emphasizes artistic style over social context, and she presses no obvious social agenda in her work, although a social agenda can be projected on to her work. In her anthology *The Short Story's Mutations*, she explains her opinion about the relationship between modern history and modern fiction. "Joyce is not so much a follower as a contemporary of Freud," she writes, "just as he is a contemporary and not a product of the war called the European War because no one has thought of a name for it." She allows that the war "undoubtedly inspired a great deal of poetry" because "men have a tendency to become rhythmical and primitive and hysterical in the vicinity of the cannon's mouth." But she does not believe that fiction has the same relationship to current events:

the years since nineteen seventeen have not been epoch-making years in American fiction because they are the years since the war ceased to be entirely European—no rational person could believe that Sherwood Anderson wrote Winesburg, Ohio [sic] because the Germans just signed a humiliating armistice and had given the French their revenge.... And no

²² Frances Newman is generally credited with coining the term "southern renaissance" in a review that appeared in New York *Herald Tribune* in 1925.

rational person could believe that James Branch Cabell wrote *The Cream of the Jest* [sic] because his country was declaring war on Germany....
(304-305)

Newman expresses a common perception that works of art are, and perhaps should be, disconnected from social circumstances. In spite of this position on aesthetic values, it is always the case that works of art take place within a social context that affects both the creator and audience, so it is impossible to remove the aesthetic apprehension of art, even fiction, from its social milieu. Although not all works of literature written by American, much less southern, authors in the years immediately following World War I directly involve the war, it is necessarily true that the war affected American culture, especially in the South. So an awareness of the war is crucial to understanding the social changes taking place as modernity invaded the South, and an awareness of modernity's impact is crucial to understanding the work of southern modernist writers, including Newman.

While Newman apparently intentionally sublimates social context as an aesthetic strategy, Zelda Fitzgerald's novel *Save Me the Waltz* places the modernist work of fiction directly and overtly in context with modernity. The novel, which is based closely on Zelda's life, follows the protagonist, Alabama Beggs Knight, from her childhood in the South, through her marriage to an artist from the North, to their lives together in Europe, and her aborted career as a ballet dancer. Zelda Fitzgerald has been called the original flapper and the personification of the New Woman, but her novel suggests that women's roles from the traditional South to modern Europe changed only slightly. Yet her depiction of women's roles shows evident signs of modernist form. Although the narrative suffers from occasional stylistic excesses and, even more detrimentally, from severe editing by F. Scott Fitzgerald, it employs many of the antitraditionalist techniques

associated with modernism; therefore, it is an especially revealing artifact depicting the fiction of southern womanhood. The book, however, has been consistently dismissed by critics. In the foreword to the 1967 republication, for example, Harry T. Moore calls it a “literary curio” (vii). In most cases, critics regard the book as a derivative of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s work, particularly his novel *Tender is the Night*, which also happens to be based on his marriage to Zelda.²³ But this critical discourse has the effect of privileging the masculine perspective. While it may be true that *Tender is the Night* is a more successful book, both critically and commercially, *Save Me the Waltz* stands on its own as a feminist narrative of changing southern gender roles. In the same way that Frances Newman may not have imagined herself as a feminist, Zelda Fitzgerald likely did not see herself as a feminist, yet she has become a symbol of the Jazz Age woman. Unlike Newman, she did not self-consciously identify herself as a southerner, but I am inclined to agree with Lisa Nanney’s opinion that “*Save Me the Waltz* is a southern novel” (222).

Zelda’s life demonstrates the congruence between the flapper and the southern belle. Her biographies describe her as the beautiful and willful child of southern aristocrats. Her father was a highly respected judge in Montgomery, Alabama, and her mother, a legendary beauty from Kentucky, had been known as “the wild lily of the Cumberland.” Zelda was the youngest of their children, and she had a precocious talent for attracting attention, especially the attention of young men. In spite of her recklessness and coquetry, her childhood was highly traditional. She clearly understood the myth of

²³ Although Zelda Fitzgerald grew up in Alabama, she has not been heavily incorporated into the criticism of southern women’s literature. In fact, she merits only a passing mention in *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*. Lisa Nanney’s essay, “Zelda Fitzgerald’s *Save Me the Waltz* as Southern Novel and *Künsterroman*,” is the only work that claims Fitzgerald as a southern writer. Her position within the criticism of American modernism is also problematic. Some feminist critics have reclaimed her work, but most treatments of her novel approach it as a curious appendage to *Tender is the Night*.

southern womanhood. In fact, on one occasion she attended the Key-Ice dance at the University of Alabama. During intermission the members of the club paraded a large block of ice through the house by torchlight and drank a ceremonial toast “to the lovely woman of the Southland, as pure and chaste as this sparkling ice.” Nancy Milford describes this episode as “an extravagant and somewhat sinister homage to Southern womanhood” (21). She goes on to affirm that Zelda’s family was firmly rooted in southern tradition, and she explains that Zelda, in spite of her impetuosity, recognized her place within the social structure. She understood, in other words, that southern women were expected to be submissive and that creative dissembling was a necessary survival skill. For a woman raised on the fiction of southern womanhood, the advent of new womanhood and the relative freedom of post-war American society seemed to offer space for personal realization, but the deeply-ingrained values of southern womanhood proved, at least in Zelda’s case, to impose debilitating limits on that freedom.

Save Me the Waltz is a novel about a woman living in a patriarchal system. The book opens with a description of Alabama’s relationship with her father, who is described as “a living fortress” (3). The sense of security he provides protects his daughters, particularly his youngest, Alabama, from “the changing exigencies of [her] time,” which has the effect of leaving the daughters “crippled” and clinging to their father (4). In this way, submissiveness is ingrained into the girls from an early age, and, while their behavior has the appearance of recklessness, it is predicated upon masculine privilege. In other words, the daughters of Judge Beggs have a greater degree of relative freedom for two reasons: first, because they are beautiful and thus embody the most valuable trait of southern womanhood and, second, because their father is an important man and they are

an extension of him. His primary obligation to his daughters, meanwhile, is to see them advantageously married. The daughter's mother models for them the role of a southern wife. "The wide and lawless generosity of their mother," Zelda writes, "was nourished from many years of living faced with the irrefutable logic of the Judge's fine mind. An existence where feminine tolerance plays no role being insupportable to her motherly temperament, Millie Beggs, by the time she turned forty-five, had become an emotional anarchist" (11). The mother, thus, is a subordinate to the father who offers emotional support to her daughters, but she clearly does not model independence. By the time she became a young woman, Alabama internalized the lessons of southern womanhood: "She had a strong sense of her own insignificance; of her life's slipping by while June bugs covered the moist fruit in the fig trees with the motionless activity of clustering flies upon an open sore" (31).

Alabama sees romance as her reason for being, so the war and the trainloads of dashing young men from far away places steaming into her hometown seems like a blessing.²⁴ To her, the prospect of war seems thrilling: "All night long Alabama thought about the war. Things would disintegrate to new excitements. With adolescent Nietzscheanism, she already planned to escape on the world's reversals from the sense of suffocation that seemed to her to be eclipsing her family, her sisters, and her mother" (29). Alabama briefly finds a sense of significance in the attention of men who swarmed the town "like benevolent locusts eating away at the blight of unmarried women that had overrun the South since its economic decline" (34) She dances and flirts with the men,

²⁴ For a description of American soldiers in Montgomery, see Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography*, 19-23. While still in high school, Zelda wrote a patriotic poem called "Over the Top with Pershing" that reflects the jingoism of the day.

and she collects their insignia—trophies of her own conquests—in a glove box. She says proudly that “no other girl had more and even then she’d lost some” (35). In Alabama’s case, the war only serves to throw the usual dynamics of southern womanhood, specifically the competition for male attention, into a fever pitch. For her, as many other southern belles, the war does not represent new economic or social opportunities; instead, it represents a new landscape for the performance of traditional southern gender roles. This pattern is in itself a function of masculine traditionalism. If Alabama were a working class woman, the war may have made necessary economic opportunities available, but she is a member of the social elite and, thus even in a marketplace teeming with new positions, she seeks only the occupation for which she has trained since birth, as a wife.

Alabama falls in love with perhaps the most dashing of the young men, an artist from New York named David Knight. After an extremely brief courtship, they are engaged to be married. Their engagement proceeds according to clear masculinist guidelines for economic exchange. David asks Judge Beggs for permission to marry Alabama, and Judge Beggs’ only concern is David’s ability to support Alabama. David lies about money in the family and his future earning prospects. The exchange reminds him of a strange dream about “a troop of Confederate soldiers who wrapped their bleeding feet in Rebel banknotes to keep them off the snow. David, in his dream, had been there when they found that they did not feel sorry about using up the worthless money after they had lost the war” (39). The dream implies that David sees his engagement to Alabama as an economic conflict in which he uses the appearance of money to deflect the absence of money. This dream also suggests that the South has a peculiar significance in David’s northern imagination, a significance associated with

defeat. In a sense, his marriage to Alabama represents a new conquest of the South by a masculinist northern tradition. After their marriage, David asserts his dominance over Alabama; he even tells her “you belong to me,” reinforcing his possession (45). Later, when he begins to suspect that she is having an affair, he accuses her of “reversion to type,” telling her, “you’ve gone Southern again” (85). Here he projects conceptions of southerners as lustful and licentious on his wife, extending the negative perception of the South in the mind of the North.

Almost as soon as David and Alabama are married they leave the South, and, at the same time, David’s charade of financial solvency comes to an end. They move to a rented house near New York, where David earns some money as an artist, but they spend the money as soon as it is earned on drinking and partying. In this sense, they appear to embody the Jazz Age lifestyle, but the notions of female sexual freedom associated with flappers and the New Woman do not in any way extend to Alabama. She essentially plays the same role to David that her mother played to her mother, as a beautiful and emotional adornment, a projection of his own success. When Alabama’s parents come to visit them in New York, she engages in an elaborate subterfuge to conceal David’s drinking and their poverty. In a house littered with empty bottles and drunks, however, maintaining the façade proves impossible. Alabama’s parents leave hastily, and she worries obsessively about their opinion of her, which leads her to articulate the paradox of feminism and southern womanhood: “it’s very difficult to be two simple people at once, one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be loved and safe and protected” (56). As a product of the cult of southern womanhood, Alabama has been inculcated in a gender dynamic that enforces protection for women, and for her

any difference is unsettling. David continues to restrict her agency, but he does not continue to provide her with protection, which leads her to a crisis of identity. When they move to Europe, she takes on a new identity in a new place, becoming a ballet dancer at a relatively advanced age and rejecting, at least temporarily, the roles of wife and mother, the only viable roles available to her as a southern woman. When she develops an injury, however, and can no longer dance, her identity collapses, and she suffers a debilitation nervous breakdown.²⁵

Only briefly does Alabama feel a reintegration of identity, when she returns to Montgomery to visit her father on his deathbed. When Alabama steps off the train, she feels at home: “The old town where her father had worked away so much of his life spread before her protectively. It was good to be a stranger in a land where you felt aggressive and acquisitive, but when you began to weave your horizons into some kind of shelter it was good to know that the hands you loved had helped in the spinning—made you feel as if the threads would hold together better” (196). Her sense of return, however, is complicated by her experience outside the South. While part of her longed for the simplicity of southern womanhood, the desire to be protected, she also found the possibility of feminine self definition while studying ballet in Italy. Consequently, she finds that her attitude toward southern womanhood has changed. “She saw her mother,” a paragon of southern womanhood, “as she was, part of a masculine tradition. Millie did

²⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald insisted that a number of revisions be made to the novel before he would allow his editor, Maxwell Perkins, to publish it. Because the novel is based closely on their marriage and because he based *Tender is the Night* on the same material, he saw Zelda’s novel as a threat to his own. In the original version, the character David Knight is named Amory Blaine, which also happens to be the name of Fitzgerald’s doppelganger in *This Side of Paradise*. Fitzgerald requested this change and the omission of several passages describing Alabama’s affair in France. For details about the tension between Scott and Zelda over these revisions, see *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks, 144-171, especially Scott Fitzgerald’s note to Zelda’s doctor, 164-165.

not seem to notice about her own life, that there would be nothing left when her husband died. He was the father of her children, who were girls, and who had left her for the families of other men” (201). Alabama sees herself, perhaps, as both inside and outside southern womanhood. Certain aspects of her relationship with David clearly show signs of masculinist tradition, but she has evolved from the woman who saw romance as her occupation to a woman who can imagine self definition outside the roles of wife and mother. Whether or not she achieved that form of definition is questionable. *Save Me the Waltz* comes to an abrupt end just after Judge Beggs’ death. Alabama and David return to New York, where she attempts only to put her past behind her. But the novel’s structure, spanning Alabama’s relationship with her father from her birth to his death, suggests that masculinity defines Alabama’s life, but her apparent intention to empty “this deep reservoir that was myself” implies that she is on the verge of creating a new—and thus, by definition, feminist—identity (212).

Possibly, Alabama has realized that southern womanhood, like all other identities, is a rhetorical construction predicated on the values of a specific time and place. The South modernized during and after World War I, but the process was slow and recursive. Yet real change did occur, and its effects are evident in the difference in the living conditions of southern women, especially those who found work outside the home and those who became activists for women’s rights. Those examples, however, while signaling the impact of modernity on southern womanhood, should be considered in context with the vast majority of other southern women, whose living conditions evolved much more slowly, continuing to maintain most aspects of traditional southern womanhood long after the war. Meanwhile, the literary representations of these changes,

both radical and gradual, demonstrate the emergence of literary modernism in the work of southern women writers. But artistic change, like social change, happens on an individual scale. Ellen Glasgow's novels, including *Vein of Iron*, show an evident awareness of modernist experimentation, but they reflect a more realist aesthetic. Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *He Sent Forth a Raven* situates modernist intellectualism, specifically Freudianism and socialism, in a traditional southern social context. Frances Newman's *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* gratuitously experiments with modernist style to represent a mostly traditional upper-class incarnation of southern womanhood. And Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* portrays a woman who is deeply involved in modern artistic production eventually, even reluctantly, adapting to the passage of southern womanhood. Each of these texts demonstrates the impact of World War I on southern women and, perhaps more importantly, the impact of modernity on the fiction of southern womanhood and of modernism on the fiction of southern women.

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