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Bryan Thomas McCabe
University of South Florida

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Cars, Collisions, and Violence in Southern Literature

by

Bryan Thomas McCabe

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Major Professor: Robert Snyder, Ph.D.
Maria Cizmic, Ph.D.
Silvio Gaggi, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Southern literature, from the first half of the twentieth century, deals primarily with the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. The conflict in the Southern novel is a result of the protagonist's inability to transition from the structure of the Old to the New South. The Southern protagonist is often quite unconscious of his inability to adapt to the modern world because he suffers from a "diffusion of time perspective." As the protagonist struggles to find a harmonic balance between traditional and modern, he is ultimately unable to avoid a tragic fate. The "violence" that must take place in Southern literature is often a final resort of the character when all other alternatives have failed. He is inevitably drawn by fate (or by the hand of God) towards the crossroads where a choice must be made between the agrarian or industrial, between archaic morality or modern atheism, a collision that must be radically violent to be justified. This violent collision reaches its pinnacle of expression in violence involving the automobile.

Introduction

Following the Civil War, Henry Grady, a native Georgian and editor of the Atlanta Constitution, championed what came to be known as “The New South Creed.” Grady desired to rebuild the ravaged economy of the South by following the business model of the North, which relied heavily on industrial factories. Grady believed that industrialization and economic success was the quickest way to transform the South. While Grady articulated the industrial side of the ledger, Booker T. Washington, President of Tuskegee Institute, proposed a solution to the South’s racial dilemma. Washington advised African Americans to trade racial equality for economic progress. Washington ignored the social flaws of society and refused to challenge the racial hierarchy of the South. Washington believed that offering blacks opportunities for financial improvement, while denying political equality, would be the best way to end racial friction (Gaston 210). The system of sharecropping, which perpetuated the plantation structure following emancipation of the slaves, was also developed in order to maintain the economic dominance of the white elite. Tenantry divided labor into shares, whereby planters provided the land and former slaves the labor, and used the crop lien to lock in sharecroppers from year to year. This system was not challenged until the New Deal programs of the 1930s made mechanization an affordable alternative to labor intensive farming methods in the South (Crawford 103).

In the 1880s and 1890s, the South sold off its natural resources in order to advance the development of railroads, coal mines, lumber camps, textile towns, and urban areas. In the

process, the South became an economic colony of the North, and class and race divisions stratified. However, at the same moment, the South created a mythic vision of its past that lamented a lost tranquility and golden age of prosperity. This myth was a celebration of the now defunct plantation structure of the Old South. Ironically, the same businessmen who encouraged rapid industrialization of the South also embraced the agrarian myth. As James C. Cobb points out:

Advocates of industrial development promised a prosperous New South based on economic modernization, but they were also careful to pay homage to a mythical 'gone with the wind' vision of an antebellum society peopled by aristocratic beaux and belles who lived in elegant white columned mansions surrounded by fragrant magnolias. This celebration of a non-industrial, noncapitalistic society went hand in hand with tributes to the Lost Cause and the use of Confederate heroes to boost the crusade for economic expansion (*Industrialization in Southern Society* 13).

The conflicting principles of the South over agriculture and industry continued in the twentieth century, and was most eloquently expressed by the twelve agrarians in *I'll Take My Stand*. The Nashville agrarians argued that the Southern way of life held a spiritual and cultural advantage to the North. It saw the policies of the New South, which favored technology and industrialization, as equivalent to "Yankee imperialism." They feared the South was losing its unique cultural identity in attempting to modernize. As James C. Cobb points out, "In the late 1920s and 1930s the Nashville Agrarians warned that the best elements of the region's rural, agricultural way of life would be quickly destroyed as cities and manufacturing plants cluttered the landscape and southerners forsook their farms for the dehumanizing regimen of the factory" (*Selling the South* 2).

However, the agrarian movement offered little promise of maintaining a distinctive Southern way of life. For one, many of the principles they stood for were more mythical than practical. Industrialization, as even Allen Tate admits, had started as early as the invention of the cotton gin, and by the time of the Great Depression, machinery was becoming an unalterable reality for the South. As Vann C. Woodward explains in *The Burden of Southern History*, “The twelve Southerners who took their stand in 1930 on the proposition that the Southern Way stands or falls with the agrarian way would seem to have been championing a second lost cause...the Southerner as a distinctive species of American would have been doomed, his tradition bereft of root and soil.” The agrarian vision seems more closely related to the idyllic myth of a “green republic” articulated by Leo Marx, author of *The Machine in the Garden*, than a reflection of the way the actual South once appeared (6).

Despite the nostalgic quality of the vision of the Old South, its mythic influence over Southern writers in the early twentieth century cannot be denied. The clash between agriculture and industry found significant expression in Southern literature, with violent crashes and confrontations involving the automobile metaphorically expressing and addressing the conflict of philosophies and social structures.

In an essay titled, “The American Roadside,” the famed Southern writer James Agee wrote ardently about the economic potential of businesses along American highways, such as tourist cabins and fast food restaurants. While Agee believed the American highway system was, “by very considerable odds the greatest road the human race has ever built,” and discusses in great detail the profits made by innovative entrepreneurs, he still could not help but question why Americans were so drawn to travel (45). He concludes:

Whatever we may think, we move for no better reason than for the plain unvarnished hell of it...So God made the American restive. The American in turn got into the automobile and found it good...it was good because continually it satisfied and at the same time greatly sharpened his hunger for movement: which is very probably the profoundest and most compelling of American racial hungers. The fact is that the automobile became a hypnosis. The automobile became the opium of the American people (45).

It is clear that while Agee revels in the glory of the American roadside, he also understands the negative aspects of America's continuous desire for movement, and the way in which the automobile has become an insatiable fixation. The restive nature of Southerners, and the ways in which the automobile changed the fabric of Southern life, is a theme Agee returned to often in his work. In his greatest novel, *A Death in the Family*, Agee laments the loss of his father who died in an automobile accident.

After World War I, the "good roads movement" was established with the belief in business progressivism and the notion that new roads would break down provincialism, bring the countryside and city close together, and change the social network and resources available to businesses. These new roads challenged the established structure of the South, bringing many rural and isolated areas in closer contact with the city and mainstream American culture. The roads enabled the development of factories, and made available new traffic to increase the populations of Southern cities. This movement of course, was met with resistance by Southerners, who wished to maintain cultural distinctiveness:

Automobiles and their drivers at first generated substantial antagonism, especially among the nation's farmers. Noisy machines frightened horses, and runaway

teams could injure both people and property. Farmers were known to spread glass, throw logs across roads, and even dig ditches across right-of-ways in attempts to discourage motoring...Many rural Americans worried about the increase in taxes necessary to build and sustain auto roads, which likely would primarily serve wealthy city people (Jakle and Sculle 33-39).

The struggle to preserve a distinctive Southern culture and lifestyle in the face of increased contact with a nationalized culture causes a crisis in the protagonist in Southern literature. The automobile is destroyed or causes destruction at the climax of each novel in order for the protagonist to recognize that he has no place in the modern world, but equally the protagonist realizes that he has nothing to fall back on because the Old South is gone, as it was possibly only a myth to begin with. This accounts for the violence and destructive or suicidal behavior of the protagonists.

This essay will explore the violent collisions present in *Sartoris*, *Light in August*, *Wise Blood*, and *The Violent Bear it Away*. In *Sartoris*, the protagonist, named Bayard, is reckless and suicidal and violently crashes his car killing his grandfather and nearly ending his own life. Bayard eventually commits suicide in a violent plane crash. In *Light in August*, the protagonist has a violent altercation with his guardian, a confrontation reminiscent of an automobile crash. The protagonist also beats a horse to death, symbolic of his rupture from the Old South. In *Wise Blood*, the protagonist, Hazel Motes, runs over a false preacher with his car, and his car is also pushed off a cliff by a police officer. In *The Violent Bear it Away*, Francis Tarwater is brutally raped and left in the woods after hitchhiking.

Although agrarian society was abandoned before the 1920s, and perhaps never entirely existed, Southern writers are conscious of what has been lost, and the possibilities of what could

have been under a reformed agrarian system. Southern fiction exists at best at a crossroads between this haunting phantom of the Old South and the emerging modern world symbolized by industrialization. The Southern writers of the early-twentieth century respond to the rapid transformation of the South by expressing the conflict between the traditional and modern in the climax of their works. As Jeffery Folks writes, “Certainly, there is in Southern writing that point at which a still vital traditionalism and an emerging modernity meet, the ‘crossing of the ways’ defined by Allen Tate...” (4-5). While many critics have noticed this central conflict in Southern literature, few have discussed the extent to which the automobile, and in particular the car crash, serves as a representation of the collision between two polarized structures: the old, agrarian South, and the modern industrial. Jeffery Folks, in particular, examines the conflict between agrarian and industrial in the writings of Southern authors in his book, *Southern Writers and the Machine: Faulkner to Percy*. However, although he perceives the clash between agrarian and industrial, he fails to fully connect this clash to the violent collisions that take place at the climax of modern Southern novels. Cythia Golomb Dettelbach’s book, *In the Driver’s Seat*, is also very influential, although she focuses on the symbol of the automobile in modern literature in general and does not limit her discussion to Southern literature, nor does she pay much attention to violence related to the automobile. However, she does make many interesting connections between the automobile and sexuality and religion. Her statement, “the car did wonders for the American male’s sex life. It not only helped him get the girl, but provided him with a private place to be with her” is particularly valuable when considering how the automobile changed the mores of Southern society (59).

It is imperative to consider the way in which the automobile changed the religious construction of the South. The religion of the Old South was medieval in origin, aligned with the

principles of the feudal system, and above all desired balance and order. In the modern period, the automobile became an object that was revered and desired by many as much as a savior in the South. It was thought by many economic theorists that the automobile and roads would end all of the South's problems. However, the automobile also challenged the religion of the South by creating movement, chaos, and a reorganization of the social order that was seen by many to be ordained by God. For example, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Vanderbilt professor, wrote in *I'll Take My Stand*, "Highways had not enhanced rural life or helped to stabilize the traditional values associated with farming. Instead they had worked to erode them"(Preston 169).

It is also essential to consider that the automobile changed the social structure of the South by enabling many blacks to find work and escape the poverty of the South, as it gave them employment in the North at auto factories. Blacks left the South in large numbers during The Great Migrations after World War I and II, taking boats and trains to work in Northern factories. Although this change was detrimental to the plantation system of the Old South, the automobile offered greater opportunities for a better life for black Southerners. Much of the antagonism towards the automobile felt by white Southerners resulted from a fear that the black populations in the South would abandon the plantations and leave the South without an economical workforce.

In addition, it is necessary to recognize that the automobile impacted the South to a much greater extent than the North or West because movement was a natural part of the culture and structure of society in these cultures. The West was chaotic from the time of westward expansion, and the economy of the West was dependant on the movement of populations in the region. The North also depended on immigration from Europe and movement of poor populations from the rest of the country to work in the industrial factories. However, the South

was very different because its economy was dependant on a stable, dependable and docile workforce. It was feudal in structure, and so the movement and transformation of society created by the automobile in the South was different than in the North or West. The plantation structure had prevented much of the growth of cities and institutional services that had existed much earlier in the North and West. As Cobb relates, “The growing dominance of plantation agriculture with its economies of scale and the attachment concentrations of wealth led to what Peter Coclanis called a ‘pinched and niggardly institutional development’ in areas such as transportation, urban growth, education, and even religious organization”(*Away Down South* 9).

Historians have also considered the importance of Southern “honor” and “community” developed during the plantation system that sets the values of Southerners quite apart from the North or West. Cobb writes:

Perhaps the most crucial difference between North and South was not reflected in economic or social statistics but in the white South’s retention of a masculine behavioral code rooted in an older European tradition of ‘honor’ in which a man’s actions must be ‘ratified by community consensus’...The white males’ power, prestige, and reputation for manliness in the eyes of others were the crucial influences on his behavior...white Southerners created Southern romanticism to deal with the destabilizing forces of modernization. They created a smaller communal identity to challenge northern economic and cultural dominance (*Away Down South* 41-45).

The confusion and social disorder created by the automobile upset the organization of the South regulated by an aristocratic male class.

Among the most influential Southern Gothic novelists of the 1900s, William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor respond to the rapid transformation of the South as a result of the automobile and industrialization. The Southern Gothic genre was in many ways a reaction to the profound social ills in the South. The movement focused on the horrible and shocking elements of the South, focusing on flawed and grotesque characters and situations. Southern Gothic novels often contain elements of racial bigotry and lynching, fanatical religion, abandoned plantations, and the decay of Southern culture. Wilbur Cash compares this genre of literature on the South to "a painter set out to do a portrait by painting only the subject's wens, warts, and chicken-pox scars" (379). The propensity for violence and shocking scenes in Southern Gothic literature is a response to the tension caused by the rapid change in the South. Their protagonists must ultimately realize that there is no place to escape, that the "hypnosis" of travel is just that, a blind illusion. Faulkner expresses this restiveness in *Light in August*, "When he went to bed that night his mind was made up to run away. He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage" (*Light in August* 118). Although the Southerner often believes in the freedom offered by the automobile, he suffers from a delusion of modernity, one that must be broken in order to find, "a private, self-contained, and essentially spiritual life" (Tate 322). While both Faulkner and O'Connor understand the benefits of technological progress, they do, however, lament the loss of the agrarian society of their forefathers.

Faulkner began writing at the very beginning of the twentieth century. As a result, he was a personal witness to the swift industrial revolution of the South. In his lifetime, (September 25, 1897 – July 6, 1962) Faulkner was often quite conflicted on the value of machines and the ways they could both benefit and harm mankind. Faulkner was very interested in aviation and

attempted to become a pilot himself. However, living through the World Wars, Faulkner was able to experience the destructive nature of airplanes, and included plane crashes at the center of his novel *Sartoris*. In his later years, Faulkner often seemed quite apprehensive of machines. As Cobb points out, “Faulkner embraced anachronism in a variety of ways, refusing to allow a radio at Rowan Oak until his daughter Jill was a teenager, and concentrating on the sale and breeding of mules at his farm at a time when the mule was clearly beginning to pass from the scene in southern agriculture” (*Away Down South* 138).

Sartoris, written early in Faulkner’s career (1929) is rarely given full consideration by literary critics, although it establishes many of the symbols and motifs that Faulkner would return to throughout his career. Few critics, if any, have ever noted the importance that the automobile has as a major theme in Faulkner’s work, and have never noted its importance in the works of *Sartoris* or *Light in August*. However, it is quite impossible to correctly analyze these works without the recognition that the conflict between the Old South and New is at the core of his tragic novels.

Flannery O’Connor (March 25 1925 – August 3 1964) wrote her major works during the second half of the twentieth century, just as the national culture of industrialization began to assert its dominance over Southern traditions. O’Connor felt it increasingly difficult to maintain Southern values during the Cold War, as the nation required patriotism and consensus in order to combat the soviets. During the Cold War, The United States attempted to define the “American way” and considered industrial production to be at the heart of national interests and identity. Any writer who failed to see the benefits of new automobiles and mechanized household gadgets risked being labeled a communist. Flannery O’Connor protested and resisted this national ideology in her fiction by attempting to assert Southern values over the national agenda.

O'Connor's two novels *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear it Away* (1960) both center on the automobile and the way modernization has challenged Southern values. The violent climaxes in both novels involve the destruction of the automobile and the desire to return to a preindustrial South. While much attention has been played to *Wise Blood*, few critics have noticed how clearly the automobile exists as a symbol and how it relates to issues such as education and environment in O'Connor's second novel *The Violent Bear it Away*.

It is interesting that both writers, although from quite different time periods, respond to the automobile and industrialization in a noticeably similar way. Jeffery Folks points out, "The crises of traditional culture in conflict with modernity may well be the central theme of the Southern novel since the twenties" (4). This theme is not entirely limited to the South, but the resonance and haunting quality of the agrarian past is much more distinctive in the works of Southern authors than in the works of their northern counterparts. As Folks writes about industrialization during the New Deal programs, "New Deal programs of the thirties and the military spending of the forties, the Southern experience of industrialization was different from that of the North, in which the industrial and urban experience was long familiar and of native origin"(87).

The industrialization of the South after World War I included, most importantly, an elaborate highway system that penetrated deeply into the Old South, transforming the landscape, and making accessible areas long since remote and isolated from the modern world. Although many Southern authors are immensely proud of the technological advantages and financial opportunities offered to their historically impoverished region, it is clear that this progress is not gained without loss of the old way of life. Modern Southern novels deal to a large extent with the breakdown of the family, the increase in crime and immorality, and the loss of community as a

result of industrialization. To Faulkner and O'Connor, the machine often appears as an invader, destroying the tranquility of the agrarian landscape.

Of course, the Southern writer realizes that the agrarian system was not without its own contradictions and failures, not limited to slavery, and as a result the memory of the Old South, although often haunting, is rarely completely nostalgic. Southern writers are conscious of the inevitable failure of the Old South, and its inability to resist modern industrialization. Allen Tate argues that the breakdown of the agrarian South was not a result of losing the Civil War (as many historians today still believe), but rather it was an ideological failure, a flaw in the morality of the Old South that brought about its own destruction (307). The Old South failed because its ideology was flawed as early as colonization. The protestant settlers who moved to the South, predominately from England, brought with them an ideology grounded in the feudal system and manor life, complete with the courtly values of chivalry and manners. From the start, this system was contradicted by mixing it with strong capitalistic goals. Mark Leone and Neil Silberman, authors of the book *Invisible America*, agree with this assertion, "Those in positions of power in colonial administrations of most colonies strove to create or re-create forms of hierarchy and exploitation such as feudalism, tenancy, and chattel slavery" (79). The religious beliefs of the settlers, again sturdily medieval and based on a hearty protestant work ethic, were corrupted by both the immorality of slave labor and the leisure afforded to the settlers as a result of it. Tate writes that a true agrarian system must unify both economics and morality (307). He believes the feudal system in England thrived during the Middle Ages because there was an acceptable relationship between serf and lord, and a connection to the land entirely absent in the Old South. Leone and Silberman support this idea, "Europeans saw land in terms of value and profit, often

short term profit, with no regard for the regeneration or replenishment of resources. In other words, land became a commodity” (85).

Therefore, the protagonists of Southern literature are haunted by the historical legacy of the Old South, a haunting that they must confront in the present. This lingering traumatic memory is often triggered by a shocking experience in the modern world. They must realize the new social position of African Americans, while at the same time understand his own degraded social status. By failing to comprehend new machinery, the protagonist must realize his separateness from modernization, at the same time he must attempt to reconcile his cultural heritage. Although this shock is often experienced, at least partially, prematurely, the full expression of this shock occurs at the culmination of the work. After the initial shock, the protagonist must find a way to justify his forefathers. Although the protagonist usually attempts to validate his ancestors with religious dogma, he finds the religion of his relatives to be deceitful and fraudulent.

Likewise, since the slave owners were detached from the land, and from their source of wealth, they could not justify their hypocritical religious beliefs. Tate concludes Southerners never had true convictions. As he calls it, they never had the “whole horse,” the system was easily broken by modern pressures and temptations, and the generations immediately following the Civil War abandoned their traditions in favor of modernity (307). As Tate puts it, “If this mind had had much respect for the full-bodied, grass eating horse, it would have never have invented the machine which represents only half of him” (307). Since the aristocracy of the South was only concerned with making a profit, it never fully appreciated the values of agrarian society it claimed, and easily turned to machines in order to continue making profits.

The characters are haunted by figures strikingly archaic both in terms of morality and politics. The domineering character, Hazel's mother, in *Wise Blood*, by Flannery O'Connor for instance:

His mother was standing by the washpot in the yard, looking at him, when he got home. She wore all black all the time and her dresses were longer than other women's. She was standing there straight, looking at him. He moved behind a tree and got out of her view, but in a few minutes, he could feel her watching him through a tree...She left the washpot and came toward him with a stick. She said, 'What you seen'...She hit him across the leg with the stick, but he was like part of the tree. 'Jesus died to redeem you,' she said...She didn't hit him again but she stood looking at him, shut mouthed, and he forgot the guilt of the tent for the nameless guilt that was in him (*Wise Blood* 63).

Although this hard religion of the past offers hope of salvation, it in itself is riddled with contradictions and complications that make it impossible for the protagonists to accept.

Examples of such contradictions appear often in the works of Faulkner and O'Connor. In a *Light in August*, for instance, Hightower's sermons blend fanatical religious rhetoric with confederate nostalgia. In addition, Uncle Doc goes to black churches where he delivers sermons defending white supremacy. The protagonist is forced to accept the hypocrisy of this ideology and look elsewhere for salvation.

While the protagonist is unable to remain in the feudal world of his parents, on the other hand, the modern world is austere, mechanical, commercial, and devoid of any genuine substance. It is a land inhabited by false prophets and lost souls.

The choice left to the protagonist is no choice. He cannot live in the lost agrarian world of his forefathers, nor can he inhabit the sacrilegious world of the present. Hazel Motes' sermon in *Wise Blood* expresses this absurdity:

Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to was never there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is a place for you to be? No place. Nothing outside you can give you any place... You can't go neither forwards nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right now is all the place you've got...your conscience is a trick...it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you (*Wise Blood* 166).

Of course, the conscience of the Southerner is just as contradictory, unreliable, and confused; although all the Southerner has are his thoughts and his blood. The Southerner cannot rely on his conscience to save him because his conscience, like his blood, is part of the corruption. There is no better example of this than Enoch Emory, whose "wise blood" inherited from his daddy causes his blood to act irrationally: "He knew that he would have to see him soon or the nerve inside him would grow so big he would be forced to steal a car or rob a bank or jump out of a dark alley onto a woman" (81). If the Southerner cannot look within himself for redemption, he is left with no choice but the desperation of trying to change his world from without. As Tate writes:

How may the southerner take hold of his tradition? The answer is: by violence. For this answer, if we want an answer, is inevitable. He cannot fall back on his

religion, simply because it was never articulated and organized for him. If he could do this, he would constitute himself a 'borer from within' and might hope to effect gradually a social revolution in his favor. As we said, economy is the secular image of religious conviction. His religious conviction is inchoate and unorganized...Since he cannot bore from within, he has left the sole alternative of boring from without. This method is political, active, and in the nature of the case violent and revolutionary. Reaction is the most revolutionary of program; it aims at...getting back to the roots...The Southerner is faced with this paradox: He must use an instrument, which is political, and so unrealistic and pretentious that he cannot believe in it, to re-establish a private, self-contained, and essentially spiritual life. I say that he must do this; but that remains to be seen (322).

The Southern protagonist is often quite unconscious of his inability to adapt to the modern world. The "violence" that must take place in southern literature is often a final resort of the characters when all other alternatives have failed. They are inevitably drawn by fate (or by the hand of God) towards the crossroads where a choice must be made between the agrarian or industrial, between archaic morality or modern atheism, a collision that must be radically violent to be justified. This violent collision reaches its pinnacle of expression in the crash of the automobile.

Chapter One

The Automobile and Generational Discord in Faulkner's *Sartoris* and *Light in August*

Southern literature, from the first half of the twentieth century, addresses many distressing issues, such as guilt over the legacy of slavery, but it also expresses the pains of shifting from an essentially agrarian structure into an industrial society. Southern writers struggled with the inchoate, often contradictory philosophic legacy of the Old South, while attempting to reconcile their cultural heritage to stand against Northern modernism. The Southerner's inheritance of guilt and ignominy after the defeat in the Civil War led the South in two overlapping directions. As a reactionary measure, the South mythologized its past in an attempt to overlook its profound structural ills of poverty, racial discrimination, and loss of infrastructure. It reinvented the cavalier myth of chivalric, gentlemanly, and paternalistic plantation owners and reinforced a rigid Victorian, sometimes even gothic piety. The cavalier myth held, "only the cavalier possessed the heroic force of character which was required to hold back the restless flood of savagery that threatened to overflow the country" (*War Within* 18). At the same moment, the South attempted to modernize through urbanization and immigration, building railroads, textile mills, steel and manufacturing plants, in order to challenge the North economically. What resulted was an attempt to merge the two contradictory frameworks of Victorianism and modernism. The Victorian world sought social order, clear distinctions between classes and races, and a rigid moral code. The modern, on the other hand, valued

individualism, originality, and a capitalistic secularism. These two contradictory value systems existed simultaneously to form the ideology of the New South.

As a consequence, the schism between old and modern was experienced in the South to an extent not found in the North nor in Europe. For example, as the cultural historian Daniel Joseph Singal points out, Southern writers and intellectuals, at the dawn of the twentieth century, were still influenced primarily by English writers of the 1850s (WW 9). Although the plantation structure ceased to offer a profitable economic alternative to industrialization following the Civil War, as the demand for cotton diminished, the ethical ideals of the plantation life remained present in the South well into the twentieth century. So much so, that at the same time proponents of the New South were calling for rapid industrialization and modernization, the agrarians called for the return to plantation life. As James C. Cobb points out:

In the late 1920s and 1930s the Nashville Agrarians warned that the best elements of the regions rural, agricultural way of life would be quickly destroyed as cities and manufacturing plants cluttered the landscape and southerners forsook their farms for the dehumanizing regimen of the factory (*Selling of the South* 2).

Therefore, the literary landscape of the modern Southern novel is divided into two polarizing structures. Both Victorian and modern eras subsist simultaneously, competing for idealistic supremacy. As a corollary, the characters exist in a struggle to form their identities, and establish the historical moment in which they live. The psychologist Erik Erikson calls this identity crisis the “diffusion of time perspective” (WW 174). This neurotic condition, indicated by an obsession with time or clocks, results from a failure to establish role models in adolescence that will allow the individual to create an identity in the present. The historian David Singal points to Quentin in the *Sound and the Fury* as an example of a protagonist suffering from the

condition. His inability to live up to his grandfather's heroic reputation leads to his obsession with clocks and eventual suicide (WW 174).

This condition develops in Faulkner's novels because the parental characters exist as remnants from the past, often shockingly archaic or Gothic figures, unable to adapt to the modern South themselves, and intent on raising their children in the old tradition. Although the protagonist, as a child, often wishes to obey his parents, he cannot ignore the intrusion of modern industrialization into the agrarian landscape. The archaic parents warn the child of the corruption and sin encroaching on their lands as a result of this industrialization, but the child is unable to resist contact with the modern world, both because of the forbidden temptation the city offers, and because the feudal world of his parents no longer exists for him as an inclusive structure.

The majority of Faulkner's protagonists suffer from the condition because it is impossible for the characters in the modern South to measure up to the romanticized vision of the past. It is often stated that Faulkner himself suffered from this condition, as Singal points out:

The Cavalier ideal came to embody the essence of Victorian culture in the South and to dominate the imaginations of most Southerners at the time Faulkner was growing up. Accordingly, the Southern writers of Faulkner's generation would each need to make a separate peace with this powerful symbol of their nineteenth-century legacy. Only then could he be free to embrace the culture of their own times (*Making of a Modernist* 7).

Faulkner's personal struggle to atone with the past is expressed repeatedly by his protagonists. In *Sartoris*, for example, Young Bayard articulates his frustrations with attempting to live up to the myth of his great-grandfather's reputation:

‘Little two bit-war,’ Young Bayard repeated, ‘and on a horse. Anybody can go to a war on a horse. No chance for him to do much of anything.’ ‘At least he got himself decently killed,’ Miss Jenny Snapped. ‘He did more with a horse than you could do with that aeroplane’ (*Sartoris* 230).

The archaic figures exist in a South still dominated by the memory of the Civil War, unable to accept the expanding modernism, and confident that the past was superior to the present, a principle that Bayard challenges and tries to deny. The conviction of a lost gentility rests on the belief that the machine is a corruptible force, one that is responsible for the decay and destruction of the grandeur of the Old South.

Another example, from *Light in August*, is the preacher Hightower. He lobbied to be sent to Jefferson, so that he could still hear the hoof beats of his grandfather’s horse, who was killed in the Civil War. His sermons are a mixture of prim Victorianism and Southern ideology. The narrator describes them:

...full of galloping calvary and defeat and glory just as when he tried to tell them on the street about the galloping horses, it in turn would get all mixed up with absolution and choirs of marital seraphim, until it was natural that old men and women should believe that what he preached in God’s own house on God’s own day verged on actual sacrilege (*Light in August* 45).

The narrator remarks that it is unfortunate Hightower was not born thirty years earlier, when his grandfather was shot from his horse, because it seems to be the only moment he ever existed in. Hightower’s inability to adjust to the New South causes him to become a living fossil, a preacher without a congregation, living on a forgotten street in Jefferson. Although Hightower moved to Jefferson so he could still hear the hoof beats of the confederate soldiers, he

is unable to escape the sounds of the motorcar and the train imposing on the last remnants of the tranquility of the Old South.

In the Southern novel, the clash between Victorian and modern is best expressed by the opposition between horse and the automobile. The symbolic representation of the Victorian world is the horse, and that of the modern is the automobile. The archaic figures of the Old South disdain the automobile, and try to assert the supremacy of the horse. For instance, Hightower thinks about, “how right the ancients were in making the horse an attribute and symbol of warriors and kings” (*Light in August* 55). In *Sartoris*, the narrator remarks, “There was a hitching-post there, which Old Bayard retained with a testy disregard of industrial progress” (*Sartoris* 3). As a banker, Old Bayard refuses to loan money to anyone who owns an automobile. Although the carriage is already quite old-fashioned in *Sartoris*, Old Bayard insists on riding around in one because of the antebellum prestige associated with it. Old Bayard refers to people in automobiles as paupers because he believes it takes a gentleman to own horses. Simon, Old Bayard’s Negro carriage driver, reinforces Old Bayard’s ideology:

...young folks is growed away fum de correck behavior; dey don’t know how to conduct deyselves in de gent’mun way. Whut you reckon folks gwine think when dey sees yo’ own folks ridin’ in de same kine o’ rig trash rides in? (*Sartoris* 114).

Although, by this point, industrial progress is an inevitable reality, the horse is associated with the South’s glorious past, and becomes a strong symbol for the myth of a chivalric past that was destroyed as a result of the Civil War. The standard of measurement for gentility becomes the number of horses a man owns, despite their impracticality as a means of transportation.

Likewise, the automobile becomes a representation of all the social ills in the South. Despite the economical value of the automobile as opposed to the carriage, and the mobility it offers to lower

classes, both in terms of transportation and social advancement, it is viewed as a threat to the structure of the Old South.

Likewise, the narrator suggests that the savior of the South is not the automobile, but rather the mule. In his ode to the mule in *Sartoris*, the narrator says:

Some Homer of the cotton fields should sing the saga of the mule and of his place in the South. He it was, more than any other one 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 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...he bleaches his awkward accusing bones among rusting cans and broken crockery and worn out automobile tires on lonely hillsides (*Sartoris* 279).

Faulkner's landscape, littered by the materials of vanity the South inherited as a result of industrialization, creates a modern wasteland. The utopian promise of the automobile is reduced to rubble on the side of the road, while the donkey, however aesthetically unappealing compared with the glamour of machines, is responsible for saving the South.

Likewise, often in Faulkner's novels, after the automobile fails, as in *Sartoris*, the drivers are rescued by Negroes with mule drawn wagons. The narrator suggests the South is only to be saved through old Southern values of hard work and humility, despite the frills offered by machines. Also, the narrator makes a connection between the destruction of the landscape caused by the battles of the Civil War and the destruction caused by rapid industrialization.

However, the narrator does more than simply suggest the automobile in itself is responsible for the destruction. It is rather a complete change in lifestyle that the automobile initiates that causes the foundation to crumble. Besides old tires, cheap plates and cans clutter the landscape, the rusted out skeletons of mass production. They are the discarded products of a new chain-store driven material culture. Miss Jenny complains about this new “fast” lifestyle in *Sartoris*:

I had dinner with ‘em one night. Sat in the hotel an hour until they remembered to come for me. Then we stopped at a delicatessen and Bayard and Caroline got out and went in and came back with about a bushel of packages and dumped ‘em into the car, where they leaked grease on my new stockings. That was the dinner I’d been invited to mind you; there wasn’t a sign of anything that looked or smelled like a stove in the whole place... I told Caroline I didn’t know anything about that sort of housekeeping because my folks were old fashioned enough to cook food...and Bayard and Caroline came in with that silver I gave ‘em and monogrammed napkins and that delicatessen fodder that tasted like swamp grass, on paper plates. We ate it there, sitting on the floor or standing up just wherever you happened to be (*Sartoris* 55).

Miss Jenny, as a result of her Victorian upbringing, is baffled by the transformation of manners and civility in the modern age. As Miss Jenny’s complaints demonstrate, the primary difference between the Victorian and the modern is a drastic reconfiguration of the concepts of time and speed. In Miss Jenny’s Victorian age, time was not a commodity. As the days in the Old South moved at a slow pace due to the heat and diseases like malaria and hookworm, the planters owned slaves for field and housework, there was no need for delicatessens or grocery stores.

There was also no need to hurry or to use disposable materials in fixing dinner. The pace at which Young Bayard, and his wife, Caroline, live is as utterly foreign to Miss Jenny as if they inhabited different countries, and this pace was created as a result of the speed and convenience of the automobile.

As a representation of the inexorable breach between old and new in Faulkner's novels, the archaic figures exist in a world without speed. For example, carriage riders in *Sartoris* are described as:

At times it seemed that they were traveling backward, that they would crawl terrifically past the same tree of telephone pole time after time; and it seemed to him that the three of them and the rattling wagon and the two beasts were caught in a senseless treadmill: a motion without progress, forever and to no escape (*Sartoris* 212).

Although the horses and the carriages are exalted in Faulkner's novels, and the slow pace is a nostalgic reminder of what has been lost as a result of industrialization, the narrator is conscious of the necessity of industrial progress because to ignore the changes brought by the automobile is to live in a world without progress. The characters that chose to ignore industrial progress are shown as fleeting, unable to prevent the rapid transformation of society. In *Sartoris*, Aunt Sally refuses to acknowledge the existence of the automobile: "Aunt Sally was a good old soul but she lived much in the past, shutting her mind with a bland finality to anything which had occurred since 1901. For her, time had gone out drawn by horses, and into her stubborn and placid vacuum the squealing of automobile brakes had never penetrated" (*Sartoris* 175). Unable to adapt to industrial change, Aunt Sally chooses to ignore its existence, and therefore lives the rest of her life as a remnant from the past, already a ghost before her death.

The Victorian belief that the automobile is a corruptible force or an “iron demon” is clearly expressed by the narrator. Victorians believed that the automobile provoked sexual immorality. This conviction finds frequent expression in *Sartoris*. After first riding in Young Bayard’s automobile, Miss Jenny, a very prim and proper Southern woman seems corrupted by the experience. Riding in the car seem similar to a sexual thrill, “‘I wished I smoked cigarettes,’ she said, and then: is that as fast as it’ll go? Isom got out and opened the door for her. She descended a little stiffly, but her eyes were shining and her cheeks were flushed” (*Sartoris* 78). The bumpy ride of the automobile is clearly associated with a sexual experience, one that causes Miss Jenny’s eyes to shine and cheeks to flush, and provokes the desire to smoke, a habit often associated with sexual gratification and liberation. Miss Jenny eventually considers riding in the automobile to be a sin and refuses to ride to church in one on Sundays for fear of going to hell.

In addition, Bayard, and his friend, Hub, go down the streets of the town with the black musicians to stop and serenade the young ladies. Not only does riding in the car rouse sexuality, it causes those who ride to drop restraint and composure and break moral codes. After riding in the automobile, Bayard and his friends are described as young boys trying to relive adolescence. The automobile becomes further associated with the dark aspects of sexuality when Bayard uses it voyeuristically to drive in front of Narcissa’s house and stare into her bedroom window.

The corruptible force of the automobile is best expressed in the scene in which Bayard convinces Simon to go for a ride. The car seems to possess the seductive powers of Satan, luring the old black servant to take a ride. It then provokes in him animalistic desires and fears:

He allowed himself to be drawn gradually toward the car gazing at its various members with slow, blinking speculation, now that it was about to become an actual quantity in his life. At the door and with one foot raised to the running

board, he made a final stand against the subtle powers of evil judgment...The car gained speed and with a sudden convulsive motion he caught his hat as it blew off his head. 'I 'speck dis is fur enough, aint it?' he suggested raising his voice...Then Bayard leaned forward and watched his forearm tauten, and then they shot forward on a roar of sound like blurred thunder...But he[Simon] said no word, made no other sound, and when Bayard glanced the cruel derision of his teeth at him presently, Simon knelt on the floor...Later Bayard glanced at him again, and Simon was watching him and the blurred irises of his eyes were no longer a melting, pupilless brown: they were red, and in the blast of wind they were unwinking and in them was that mindless phosphorescence of an animals. Bayard jammed the throttle down to the floor (*Sartoris* 117).

The automobile itself is shown to be a seductive force, one capable of debasing even the most benign characters. Once Simon enters the automobile and allows it to become "an actual quantity in his life" it is if he is exposed to the powers of Satan from which he cannot escape, only repent. The automobile causes the demonic transformation in both Simon and Bayard expressed by the "cruel derision of his teeth" and the turning of the pupils to an animalistic red.

In another association with evil, the automobile is connected with the sin of alcohol consumption. Bayard's need for speed is coupled with his desire for alcohol. Not only does he drink himself, but he allows blacks to drink directly from the funnel of the car: "He got out and lifted the hood and removed the cap from the breather pipe. It'll taste a little like oil for a drink or two" (*Sartoris* 146). The car becomes a symbolic altar of evil, in which the blood of Christ is replaced by the mixture of oil and alcohol, the modern Eucharist of atheism.

Clearly, the narrator does not suggest that the characters who abandon the traditions of the Old South to exist in the modern world are any superior than those that remain in the past. They are plagued by guilt, insecurity, and self destructive impulses. For example, Young Bayard, a figure representing the modern world, is consumed with a desire for reckless speed. Miss Jenny says, “And now he’s [Bayard] got to have an automobile, got to go all the way to Memphis to buy one. An automobile in Bayard Sartoris’ barn, mind you; him that won’t even lend the bank’s money to a man that owns one” (*Sartoris* 56). He continually drives his car into ditches and attempts suicidal stunts with his automobile.

However, it must be understood that Young Bayard’s automobile represents a transition from the horse to the modern machine. In many ways, Bayard’s automobile translates the cavalier myth into the new age. First, Bayard’s car is unlike the cars the paupers ride in. His car was “long and low and gray” (*Sartoris* 77). In its physical description it is similar to a prized race horse. Bayard himself talks about the automobile as if it is a horse, “She must be in pretty bad shape. Hope I didn’t hurt her guts any” (*Sartoris* 260). Bayard’s words exhibit the transfer in symbolism for the wealthy classes from valuing race horses to favoring automobiles that closely resemble them. Bayard’s grandfather is drawn to the powerful symbol of the automobile even if he will not admit it. Miss Jenny tells him, “I believe you like to ride in that car, only you won’t admit it and you just don’t want him to ride in it when you can’t go too” (*Sartoris* 85).

The absolute symbol of the modern age is not Bayard’s automobile, which is still in many ways closer to the past, because Bayard values the machine and the speed it offers as a novelty and not as a necessary means of transportation. Bayard loathes riding in the ordinary machine as much as his grandfather. When his car is in the shop he is told he will have to ride in Narcissa’s car, ““In that little peanut parcher?” Bayard said derisively. ‘It won’t do better than twenty-one

miles”” (*Sartoris* 261). Bayard fears the banality of a modern life dominated by machines perhaps just as much as his grandfather. As much as he tries to break from the past and live in the modern age, he is still tied to the cavalier myth of his forefathers and considers the glamour of each of his actions. Interestingly, Katherine Hodgkin, a literary critic, compares Bayard to Lord Byron, “Bayard also seeks a finer world—a heroic world in which he may prove himself by defying death through reckless feats of daring. In this respect and many others, Bayard embodies the Byronic hero as exemplified by Byron’s own life and the lives of the characters in his works” (Hodgkin 647). This association is quite correct, and demonstrates that Bayard is a figure still dominated by the Victorian age, trying to exist in the modern age, and unable to cross completely over.

Young Bayard represents the antithesis of Aunt Sally, she attempts to deny the existence of the modern world, Bayard attempts to deny the presence of the Victorian traditions which still have a firm hold on the South Bayard inhabits. He not only uses his automobile to break the mores of speed in the South, but he also uses it in an attempt to sever the structure. As the automobile represents a noise intrusion, and a destruction of the agrarian landscape, it also represents a quick transformation of the feudal structure of the Old South. As the South depended on the constancy of black populations in the workforce, and the paternalistic relationship between plantation owner and workers, the movement the automobile afforded was a direct threat to the structural order of the South. In addition to the reliance on dependable and docile economical labor, the structure also required a rigid racial and gender hierarchy, and an obligatory inheritance of Southern values by the landowner’s children. When Bayard denies his inheritance, he threatens to destroy the social order of his forefathers. By refusing to adhere to the chivalric code of his grandfather, and by refusing to acknowledge his paternalistic

responsibilities, he destroys both the family name and its legacy. Not only does he race his automobile, but he also allows black workers to ride in his car, such as Isom. Miss Jenny expresses her frustration to Old Bayard when Isom disappears riding in the car, “I need Isom to keep a roof over your head and something to eat on the table” (*Sartoris* 84). As he refuses to inherit both his father’s land and his profession, he destroys the last remnants of his family’s wealth and power.

In addition to Bayard, the change of the modern period is also evident in Isom, Simon’s son. Isom comes home from the war intent on challenging the authority of the white masters. He says, “I don’t take nothin’ fum no white folks no mo, war done changed all dat” (*Sartoris* 63). Isom spends his time riding around with Young Bayard, neglecting his chores, and engaging in immoral behavior. Isom refuses to work and has to be beaten by Old Bayard before he is willing to complete his chores. Isom’s demonic transformation serves to distract him from his obligations, and thereby will destroy the productivity of the plantation. Simon attempts to make his son adhere to the old traditions, but it is clear Isom will not follow in his father’s footsteps: “...and in the flashing of an instant he and Simon saw the whites of Isom’s eyes and the ivory cropping of his teeth behind the steering wheel. When the car returned home that afternoon Simon conducted Isom to the barn and whipped him with a harness strap” (*Sartoris* 88). Simon, who often carries on conversations with the ghost of Bayard’s grandfather, believes his son is wrong for challenging the authority of the white masters, and longs for the return of the old structure. He believes that Young Bayard’s child will restore the old paternalistic order, and return the plantation to a time before the corruption of the automobile. However, this seems an impossible dream as the Victorian world fades so much throughout the novel; to the point its influence is barely visible by the novel’s conclusion.

Young Bayard attempts to bridge the past and present to find a harmonious balance, but fails miserably. Bayard first attempts to ride an untamed stallion shortly after returning home from the war. The narrator reveals that the horse trainer “was constantly engaged in litigation with the railroad company over the violent demise of his stock by its agency” (*Sartoris* 130). The only person who can ride the horse is a black trainer, an example of a prejudiced belief that the black race is more in tune with animals than whites. He warns Bayard to stay away from the horse, but Bayard quickly jumps on the horse’s back and the horse took off “like a bronze explosion” full of “mad music, splendidly uncontrollable” (*Sartoris* 133). Bayard believes, if he can get the horse out in the country, he could break him by letting the horse expend his energy, but he is never able to escape the hazards of the city, and the horse slides and crashes on the pavement. The violent collision that leaves Bayard unconscious is a representation of the incompatibility between modern invention and horse, or between modern and Victorian.

For a short time, it seems Bayard might be able to find balance:

For a time the earth held him in a 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 harried niggers and mules into motion and kept them there, and put the grist mill into running shape and taught Caspey to drive the tractor, and came in at mealtimes and at night smelling of machine oil and stables and of the earth, and went to bed with grateful muscles and with the sober rhythms of the earth in his body and so to sleep (*Sartoris* 203).

The narrator combines the technological progress and ingenuity of the modern man symbolized by the tractor and machine oil, with the brawny work ethic of the Victorian to give the reader an idealized portrait of how the South could prosper if it could only blend the best characteristics of

both ages. As Jeffery Folks points out, “the treatment of mechanization in Faulkner’s novels and short stories reflects the author’s determination to comprehend these opposing responses to modernity and to arrive at an artistic synthesis that would permit a sense of future growth, and even of a cultural rebirth without glossing over the potentially destructive elements of industrialization”(Folks 9).

However, the narrator quickly denies the viability of this utopian vision:

But he still waked at times in the peaceful darkness of his room and without previous warning, tense and sweating with old terror. Then, momentarily, the world was laid away and he was a trapped beast in the high blue, mad for life, trapped in the very cunning fabric that had betrayed him who had dared to chance too much, and he thought again if, when the bullet found you, you could only crash upward, burst; anything but earth (*Sartoris* 203).

The “fabric of entrapment” is the very fabric that doomed the South, a commitment to the reckless cavalier myth that doomed Bayard’s ancestors in the Civil War, and which still dooms Bayard in the present. As Hans Beatrice points out:

In fact the problem with the Sartoris males is their ‘staticity,’ they are unable to break away from a tradition that crushes them. They live by the past and try to reenact in the present values of the past that are completely out of place in the society of the 1920s. There is something pathetic in this, for it implies that the Sartorises are the last though ineffectual defenders of values that are presented as admirable in their context (Beatrice 503).

The Sartoris family is threatened with complete extinction since it cannot adjust to the New South that emerged from the Civil War. The final crash destroys both the conception of the car

as a grand “mechanical horse,” and also as a hopeful mechanism for the reconstruction of the South.

Bayard attempts to shake free from the demons of the past, but they are precisely what dooms him in the present, namely his inability to discard the vices of his inherited culture while salvaging what was pure, and what will still work in the present. As folks writes, “Modernity is threatening, not so much because of the rapid mechanization in and of itself, but because of a failure of consciousness that has its source in the past” (Folks 11). As Bayard shifts between the two worlds, unable to exist purely in either, he ultimately inherits the worst of both traditions. His fixation with speed, a trait of the modern, is coupled with the blind audacity of his forefathers. What inevitably results is a horrific car crash that claims the life of Old Bayard and severely injures Young Bayard:

...Although they had almost reached the foot of the hill, Bayard saw that they would not make it. Just before they slipped off[the road] he wrenched the steering-wheel over and swung the nose straight over the bank, and the car poised lazily for a moment as though taking breath. ‘Hang on’ he shouted to his grandfather and they plunged. An interval utterly without sound, in which all sensation of motion was lost. Then scrub cedar burst crackling about them and whipping branches of it exploded on the radiator and slapped viciously at them as they leaned with braced feet, and the car slewed in a long bounce (*Sartoris* 304).

At the close of the novel, Miss Jenny learns of Young Bayard’s death. Bayard dies by flying a stunt plane at a terrific speed intentionally into the ground.

The ideological collision between Victorian and modern is also expressed in *Light in August*. It is important to note first that the narrator establishes time in the novel by its relation

to the horse or automobile. The novel begins with the horse, “Sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill toward her, Lena thinks, ‘I have come from Alabama’” (*Light in August* 1). As Lena comes into Jefferson on a wagon at the beginning of the novel, she leaves it in an automobile at the end, symbolic of a shift from Victorian to modern. As the novel progresses, the modern world increases its influence on the town to the point at which the ending is a complete sever from the Victorian South.

The greatest example of the transformation from Victorian to modern involves the relationship between the character McEachern and his son. McEachern lives on a farm and attempts to raise his adopted son, Joe Christmas, to adhere to a rigid Victorian code of conduct. It is unknown to McEachern, but Joe Christmas is mixed race. McEachern is a symbol of the past: “His head resembled one of the marble cannonballs on civil war monuments” (*Light in August* 121). He continually beats Joe Christmas in an attempt to scare him away from sin, and, above all, he warns Joe about the godlessness of the city. As McEachern views the automobile as an instrument of evil, he also exists in a world without speed:

...He went straight as an arrow to the stable and straddled his big, old, strong white horse and returned back down the lane and to the road at a heavy gallop, the two of them, man and beast, leaning a little stiffly forward as though in some stimulation of terrific speed though the actual speed itself was absent, as if in that cold and implacable and undeviating conviction of both omnipotence and clairvoyance of which they both partook known destination and speed were not necessary (*Light in August* 149).

The violent relationship between McEachern and Joe Christmas develops as Joe trades his cow for a suit. Of course, the cow is symbolic of the agrarian, and the suit symbolic of the

modern. McEachern views the suit, just as he views the city, with sin and idleness. He asks Joe, “What else would you want with a suit if you were not whoring?” (*Light in August* 121).

One day as McEachern and Joe are in town on business, they stop and eat at a dinner. McEachern tells Joe that he took him there so he knows what to avoid. Joe is still young, so he doesn't understand what is sinful about the place. As he matures, the dinner becomes an insatiable temptation to Joe, and he ultimately sneaks out of the house at night and begins a relationship with a waitress at the dinner that verges on prostitution. McEachern finds out that Joe is sneaking out of the house at night and begins following him to town.

The dispute between McEachern and Joe ultimately results in a violent collision:

It was the face of Satan[Joe], which he[McEachern] knew as well, And when, staring at the face, he walked steadily toward it with his hand still raised, very likely he walked toward it in the furious and dreamlike exaltation of a martyr who has already been absolved, into the descending chair which Joe swung at his head, and into nothingness...Then to Joe it all rushed away, roaring, dying, leaving him in the center of the floor, the shattered chair clutched in his hand, looking down at his adopted father. McEachern lay on his back. He looked quite peaceful now. He appeared to sleep: bluntheaded, indomitable even in repose, even the blood on his forehead peaceful and quiet (*Light in August* 151).

The confrontation between McEachern and Joe Christmas is described in terms of an automobile crash. The paths of McEachern and Christmas collide at a midway point, at a dance between the town and country. There is a moment when the two paths collide into a moment of chaos and silence, described by the narrator as “roaring and dying,” and just as in a crash, there is a moment of extreme confusion, followed by the realization of damage. In this case, the

collision is not simply a crash between two individuals, but also a collision between two opposing generations. McEachern exhibits the slowness and moral convictions of the Victorian, while Christmas exhibits the speed and rashness of the modern. The collision results in the death of McEachern, which represents the death of the Victorian, although, looking back, Joe Christmas realizes that even in death the past age looks much more peaceful than the present.

Joe makes a final break from the Victorian after killing McEachern. After leaving the party with McEachern lying dead on the dance floor, Joe steals McEachern's horse to escape, and makes a final break with the agrarian world of his stepfather:

Joe urged the now spent old horse through the main street of town...the horse and the rider had a strange dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion... The stick still fell; as the progress of the horse slowed, the speed of the stick increased in exact ratio... Joe pulled at its head, beating it, but it slowed into the curb and stopped, shadowdappled, its head down, trembling, its breathing almost like a human voice...Yet the rider still leaned forward in the arrested saddle, in an attitude of terrific speed, beating the horse across the rump with a stick...save for the rise and fall of the stick and the groaning respirations of the animal, they might have been an equestrian statue strayed from its pedestal and come to rest in an attitude of ultimate exhaustion...Again they were motionless, the spent beast and youth, facing one another, their heads quite near, as if in an attitude of listening of prayer or of consultation. Then Joe raised the stick and began beating the horse about its motionless head. He beat it steadily until the stick broke. He continued to beat it with a fragment not much larger than his hand. But perhaps he realized he was inflicting no pain...because he turned in full stride...He did

not look back...he ran completely out of the life of the horse as if it had never existed (*Light in August* 155).

Allen Tate wrote that man had abandoned the horse in favor of the automobile because man had lost respect for the animal (307). This notion is fully expressed by Joe Christmas. He does not respect the animal, only what the animal offers, which is speed. When the horse is unable to provide him with the speed he desires, he beats the animal to its death, unable to understand the intrinsic value of the horse, both as an animal and as a symbolic representation of the Victorian structure. But, as Christmas abandons the horse, he must also abandon the Old South that made the horse a power symbol. As the horse is an organic animal, it was compatible with ethical and religious ideals of the South which valued self reliance and agrarianism. The automobile, however, as an industrial machine, is incompatible with the values of the Old South because it calls for the destruction of the land through new highways, pollution, and the radical shift of populations. What Joe gives up by leaving the horse is a system of order and definition, a structure that defined each person's social and spiritual identity through their association with the land.

While the old age certainly can be associated with slavery, stifling religion, and a lack of freedom, the new age is associated with disorder, confusion, impulsive violent and sexual behavior, all of which trouble Joe the rest of his life as he attempts to define himself and his place in society. The rest of his life feels like motion without purpose:

He thought it was loneliness he was trying to escape and not himself. But the street ran on: catlike, one place was the same as another to him. But the street ran on in its moods and phases, always empty: he might have seen himself as in

numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of
flagged and spurred despair (*Light in August* 167).

Joe unquestionably leaps from the Victorian to the modern, symbolized by the beating of the horse, but the Victorian South will not allow him to exist totally in the modern age. Singal observes, “he is the victim of powerful social and psychological forces that largely determine his life, the ultimate example of a man held captive by the interlocking religious, racial, and sexual beliefs of his culture, which lodge in his unconscious during childhood and later dominate him without his ever being fully aware of their power” (WW 170). Joe becomes the first truly modern character in *Light in August*, making his living by becoming a bootlegger. He defies definition both in terms of his lifestyle and racial identity. However, he is killed after murdering his lover by an angry mob, symbolic of the lynch mobs of the Old South, that will not accept his lifestyle nor his racial identity.

Chapter Two

Wise Blood and The Violent Bear it Away

The landscape of the South altered drastically in the mid-twentieth century as a result of the depression and increased industrial production during the Second World War. The depression left farmers without enough capital to survive by agriculture alone. This trend continued into the second half of the twentieth century, as farmers were often forced to seek employment at factories to subsidize their farms. As James C. Cobb relates, “By the late 1950s, industrial employment had become the only means by which rural residents could continue to cope with the shrinking buying power of their farms’ incomes. By working early mornings, late afternoons or evenings, or by seeking nightshift employment, farmers could still work a crop while earning an industrial paycheck” (*Industrialization in Southern Society* 78). Besides rising costs of production and labor and transportation, the heavy pollution and overproduction from factories rendered many once fertile areas of the South barren wastelands. As Cobb writes, “Farmers fled rural life at such great numbers that between 1940 and 1960 the population shifted from 65 percent rural to 58 percent urban” (*ISS* 53). Southern cities and towns competed with one another to bring in new industries in order to provide employment for the large populations of uneducated and unskilled workers. In doing so, they built new roads and railways in order to attract factories to their cities.

The Agrarian movement, which sought a return to a “Southern” agricultural way of life, did little to diminish the rapid industrialization of the region. Cobb points out, “Despite

their cultural objections to the New South program, the Agrarians offered no practical alternatives other than a romanticized historical vision of the country life that Depression-era Southerners were then fleeing by the thousands” (*ISS* 121). Although unable to offer solutions, the Agrarians did protest the development of highways in the South. For example, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Vanderbilt professor and Agrarian, argued in *I’ll Take My Stand*, “Highways had not enhanced rural life or helped to stabilize the traditional values associated with farming. Instead, they had worked to erode them” (Preston 169). He criticized farmers who spent their last dollars in order to buy an automobile, claiming that they neglected and bankrupted their farms in order to spend time driving. Although the Agrarians could not halt the swift economic revolution, they did manage to invoke a profound nostalgia for the myth of the Old South. What results from the competing forces of industrialization and agrarianism in the 1950s is an urbanized Southern society with a deep wistfulness for agricultural life.

The devastation of the land ended the last hope of maintaining a distinctive Southern way of life, which was an economy based exclusively on agriculture. In addition, the 1950s was a period of stifling conformity. The threat of a communist infiltration in America reinforced a postwar propaganda that preached the glories of capitalism and material progress, and attempted to silence any dissenting voices. America, more than ever, needed to appear as a unified nation in order to win the Cold War. As a result, propaganda from the period attempted to avert Southern identity and history; especially since the reality of the poverty of the South seemed to be directly opposed to the ideology of economic progress, and the guilt of slavery and defeat in the Civil War contradicted the ideology of America as a land of innocence and providence. As Jon Lance Bacon writes, “Postwar American culture was placed on the same footing as American economic and military strength: in other words, it was made responsible for the survival of democratic

liberties in the free world...To win allies for the United States and to counteract Soviet propaganda, American artists were supposed to present their country in a positive light” (43). Southern writers of the period faced the immense tasks of responding both to the mythology of the Old South and to the illusions of their present age. They had to determine what aspects of Southern identity and values were indispensable, and how to translate and preserve them in the modern era, while also dealing with issues of censorship and the burden of national identity.

The writer who best expresses the rapid changes and conflicting values of the South in the post war period was Flannery O’Connor. Her vision of the South was perhaps more haunting and grotesque than any other Southern writer because she stripped the South of all of its idealism and romanticized illusions and exposed it for what it was: a severely impoverished land populated by uneducated and often violent outcasts, and a cultural and environmental wasteland. As Jeffery F. Folks states:

Growing up in the post-war South at the point of its greatest industrial transformation and social change, O’Connor observed a radically different land from that of earlier Southern writers. When Faulkner wrote of the machine, he still retained the agrarian ways very much in mind, if not a viable future, at least an experienced past...the modernization of her region was more a compelling, inescapable reality. The grotesque transformation of the physical landscape of the South and the concurrent transfiguration of human manners and values became O’Connor’s primary subject, and the enormous pressures of this material led to shifts in the aesthetic which O’Connor inherited from her predecessors...With O’Connor the Southern aesthetic for the first time fully reckoned with mechanization as the permanent and inescapable prospect of the region (85).

It is fitting then that O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, begins with an exodus. The protagonist, Hazel Motes, leaves his family farm in Eastrod and heads for the mythical city of Taulkinham. Hazel returns home from war to find his family farm abandoned and boarded up, and all of his family dead and buried. He decides to go to the city proclaiming, "I'm going to do some things I never have done before." In this opening chapter, the novel clearly articulates the shift from agriculture to industry. Hazel moves from the farm because it no longer offers him a viable source of income. However, it is unclear what he plans to do in the city. The language is deliberately vague because, as Hazel will learn, the city offers him few more options than the farm. As Farrell O'Gorman writes, "Motes exemplifies a social type O'Connor returned to throughout her career: the rural Southerner whose traditional world has collapsed and who is destined for a deracinated life in the postwar-and emergently postmodern-city" (167).

O'Connor begins her novel with a train ride, "Hazel Motes sat at a forward angle on the green plush train seat, looking one minute out the window as if he might want to jump out of it and the next down the aisle at the other end of the car" (*Wise Blood* 9). From the first line, the narrator expresses the tension between two worlds, as Hazel wishes for a moment to jump from the train back to the pastoral landscape, and then looks down the train in anticipation of seeing the city. In addition to abandoning the farm, Hazel also attempts to shed his rural identity and religion. Although Hazel tries to deny Christ, he purchases a dark blue suit and stiff hat so that he looks just like his grandfather, an evangelist who preached about Jesus from the hood of his car. In fact, the first person Hazel meets in the city, a cab driver, is shocked when Hazel tells him he wants to go to a brothel. The cab driver tells Hazel, "It ain't anybody perfect on this green earth of God's, preachers nor nobody else. And you can tell people better how terrible sin is if you know from your own personal experience" (*WB* 32). Hazel is adamant that he no longer

believes in anything, but he is unable to hide his agrarian heritage from the inhabitants of the city.

It is appropriate that one of Hazel's first experiences in the city is a confrontation with a police officer. Hazel is unaware of the traffic laws in the city. He attempts to cross the street on a red light, and is scolded by a policeman. The policeman tells Hazel:

You tell all your friends about these lights. Red is to stop, green is to go—men and women, white folks and niggers, all go on the same light. You tell all your friends so when they come to town, they'll know (*WB* 45).

Hazel must quickly adjust to the structure of modern society. The new formation is radically different from the plantation system of the Old South. Not only is the pace and organization of the city dictated by machines, but there is also a drastically different social order. Throughout the novel, Hazel struggles with his belief in white superiority. Hazel takes pride in the fact that his car was built before the car factories in Detroit became integrated. The car dealer tells Hazel:

They was better cars built a few years ago...They don't make no more good cars...Well, what you want to pay for it?...I wouldn't trade me a Chrysler for a Essex like that. That car yonder ain't been built by a bunch of niggers...All the niggers are living in Detroit now, putting cars together...I was up there a while myself and I seen. I come home (*WB* 71).

Although Hazel's car is ready to be sold for parts, Hazel retains an irrational sense of pride in the superiority of his automobile. He tells Lilly Hawks, "It ain't been built by a bunch of foreigners or niggers or one armed men...It was built by people with their eyes open that knew where they were at" (*WB* 127). However, Hazel's veneration of his car is constantly contradicted by its

mechanical ineptness. The ultimate destruction of the archaic automobile ends Hazel's delusion. He finally must concede that the Old South is gone, and the New South offers him no prospects.

The conflict between the old and modern becomes the catalyst that drives the plot of the novel, as Hazel must conform to a new urban identity or be martyred. As O'Gorman writes, "Indeed to a large extent her fictions are built upon a conflict between contemporary consumerism and traditional Southern mores in which she exhausts herself and points obliquely toward the possibility of a Christianity truly practiced" (177). There is no possibility of finding a harmonious balance between the agrarian and modern. The schism between the two worlds renders them utterly incompatible. Those who reject materialism and fail to recognize the benefits of industrialization risk being ostracized.

In *Wise Blood*, the modern South is a wasteland because of the prevalence of materialism and advertising. Renzo's description of *Wise Blood's* landscape is particularly good, "The inverted world of *Wise Blood* resembles the satirical hellscapes of Hieronymus Bosch" (23). This description fits well with the grotesque nature of O'Connor's vision. The people follow whims and desires, often sexual and violent, because of the dilution of agrarian and religious values. As Hazel walks through the city, he is bombarded by flashing lights. O'Connor writes, "When Hazel got to Taulkinham, as soon as he stepped off the train, he began to see signs and lights. PEANUTS, WESTERN UNION, AJAX, TAXI, HOTEL, CANDY. Most of them were electric and moved up and down or blinked frantically" (WB 14). The "eyes" of the denizens have become soulless because they do not see the sky or the stars (symbols of heaven) but only the flashing lights. Along with this, the characters are drawn from one attraction to the next, unsure of where to spend their money. The people come to the city solely for pleasure, and send their

days accumulating useless junk like the character Enoch Emory, who has a “fondness for supermarkets” (*WB* 66).

Alongside the city, the narrator compares the highway to hell, “The highway was ragged with filling stations and trailer camps and roadhouses. After a while there were stretches where red gulleys dropped off on either side of the road and behind them were patches of field buttoned together with 666 posts” (*WB* 74). The highway is associated with hell both because of the new sins the road offers and because of the destruction to the landscape the road brings. The red gulleys, created during the burning process of road construction, also visually associate the road with hell. The narrator’s scrutiny of the highway is a response to the rapid changes to Southern life ushered in by new freeways. As Howard Lawrence Preston relates:

Gulf oil filling stations, Burma-Shave ads, and billboards calling motorists’ attention to the benefits of Goodyear tires were all part of this new direction for the South. These were the institutions through which many Southerners first experienced the outside world and witnessed the bold new age of modernization as it was ushered in by highway construction and mobility (153).

Flannery O’Connor feared that national advertising, especially advertising related to the automobile, was destroying individuality and a distinctive Southern culture. Traditional Southern values demanded a reverence for the land and stationary populations, content with strong social and religious unions. Automobile advertising undermined these values, offering freedom from societal and sexual restraints. As Ragen writes:

O’Connor began writing as interest in the automobile was reaching its height. The wartime shortage of cars and of rationed gasoline gave way to an explosion of interest in cars in the late forties and early fifties. Many servicemen must have

wanted the freedom of an automobile after being released from the restrictions of military life-just as O'Connor's Hazel Motes buys an Essex soon after his discharge. But the idea that a car and a highway mean freedom is at least as old as the first mass-produced cars. The years before the war produced images of the Ford as a means of escape (60).

In *Wise Blood*, advertising produces an image which the characters try to mimic. As Hazel buys his car, he attempts, at first, to shake off the image of a preacher and become a successful American. He tells people, "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (*WB* 58). Buying an automobile is a compulsive act for Hazel. It is as if subliminal advertising (or the devil) has unconsciously convinced Hazel to do something completely irrational. The narrator makes sure the reader understands how illogical Hazel's desire to buy a car is:

There was only thought on his mind: he was going to buy a car. The thought was full grown in his head when he woke up, and he didn't think of anything else. He had never thought before of buying a car; he had never even wanted one before. He had driven one only a little in his life and he didn't have any license. He had only fifty dollars but he thought he could buy a car for that (*WB* 67).

Hazel is unsure why he desires a car; at first he seems to buy a car just because he feels it is what he should do as an industrial man. However, he justifies the decision by claiming he needs a home. He tells the salesman, "I wanted this car mostly to be a house for me...I ain't got any place to be" (*WB* 73). Even after Hazel moves into a boarding house, the car remains as Hazel's symbolic home, "He kept a pillow and an army blanket back there and he had a sterno stove and a coffee pot up on the shelf under the back oval window" (*WB* 158). Furthermore, the car breaks down so much that it is more of a dwelling than a means of transportation. The other characters

who view the car also respond to it in domestic terms. A trucker, stuck behind Hazel on the interstate, yells at him, "Will you please get your goddam outhouse off the middle of the road" (*WB 76*).

At times, the automobile also becomes a coffin. In Hazel's dream, he is dead and trapped in his car:

Haze stayed in his car and had a bad experience in it: he dreamed he was not dead but only buried. He was not waiting on the Judgment because there was no Judgment, he was waiting on nothing. Various eyes looked through the back oval window at his situation, some with considerable reverence, like the boy from the zoo, and some only to see what they could see...All this time Haze was bent on getting out but since there was no use to try, he didn't make any move one way or the other (*WB160*).

Hazel's attachment to the car seems to be associated with his desire to escape death. He believes if he can keep moving, he can escape responsibility, punishment, and fatality. However, his car often acts independently of his wishes, breaking down at times of great inconvenience, refusing to allow Hazel to escape his fate. Since the car often deprives Hazel of movement, remaining stationary, it becomes a claustrophobic symbol of death.

The car also has the uncanny ability to repair itself. For example, the car breaks down and seems unfixable during Hazel's confrontation with the false preacher Onnie Jay, and yet after his dream the car seems brand new, "He pulled himself over into the front of the car and eased his foot on the starter and the Essex rolled off quietly as if nothing were the matter with it" (*WB 161*). Another example occurs when he runs over the false preacher named Solace

Layfield. Hazel's car is slow, barely able to roll forward, and yet during the chase scene it suddenly becomes fast:

Both cars increased their speed and in a few minutes they were heading rapidly towards the outskirts of town. The first car cut off onto a lonesome road where the trees were hung over with moss and the only light came like stiff antennae from the two cars. Haze gradually shortened the distance between them and him, grinding his motor suddenly, he shot ahead and rammed the back end of the other car. Both cars came to a stop (*WB* 202).

The automobile is erratic, reflecting Hazel's own behavior, at times determined and swift, at others motionless and aimless. The broken automobile reflects Hazel's inability to adapt to the city. Hazel has no place in society and no job prospect. Therefore, the junkyard car is a perfect representation of his position because it is broken down, has little value or purpose, and has been rendered archaic by newer automobiles. Also, there is no stability or permanence in the novel. The city dwellers do not know each other. Most of the characters are just passing through the city, or are on their way to somewhere else. As Enoch Emory tells Hazel, "You ain't gonna know none neither. This is one more hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don't know nobody. Look like all they want to do is knock you down" (*WB* 48). Hazel has no place to be, and his car is his only possession. It is the only object that connects him to the city, and it demonstrates the precariousness of Hazel's new urban life.

Although Hazel believes his car connects him to society through ownership, he fails to realize the level of hostility to which the other characters respond to his car. The final act of destruction, perpetrated appropriately by a police officer, renders a public verdict of guilt; Hazel's automobile must be destroyed simply because it is obsolete. Hazel must be punished by

the law because he refuses to purchase a new automobile. Refusing to constantly “update” or modernize contradicts the ideology of invariable industrial progress. As Marshal McLuhan writes:

Accelerated change and planned obsolescence constitute the basic principle of an industrial power-economy built on applied science. Production for use? Yes. But for the briefest possible use consistent with the rigging of the market for the pyramiding of profits. Whether its new books or light bulbs, they must not clutter up the scene for too long (128).

The destruction of the automobile corresponds to Hazel’s final rejection of the modern world. Hazel is found lying in a park half conscious by the police, and instead of being taken to a hospital; he is brought back to the boarding house to pay his rent. Again, the narrator makes it clear that in industrial society, people are treated as consumers rather than humans. The sole purpose of the citizens is to purchase goods, and those who lack the ability to pay, or refuse to, are as expendable as outdated machines.

Industrialization is not only destructive to the social fabric; it is also detrimental to the environment. There is rarely a positive description of machines in O’Connor’s fiction. The narrator frequently gives the reader descriptions of broken down automobiles and old tires that litter the landscape and fill the junkyards. Clearly the utopian promise of the automobile is shattered in O’Connor’s novel:

Used car lots were scattered among the blocks of old buildings that separated the business section from the rail-road yards. He wandered around in a few of them before they were open. He could tell from the outside of the lot if it would have a fifty-dollar car in it (*WB* 68).

The machine that Hazel chooses to buy is the worst car in the junkyard lot:

“The car he saw was on the last rows of cars. It was a high rat-colored machine with large thin wheels and bulging headlights. When he got up to it, he saw that one door was tied on with a rope and that it had an oval window in the back. This was the car he was going to buy” (*WB* 70).

The machine itself is symbolically linked to the rodent. It is an eyesore and a plague-ridden nuisance that has destroyed the beauty of the landscape. It should be destroyed, and yet even after it is no longer a functional automobile, its parts litter the land. In the end, the rat-mobile is simply pushed off a cliff by a police officer. It is left to rot in a valley, another example of pollution and destruction.

As Hazel’s automobile is a corruptible force, it is interesting how quickly the car begins to negatively influence his behavior. Hazel believes the car to be emblematic of a new type of home and lifestyle. Despite his initial skepticism of the usefulness and quality of the car, he begins to believe in the advertising and conforms to the image of a car owner. Hazel views his car as the ultimate expression of his freedom and superiority. Ironically, the more the car breaks down, the stronger Hazel’s attachment to it becomes and the more he believes in its superiority. He tells a mechanic, “This is a good car...I knew when I first saw it that it was the car for me, and since I’ve had it, I’ve had a place to be that I can always get away in” (*WB* 115). At the end of the novel, just before the car is destroyed, he tells another mechanic, “This car is just beginning its life. A lightning bolt couldn’t stop it!” (*WB* 207).

The car also influences Hazel’s sexual behavior. In the first place, Hazel’s desire to purchase an automobile arises the morning after a sexual experience with a prostitute named Leora Watts. As Driskell and Brittain propose, “The choice of the Essex is suggestive: is sex”

(47). Shortly after Hazel purchases the car, Enoch Emory asks Him, “Where’d you get thisyer fine car?...You ought to paint some signs on the outside it, like ‘Step in, baby’-I seen one with that on it...”(87-88). O’Connor cleverly connects the car to advertising that promises sex appeal to its owners. As Ragen writes, “It seems that sexual liberation has been one of the by-products of the automobile almost from its first appearance...A car allowed not only the escape from a chaperone-which a simple walk would also do-but also the freedom of privacy in a reserved space”(65).

Soon after buying his car, Hazel uses it in an attempt to track down Sabbath Hawks, the daughter of the blind preacher. The car is also the setting where Hazel plots his advances, “Haze had gone out in his car to think and he decided that he would seduce Hawk’s child” (*WB* 110). Hazel believes Sabbath is naive and innocent, but he quickly learns she is not as pure as she seems. The first sexual encounter between Hazel and Sabbath also occurs in Hazel’s car. Sabbath hides in the backseat of Hazel’s car. Hazel’s response is a mixture of irritation and sexual desire:

What do you want to hide in my car for?...I got serious business before me. I don’t have time for any foolishness...Then he checked his ugly tone and stretched his mouth a little, remembering that he was going to seduce her (*WB* 117).

The irony is that Hazel does not really have any serious business before him. Even his stern preaching is absurd and teeming with farce. Hazel’s claim of “serious business” is more a reflection of the desire to have the car to himself, to enjoy the pleasure of driving alone. However, he also desires to blemish the virtue of Hawk’s daughter, though Hazel’s plan is quickly spoiled when Sabbath reveals she was born a bastard. Sabbath convinces Hazel to park on a dirt road and take a walk in the countryside. After a few moments, Hazel becomes paranoid

and fears that someone might have stolen his car. Hazel's illogical fear is linked to his dread of immobility. As Ragen argues:

Motes feels his freedom threatened by this entanglement with a female, and immediately imagines that the embodiment of his freedom may be stolen. It is not very likely that anyone would bother to steal a car like Motes beat up Essex, but Motes often fears that someone will drive it off. His car and his freedom are precious to Motes and he dreads losing them (*WB* 129).

The automobile reveals Hazel's desire for sexual freedom. As it becomes clear to Hazel that Sabbath desires a relationship, Hazel flees to his automobile in attempt to escape responsibility. The car remains an icon of unbridled lust. In addition to stirring Hazel's desire, the automobile also mimics sexual behavior, "The Essex had a tendency to develop a tic by nightfall. It would go forward about six inches and then back about four; it did that now a succession of times rapidly" (*WB* 79). The car acts as a mechanical bride, giving Hazel pleasure without making demands or, as he believes, inhibiting his freedom.

Towards the end of the novel, Hazel becomes completely obsessed with his vehicle, and therefore almost completely dependent upon it. The car has become the focus of Hazel's religion and the altar from which he preaches his blasphemies. In other words, the automobile becomes an altar to materialism. Hazel's ecstatic preaching to the auto mechanic just before it is destroyed reveals his devotion to materialism, "Hazel said it was not right to anything you couldn't see or hold in your hands or test with your teeth" (*WB* 206).

The automobile is also linked to Hazel's act of violence. Hazel uses technology to fill a sexual void. Interestingly, Hazel does not seek sexual pleasure from women, only the desire to prove his freedom from God and his ability to escape punishment for sin. Therefore, his sexual

experiences with Leora Watts and Sabbath Hawks prove unfulfilling. His true sexual gratification is tied to the pleasure of driving the car, although driving in itself is not pleasurable unless it is connected to the possibility of speed, danger, and death. In order to indulge his sexual appetite, Hazel resorts to violence. This interpretation explains why Hazel must murder Solace Layfield. If Hazel's desire is simply to punish Solace for false preaching or for imitation, making Solace strip off his suit would accomplish this goal. And if Hazel's desire in killing Solace is simply to destroy his conscience or his double, as is often suggested by critics, it does not fully explain why he chooses to run over Solace with his car, or why he backs up and runs over Solace a second time. It also fails to explain why Hazel shows no remorse or mercy, even as Solace gives a dying confession. Hazel exhibits instead the "rigidly and thoughtless behaviorism of the machine" (McLuhan 99). His attachment to the mechanical has detached him from human compassion. He is dependent on a "fascist" level of violence in order to fulfill his sexual desires.

The absurdity of Hazel's attachment to the car is again demonstrated by his confrontation with Solace Layfield. As Solace replicates Hazel's style by wearing a dark suit and driving a junkyard car in order to make a profit preaching, he serves as a mirror image from which Hazel is able to "see" himself. Ironically, when Hazel encounters Solace Layfield, he is critical of Solace's rat colored car. He asks Solace, "What you keep a thing like that on the road for?" (WB 203). Ultimately, in his confrontation with Solace, Hazel must confront the materialistic side of himself. As he slays Solace, he also destroys the fraction of himself that is unfaithful to true religion.

Hazel becomes frantic and paranoid after he murders Solace. Hazel attempts to escape the city, but it is inescapable because the suburban sprawl of the city has spread to every corner

of the landscape. Hazel realizes there is no place to go when he notices the deserted barns covered with “CCC Snuff ads” to appeal to interstate drivers:

He drove very fast out onto the highway, but once he had gone a few miles, he had the sense that he was not gaining ground. Shacks and filling stations and road camps and 666 signs passed him, and deserted barns with CCC snuff ads peeling across them, even a sign that said ‘Jesus Died for You,’ which he saw and deliberately did not read. He had the sense that the road was really slipping back under him. He had known all along that there was no more country but he didn’t know that there was not another city (*WB* 207).

It is impossible for Hazel to retreat back to the country because, as he realizes, it no longer exists. There is also no other city because Hazel realizes that no place will offer him salvation. As Desmond says, “There are almost no signs and no means of salvation in the outer world Haze has experienced. It is a desacralized society given to mechanistic and animalistic standards of behavior, thoroughly dehumanized” (Desmond 61). Hazel is struck at the crossroads defined by Allen Tate, but in his case, Hazel has no choice. He can exist in neither the agrarian nor the modern world. After Hazel’s car is destroyed by the police officer, he decides to blind himself as a gesture of his renunciation of the world. As O’Gorman writes, “Deprived of the machine that served as his ‘home’ and his source of identity, Hazel is forced to settle down and begin his bizarre penance, the asceticism and self-blinding that will lead to new vision”(WB 170). Hazel’s death is a final declaration of his rejection of the modern world. He dies a martyr for the cause of the Old South and stringent religious values.

Although Flannery O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear it Away* lacks the philosophical depth of *Wise Blood*, it also involves an industrial wasteland and a lost pastoral landscape. There is no

plantation in O'Connor's novel, yet her protagonist, Francis Tarwater, grows up in an agricultural environment. Francis is raised by his great uncle, a prophet-like figure intent on saving his young relatives from the evils of modernization. In *The Violent Bear it Away*, the only alternative to the city is a clearing in the woods where the characters live a hermit's life, or a life similar to the prophets in the Old Testament, wandering through the wilderness. The major conflict of the novel occurs when Francis's great uncle dies, and Francis is given the choice between remaining in the clearing in the woods alone, or moving to the city to be with his other uncle, named Rayber. Rayber is a schoolteacher and represents the modern industrial man. Francis decides to abandon the farm and visit Rayber in the city in order to determine if his great uncle was telling the truth about the evils of modern society. Francis burns down his great uncle's house and hitchhikes his way to the city. He tells Meeks, the driver who gives Francis a ride, "I know everything but the machines... My great-uncle learnt me everything, but first I have to find out how much of it is true" (*Violent Bear it Away* 79).

Francis was prevented from attending public school by his uncle because he believed that school striped children of their religious values and individuality. Old Tarwater gives Francis a solid biblical education, but disregards any secular knowledge. As Bacon writes:

The conflict between private education, as a means of promoting 'backwoods' individualism, and public education, as means of forming a 'good citizen' is basically a conflict between regional and national goals. The result of the narrative is clear. The Southerner who defends individuality triumphs over the Southerner who preaches conformity (103).

The perception that the goal of public education is to produce 'good citizens' is further defined by Ralph C. Wood as the desire to produce good consumers:

The uncouth prophet does not accept the attempt of modern education to produce future autonomous adults who will make their own minds, deciding and defining things for themselves. Such training is not meant to form moral character, but to produce a good consumer, a chooser of one's own "lifestyle" from a smorgasbord of options where Christian faith becomes merely another "preference (227).

The avoidance of public school naturally coincides with the avoidance of industrialization. In fact, the most significant aspect of the farm at Powderhead is that it cannot be reached by car. Those wishing to visit Old Tarwater must park a mile away on a dirt path and walk through the cornfield. The farm enables the farmer to maintain autonomy from the city, and signifies Old Tarwater's independence from social programs, especially education. O'Connor makes a scathing criticism of the intellectual ineptness of public education compared with backwoods biblical study:

The lord had seen it fit to preserve him from contamination, to preserve him as his elect servant, trained by a prophet for prophesy. While other children of his age were herded together in a room to cut out paper pumpkins under the direction of a woman, he was left free for the pursuit of wisdom, the companions of his spirit Abel and Enoch and Noah and Job, Abraham and Moses, King David and Solomon and all the prophets, from Elijah who escaped death, to John whose severed head struck terror from a dish. The boy knew escaping school was the surest sign of his election (17).

The narrator makes it clear that biblical education, provided by rural farmers with strong Southern values, is far superior to public schools in the city. However, for Francis to remain out of school, Old Tarwater must break the law. He lies to the truancy officer by claiming that

Francis is mentally handicapped. From an early age, Francis learns that to live like Old Tarwater is to be a social outcast and an outlaw. Bacon relates, “Old Tarwater has learned that the “real world” will not tolerate dissent and that it has the institutional power to enforce its version of reality” (134). Francis realizes he must either conform to the demands of society, or live isolated from civilization in the backwoods.

When Francis visits his uncle, he is given a chance to compare the benefits of the modern city with the rural farm. His uncle Rayber, a schoolteacher, attempts to educate Francis on the benefits of industrialization. Rayber seeks to discredit the teachings of Old Tarwater, and convince Francis to discard his religious beliefs. Rayber’s teachings focus on the achievements of modern man. He accompanies Francis on long walks through the city, attempting to point out the highlights of progress. Upon looking at an airplane, Rayber tells Francis, “Flying is the greatest engineering achievement of man” (*VBA* 173). Francis responds, “I wouldn’t give you nothing for no airplane. A buzzard can fly” (*VBA* 173). Francis clearly rejects the airplane as a symbol of progress, and relates the machine to animalistic utility. Rayber responds, “You’re going to grow up to be a freak if you don’t let yourself be helped” (*VBA* 173). Rayber believes it is necessary for Francis to understand the significance of “progress.” He understands that for one to be received into modern society, one must accept the ideology of industrial improvement.

When looking at an automobile, Rayber once again attempts to convince Francis of the value of the machine:

Once he had paused at a window where a small red car turned slowly on a revolving platform. Seizing on the display of interest, Rayber had said that perhaps when he was sixteen, he could have a car of his own. It might have been

the old man who had replied that he could walk on his two feet for nothing without being beholden (*VBA* 108).

Ultimately, Rayber realizes that it is hopeless to change Francis. The individualistic strain runs too deep in him. Rayber's lessons cannot compete with the education Francis receives from his great uncle. Francis learns from his uncle at an early age that the automobile is a symbol of sin. Old Tarwater warns Francis at the beginning of the novel, "'You are the kind of boy...that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke or a drink or a ride, and ask you your bidnis'" (*VBA* 58). Old Tarwater believes the automobile to be the means of transportation through which the devil commits his evil acts. This prophecy proves true on both occasions Francis chooses to Hitchhike.

First, it is imperative to consider that Francis was born in an automobile wreck:

The two of them, along with his grandfather, had been killed in an automobile crash, leaving only the schoolteacher alive in that family, and Tarwater himself, for his mother (unmarried and shameless) had lived just long enough after the crash for him to be born. He had been born at the scene of the wreck (*VBA* 41).

Old Tarwater believes the car crash to be an authoritative indication of God's wrath. He compares her death to the biblical story of Jezebel: "Jezebel was discovered by dogs, an arm here and a foot there, so said his great uncle, it had almost been with his own mother and grandmother" (*VBA* 40).

This story becomes strongly embedded in Francis's psyche, and he naturally relates the automobile wreck with the proof of the existence of god:

The boy was very proud that he had been born in a wreck. He had felt that it set his existence apart from the ordinary one and he had understood from it that the

plans of God for him were special, even though nothing of consequence had happened to him so far (*VBA 41*).

Francis believes, perhaps unconsciously, that when God chooses to speak to him it will in some way involve an automobile. This is likely the reason he chooses to hitchhike. Since God has not spoken to him in the wilderness, he believes he must “make it happen” by going to the city.

Francis first encounters a manufacturer’s representative salesman named Meeks. Meeks uses the powers of manipulation and deceit in order to sell his products. He wears a big cowboy hat in order to appear like an honest farmer. He uses the policy of “love” to convince his clientele to buy products. He pretends to take an interest in the personal affairs of his customers, keeping a book with the names and important information of their families. He always inquires about the health of sick family members and offers his sympathy. However, Meeks thanks God when the sick family members die because “that’s one less to remember” (*VBA 51*). Just as Rayber, Meeks is confident of the value of industrialization, “Meeks told him[Francis] to learn to work every machine he saw. The greatest invention of man, he said, was the wheel and he asked Tarwater if he had ever thought how things were before it was a wheel, but the boy didn’t answer him” (*VBA 83*). The salesman’s self-assured speech is also oddly reminiscent of Hazel Motes: “I’ve never been turned around in my life...And I didn’t come from any fire. I come from Mobile. And I know where I’m going. What’s the matter with you?”(*VBA 52*).

Meeks inquires into Francis’s affairs because he wishes to find a boy who is “ignorant enough to a hard worker” (*VBA 54*). However, Francis proves to be harder prey than Meeks expected. When Francis reveals to Meeks that he was raised by his great-uncle, a prophet, and he has just ran away after his uncle’s death, Meeks asks, “And now you’re coming to town to run

to doom with the rest of us, huh?" Francis responds in a manner also quite reminiscent of Hazel Motes, "I ain't said what I'm going to do" (79).

Meeks takes Francis to his shop, a suffocating industrial factory that "was lined with automobile tires and had a concrete and rubber smell" (VBA 81). He tells Francis to call his uncle Rayber, attempting to prove to Francis that he has nowhere to go. However, Francis has never seen a telephone, and is amazed at the black coiled machine that seems able to reach people "beyond the grave" (VBA 81). Rayber's child picks up the phone and doesn't speak, nor does he give the phone to Rayber. Meeks becomes frustrated and decides to drop Francis off on his uncle's doorstep. He tells Francis before leaving, "So long, son...if you get real hungry by next week, you can contact me from that card and we might make deal" (VBA 84).

Francis manages to escape from Meeks unharmed. He resists the job offer, and refuses Meeks's advice. However, on Francis second hitchhiking experience, he is not so lucky. He decides to leave his uncle Rayber and return home to Powderhead because he will be in charge there. He rejects his calling to be a prophet, and just as Hazel Motes, wishes to escape responsibility for his actions. He chooses to hitchhike in defiance of his great uncle's warnings not to trust strangers. The physical appearance of the man who picks up Francis is grotesque:

...pale, lean, old looking young man with deep hollows under his cheekbones. He had on a lavender shirt and a thin black suit and a panama hat. His lips were as white as the cigarette that hung limply from one side of his mouth. His eyes were the same color as his shirt and were ringed with heavy black lashes. A lock of yellow hair fell across his forehead from under his pushed back hat (VBA 227).

O'Connor's description of the man is corpse-like. He is a representation of the soulless industrial man, violent and perverse. There is no humanity in his appearance, nor in his actions.

Just as in Meeks's shop, it is hard to breathe inside the man's car. Old Tarwater's prophecy about the devil comes true when the stranger offers Francis a cigarette and a drink of whiskey. Francis ignores his uncle's forewarning and accepts the offer. Francis quickly passes out from the potent whiskey. He wakes up naked and alone in a field close to Powderhead with the realization he has been brutally raped.

While at first it seems that Meeks's prediction in part one that "he will come to no good end" has come true, a deeper analysis reveals the redemptive purpose of violence in O'Connor's fiction (*VBA* 84). Francis views the violent act, associated with the automobile, as the sign for which he has been waiting. He is ceremoniously cleansed from his worldly desires and born again (symbolized by his nudity) to be a prophet. As Driskill and Brittinan write, "Francis recognizes the bestial nature, that part of man guided by the archfiend, and severs himself from it" (89). Francis sees rings of fire around him like the prophets in the Old Testament. Francis hears God command him, "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY" (*VBA* 242).

Conclusion

The “New South Creed” and I’ll Take my Stand delineated opposing ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries. Faulkner and O’Connor were raised under the conflict of agrarianism versus modernization, and responded to these crosscurrents in their fiction. Their novels contain violent crashes and confrontations involving the automobile, metaphorically expressing and addressing the conflict between agrarian and modern.

In *Sartoris* and in *Light in August*, Faulkner’s protagonists struggle to define their identities in the modern age, and neither is able to break completely free from the traditions of the Old South. Both characters face a crossroads at which they must choose between the Old and New South. The side on which they stand determines how they will be defined by Southern society. The greatest symbol of their choice is in whether they decide to own an automobile or a horse. The narrator presents the automobile as an ‘iron demon’ capable of completely destroying both the protagonists and the South.

Faulkner suggests that the destruction of the South is not caused entirely by industrialization, but rather it is a result of the destructive tendencies created by the myths and legends of the Old South that will not expire in the modern age. The narrator gives the reader a glimpse of how the South can survive through a utopian combination of old agrarian values and new industrialization, but unfortunately for the narrator, this vision seems as fantastic as the legends of the Old South.

Bayard attempts to live in both worlds, desiring to possess the heroic and cavalier qualities of his ancestors, while also incorporating the technological advancements and ideals of the modern age, but he ultimately fails to strike a balance between Old and New, and his reckless and suicidal behavior destroys both himself and his grandfather. Joe Christmas attempts to escape from the Old South and live completely as a modern man. As he beats the horse to death, he attempts to sever himself from the traditions of the past. However, the Old South will not let him escape, and he is violently murdered by a lynch mob for refusing to obey the mores of Southern society.

In *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear it Away*, O'Connor's protagonists struggle against the oppressive forces of modernization. As they attempt to deny their Southern heritage and values in order to integrate into modern society, they are eventually forced to realize, through violent altercations involving the automobile, that modern society will not offer them the redemption they seek. Hazel places his trust in an automobile to save himself, claiming that "no one with a good car needs to be justified." It is only after the car is pushed off a cliff by a police officer that he realizes the car will not offer the redemption he seeks. Hazel is forced to confront the truth, that there is no place for him in society. He turns to the fanatical religious beliefs of his ancestors in a last effort to save himself. He dies a blind outcast, unwilling to live in the modern age. Tarwater attempts to evaluate the benefits of modernization, rejecting his great uncle's advice to steer clear of the city. As he hitchhikes around town, he is violently drugged and raped, and left naked in the woods. The sadistic experience confirms the evils of modernization, and Tarwater is forced to realize his position as an outsider, a holy prophet willing to die for the cause of the Old South. It is not possible for Hazel Motes or Francis Tarwater to revisit the Old

South because it is gone. Instead, both Hazel Motes and Francis Tarwater end as social outcasts, martyrs with their spirituality and integrity unbroken.

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