Forget Jerusalem: William Faulkner's Hyperreal Novel

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(ABSTRACT)

This paper explores the relationality between Modernism and
Postmodernism as well as between literature and theory by
examining the works of two writers: master novelist William
Faulkner, and high priest of Postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard.
Specifically, this paper examines Faulkner's eleventh novel—the
oft-neglected If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem—as a proto-postmodern
text which, when examined by the light of Baudrillard's theory
of simulacra and simulations, informs the transition from
Modernism to Postmodernism.

This paper treats each author's work as a lens through which to
view the other. The result is both a re-vision of Faulkner's
social philosophy and a re-examination of the epistemic break
that separates Faulkner's philosophy from that of Baudrillard.

Introduction

Of the scholars who have published criticism on William Faulkner's If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem, surprisingly few have examined the novel's narrative forms, and of these few, none have dealt with Faulkner's use of *mise en abyme*—the mirror in the text (Dällenbach 12). Particularly, most critics have ignored the fact that each of the novel's contrapuntal narratives, "The Wild Palms" and "Old Man," includes a protagonist who narrates while being narrated. As a result, these critics have overlooked the critical possibilities which arise when a narrative "encloses the work that encloses it" (Dällenbach 35), and have therefore failed to uncover the critiques of representation made by Faulkner via this reflexion. Specifically, scholars have ignored the fact that both Harry Wilbourne of "The Wild Palms" and the tall convict of "Old Man" distort the narratives that contain them, acting as filters whose properties were formed by the same events and environments re-examined through them. The result is that Faulkner scholars have not yet treated If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem as the sophisticated work it is, realizing the contingency between representation and consciousness, and critiquing the profound impact of this contingency upon culture.

Instead, criticism of If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem has the tendency to fit in one of several categories, each privileging either the novel's forms or its content but not their interdependence. These categories include: moral judgments of Harry and/or Charlotte, examinations of Harry and Charlotte as thinly-veiled autobiographical representations of Faulkner and either Meta Carpenter or Helen Baird, studies citing the entire novel as a commentary upon the romantic tradition, gender studies of Charlotte and/or the unnamed pregnant woman in "Old Man," excavations of the novel's intertextuality, or

combinations of the above. Most criticism has failed to see beyond the conditions of the novel's production, or beyond its contribution to the literary canon alone.

Two notable exceptions exist, however, and each has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for this paper. These are Pamela Rhodes and Richard Godden's "*The Wild Palms:* Degraded Culture, Devalued Texts,"[1] and Charles Hannon's "Signification, Simulation, and Containment in If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem." In "Degraded Culture, Devalued Texts," Rhodes and Godden state that "[i]n the context of the novel, the intertextual, if pursued to its esoteric and self-referentially eccentric extremes, acquires meaning and becomes a synecdoche for overproduction," at which point "the cultural blight that is the novel's subject infects the text itself" (Rhodes & Godden 95). Stating that Harry and Charlotte lead highly reified existences void of "authentic feeling," they write:

> The more the artificial longings expand their own
> artificiality through deepening layers of parody, the
> more an excess of artifice comes to signify only its
> own falsity, leaving the novel in danger of collapsing
> upon itself, as fabricated as the fabric it sought to
> comprehend. (Rhodes & Godden 94, 95)

In this schema, the source of Harry and Charlotte's reification is the replacement of matter with commodities or intellectual forms that accompanies the commercial age (Rhodes & Godden 92-3). Rhodes and Godden state that If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem is a critique of a society that has "lost touch with 'matter,'" in which every person "is reduced to yet another item of merchandise in the market that appears to control him" (93). They accomplish this task by examining "the intertextual form" of the novel (Rhodes & Godden 93).

Although I agree with this analysis of the novel's symptomatic form, I do not concur with Rhodes and Godden's particular emphases. Rhodes and Godden assert that the novel executes its "self-parody" through Harry, who "ingests his past, as another commodity for his own consumption, turning his narrative, not into archives, but into a pulp novel written over the grave of Charlotte" (Rhodes & Godden 98, 99). I will show, however, that although "The Wild Palms" is parodic its parody is not limited to itself as a commodity, but includes a critique of the commodity's effect upon perception and of the social order which emerges alongside symbolic decay. More importantly, my paper treats the novel as a commentary on a society in which people are less "instrument[s] of passage for the circulation of commodities," as Rhodes and Godden assert (91), and are more entangled in a commerce of signs. That is, while Rhodes and Godden concern themselves with Marxist analyses of production and its role in generating "signs that the whole social metabolism has been invaded by the dominant commodity form" (92), I treat Faulkner's portrayal of those subjects who have exchanged these signs for the real.

This paper takes a postmodern approach in its examination of Faulkner's eleventh novel. Postmodernity and postmodern / poststructural theory have made possible an archeological dig into yet another strata of Faulkner's work, unearthing rich analyses which benefit scholars of modernism and postmodernism alike. This paper extends a path of inquiry begun by Charles Hannon. Hannon's insightful essay, "Signification, Simulation, and Containment in <u>If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem</u>" examines Faulkner's novel as a critique of modernism's "conditions of signification" that prefigures postmodernist tendencies as its author searches for "possibilities of emancipation from the

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[1] Later incorporated into Godden's <u>Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and</u>

various prisons of modernism and late modernist culture" (Hannon 134). Unlike Hannon, however, I argue that, rather than finding the key to liberation from modernist constraints, Faulkner discovers a prison more sinister than the first. That is, Faulkner uncovers instead (or perhaps has a vision of) a world where meaning has imploded: a post-modern (or post-mortem) landscape where the real has disappeared beneath representation. In my interpretation, Faulkner foresees postmodernity.

This paper asserts that Faulkner comes to the realization that the 'prison' of modernism, though carcereal, is at least a safe haven for signification—a retreat dramatized by the tall convict's quest to return to the protective walls of Parchman penitentiary in "Old Man." "The Wild Palms," meanwhile, undergoes an implosion of form and content over the course of its delivery, paralleling that of the real and the imaginary in the emergent post-modern society depicted by the narrative. That is, while the medium of "The Wild Palms" may, as Hannon claims, prefigure "postmodernist attitudes and devices" (Hannon 134), its message is one which critiques, through its depiction, a society in which "the Medium is the Message" (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 64-65). The result is a narrative that exhibits as well as describes the same symptoms of symbolic decay diagnosed in contemporary culture by numerous postmodern critics—especially French critic Jean Baudrillard.

In "Old Man," the tall convict is able to make the distinction between himself as the storyteller and as that storyteller's protagonist. This is reflected in the narrative's structure: there is a clear distinction between the tall convict who sits in his jail cell telling the story of his adventure, and the tall convict who spills over the boundaries of this text within the text. The tall convict comments frequently (albeit

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the South's Long Revolution.

to himself) on the tale he is trying to tell and how it will be seen as unreal by the receiver.

However, in "The Wild Palms," Harry Wilbourne is so caught up in the system of overabundant signs that replaced the real that he can make no distinction between real and imaginary, because there is no difference between them anymore. The real and the imaginary have imploded, and this implosion is reflected in the narrative's form: whereas the storyteller and the story told are separate in "Old Man," they become fused in "The Wild Palms."[2]

It is curious that both Rhodes and Godden and Charles Hannon make oblique references to the work of Jean Baudrillard, but neither cites any criticism published after The Mirror of Production—a text that predates the breakthrough Symbolic Exchange and Death by three years and Simulacra and Simulation by eight. Thus, neither incorporates Baudrillard's social theory after his abandonment of political economy (his break with Marxism) and neither takes advantage of Baudrillard's theory of simulation, which affords the strongest tool for examining If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem.

Marx/Baudrillard/Faulkner

Political economy from Marx to Baudrillard is, in part, a history of the commodity and its changing role in the alienation of individuals from nature. It is also a history of technology as the agent of change for commodities, and by extension, of the individual's relationship to nature.

Marx is the progenitor of this discourse, describing how commodities alienate individuals from nature. Marx states that when the producer is paid a wage for producing and the product

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[2] Were this paper to be complete, a study of "Old Man" would accompany the following examination of "The Wild Palms." The comparison made here must suffice, however, as ample space is unavailable for such an analysis.

is produced "only [as] a *means* for satisfying other needs" (169), then the producer and the product are both reduced to specters: "There is a physical relation between physical things," writes Marx, "But it is different with commodities. The commodity form, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom" (175); "The object produced by labour, its product, . . . stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer" (Marx 171; italics in original). Figuratively speaking, the individual is invested in a product which "disappears" when its use value gives way to its value as a commodity. Individuals do not produce commodities; rather, the market does.

Ultimately, notes Marx, the life produced by individuals under capitalism is incommensurate with the life these individuals lead. Instead, each inhabits its own, separate sphere: "[T]he productive forces appear to be completely independent and severed from the individuals and to constitute a self-subsistent world alongside the individuals," states Marx (174); "The reason for this is that the individual, whose forces they are, themselves exist separated and in opposition to one another, while on the other hand these forces are only real forces in the intercourse and association of these individuals" (174).

New technologies for the reproduction of images brought with them the necessity for a re-vision of Marxist theory as they complicated the relationship between individuals and nature by changing the nature of the commodity. Furthermore, Marx's descriptions of the commodity, although adequate for describing the alienation of the *producer*, ignored the alienation of the *consumer*. Consumer culture didn't really begin in earnest until

technologies for mechanical reproduction such as broadcast radio, film, and motion pictures made possible the infinite reproduction not only of identical objects, but identical images as well.

Mechanical reproduction of images accelerated the construction of a false reality initially described by Marx. This needs some explanation. To Marx, commodities were at once physical and spectral—they were objects and commodities *at the same time and in the same place* ("sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible" (Derrida 150).) That is, an object was the product of an individual's labor and the product of the market at the same time—*someone* made the table that hosts the specter of market value. The proliferation of mechanically reproduced images complicated things beyond measure by removing the physical human labor from the production of commodities, by exponentially increasing the sheer number of commodities produced, and by making the reproduction portable, i.e., not tied to any original and no longer the direct product of the labor of individuals.

This re-vision was accomplished by theorists such as Walter Benjamin, who recognized the impact that mechanical reproduction had upon individuals and their surroundings. Benjamin's most significant contribution to this re-vision of the commodity is his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which addresses each of the considerations above.

While Marx describes the commodity as a wedge driven between individuals and nature, Benjamin describes the mechanically reproduced commodity as a simulacrum absorbing producers, consumers, and nature alike. The producer, to Benjamin, is even farther removed from what is produced (or reproduced). One no longer fashions a work of art which then becomes a commodity, but instead, one throws a switch on a

machine, and it reproduces the likeness of the work of art. Marx's commodity may be "sensuously supersensible," but the mechanically reproduced commodity is itself spectral: a spirit without a body, produced by no one. Concerning the consumer, Benjamin states that mechanical reproduction "substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (1108). And thus, as more and more of reality consists of mechanically reproduced objects and images, individuals become increasingly estranged from what is real.

Benjamin's example is that of the motion picture. Inasmuch as the producer is concerned, there is no "original" performance of the actors, nor is there is any "original" product. Instead, there are only assemblages of fragmented, edited images, and reproductions in the form of projected images upon a movie screen. What is produced is only simulacra capable of and designed for "simultaneous collective experience" (Benjamin 1117). From this example, the removal of the producer from the product is highly apparent, as is the division of the product from the real. There is, at the same time, an "adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality" (Benjamin 1109).

Subsequent re-visions of Marx were matters of degree, corresponding with the escalation of reproductions both real and possible. Such is the case with Marshall McLuhan, who reacts to the emergence of broadcast media and the reproduction of events, stretching the limits of Marxist discourse.

It is from this lineage that contemporary French critic Jean Baudrillard emerges in the 1970s not with a re-vision of Marx, but with a revolution and repudiation. Responding to his inheritance, Baudrillard states that at some point, mechanically reproduced objects, images, and events became so ubiquitous that distinguishing them from the real was no longer possible. "This

point," to Baudrillard, marks the dawn of postmodernity, which he claims was reached when the evolution of reproductive technologies made labor superfluous, on the one hand, and led to the supersedure of the real with the imaginary, on the other. Marx, after all, was only concerned "with the products of men's hands," (Marx 176), but Baudrillard describes a world in which the image is the dominant commodity form, and "men's hands" are replaced by machines. The *social* relations of capitalism still exist, however, and labor is, according to Baudrillard, mandatory for the reason that it maintains the social hierarchy. As a result, both individuals and the real come to be characterized by reproduction: Individuals, continuing to occupy the positions made obsolete by mechanization no longer produce anything, but *re*produce the signs of their own subsistence, while technologies such as broadcast media have generated so many reproductions that they obscure and eventually replace the real.

Baudrillard's description of the *process* by which this replacement takes place is both the source of his notoriety and the hinge upon which my discussion of Faulkner turns. This description is characterized by catastrophic or apocalyptic terms such as "implosion" and "collapse," which Baudrillard uses to describe the investment of reality in the sign, and the subject's interiorization of this sign as the real. Hence Baudrillard's terminology—the mental space of the subject (the "inside") and the "outside" world cease to be different, but become repositories of identical, synthetic signs.

It is important here to note that Baudrillard is not using "real" or "imaginary" in any Lacanian or related sense, but in an entirely different way:

Up to a certain point, claims Baudrillard, "the imaginary" actually did signify a system or a repository of images

distinctly separate from the real. But following what he calls the 'structural law of value' or inauguration of the third order of simulacra, the real and the imaginary imploded, or became one and the same, and thereby became indistinguishable. Following this implosion, there ceased to be either a real or an imaginary. Instead, there existed only a "hyperreal" consisting of signs that simulated or reproduced the real, and signs that simulated or reproduced the imaginary. Baudrillard likens the movement to a death and a resurrection: the real and the imaginary both died, and were resurrected in the same form—the sign. Baudrillard's "imaginary," unlike that of his predecessors, does not signify the experience of images that are distinguishable from the real, but to a socially-constructed sign system without referents. It is no wonder, then, that Baudrillard states that representation is no longer possible, for all signs are indeterminate, merely simulating representation or reality. There are only signs, claims Baudrillard, in the guise of reality or in the guise of representation.

For example, Baudrillard states that television is brought to life by viewers in the form of codes of thought and behavior: one wears what sitcom actors wear, judges behavior according to deviation from or adherence to a set of codes established and maintained by the evening news, etc. This process becomes vertiginous, notes Baudrillard, when signs are then re-circulated under the guise of representation—when the following day's news claims to represent reality, but really only exchanges yesterday's signs of the real against today's. In other words, signs no longer represent or signify any fundamental reality. Rather, signs that *simulate* representation are exchanged against signs that *simulate* reality.

Baudrillard describes this phenomenon as "the implosion of meaning in the media" and "the implosion of the social in the masses" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 82, 81). Baudrillard explains that because the reproduced sign has no referent its meaning is absorbed by the medium. And because the sign has no value outside of the medium, the medium and the message implode, uniting in the sign. Because these signs are reproduced *ad infinitum*, the subject/experiencer becomes one of many to share an identical experience (albeit a media experience). These experiences are hyperreal, and the medium/message *is* hyperreality. Thus, mass media does not socialize the subject, but makes the subject one of the masses—one of the many to share the same hyperreal experience. Baudrillard's name for this condition is postmodernity.

It is clear that in Baudrillard's simulation theory (and Baudrillard's postmodernity) the *subject* is reproduced. In fact, the subject is reproduced *by reproductions*—by simulacra, becoming a simulacrum, too. So, unlike Marx and Benjamin who describe the subject as becoming part of the machine, Baudrillard describes the *machine* as becoming part of the *subject*. The machine is given form by the subject; the subject is the machine reproduced. Baudrillard's subject, a passive citizen of hyperreality, is incorporated into the masses—is "massified"—becoming one of *n* identical subjects formed in relation to the machine. What is "in" the television picture, and what is beyond the TV are now two strings of identical code, although they were once imaginary and real, respectively.

To support his case, Baudrillard writes a history of the simulacrum, identifying technologies of reproduction, mechanical and otherwise, that have emerged since the Renaissance, and which have driven the evolution of the sign. In so doing, Baudrillard rewrites history as a function of reproduction,

illustrating the effects of reproduction upon the evolution of the sign and the correspondence between the evolution of the sign and the evolution of the subject in relation to the sign. Baudrillard writes a history of modernity and postmodernity, and by so doing, Baudrillard becomes one of a few critics to identify a specific agent of postmodernity: the evolution of the mode of *reproduction*.

In his essay entitled "The Order of Simulacra"—a quasi-Foucauldian history of the simulacrum and its interrelationships with the real—Baudrillard demonstrates how technologies for the reproduction of objects, images, and events have evolved over time, and how this evolution was punctuated by three 'revolutions of value.' Corresponding to the orders of simulacra, each of these 'revolutions' denotes an increasing confluence of capital, labor, commodity, technology, and reproduction that culminates in a society of simulations (Kellner 77).

Baudrillard claims that in the Feudal era signs were "obligatory" or "transparent" in nature (Symbolic Exchange 50). The free production of signs was prohibited by a "strong 'symbolic order,'" which found its expression in social organization (the caste system), in scientific discourse, (the planetary system), etc. (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 50). In other words, the feudal order of things is both hierarchical and "natural"—kings possess divine rights, etc.

This symbolic order was weakened during the Renaissance when the bourgeoisie "emancipated" the sign with what Baudrillard calls the "counterfeit" (Symbolic Exchange 51). The "counterfeit" or "imitation of nature" weakened the symbolic order by disjoining the sign from its "natural" or "original" place in the order of things. For this reason, Baudrillard lauds the new medium of stucco as "the triumphant democracy of

all artificial signs," as it lent form to the counterfeit, making possible the imitation of nature, the liberation of the sign from the social hierarchy, and thereby initiated the first order of simulacra (Symbolic Exchange 51).

Arriving alongside the Industrial Revolution, Baudrillard's second order of simulacra marks the point at which objects and signs cease to be *counterfeits* and begin to be *products*. "In this order of simulacra," writes scholar Douglas Kellner, "there is no longer nostalgia for a natural order: nature becomes the object of domination, and reproduction itself becomes a dominant social principle governed by the laws of the market" (79). In the second-order of simulacra, singular reproduction gives way to serial reproduction—instead of a one to one relationship between original and copy, it becomes possible for an infinite number of identical copies to be made of one original.

This movement marks the beginning of what Baudrillard calls the accumulation of "dead labour over living labour"[3]—an accumulation which, once at its hegemonic limit, will inaugurate the third order of simulacra (Symbolic Exchange 56). Analogous to Marx's description of the simultaneous spectralization of both product and its producer when products becomes commodities, (Derrida 147-76), the producer of the second-order simulacrum becomes a simulacrum along with that which is produced (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 55). One produces an object, not a commodity. So, as market value replaces use value, so also does labor power replace the individual.

The very crux of Baudrillard's project, however, is the inauguration of the third order of simulacra, or the transformation "from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing" (Simulacra and

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[3] The corresponding quote from Marx is that the rule of capital is "the domination of living men by dead matter" (5).

Simulation 6). On this process and its completion, Baudrillard
writes:

> As soon as dead labour gains the upper hand over
> living labour . . . serial production gives way to
> generation through models. In this case, it is a
> matter of reversal of origin and end, since all forms
> change from the moment that they are no longer
> mechanically reproduced, but *conceived according to
> their very reproducibility*, their diffraction from a
> generative core called a 'model'. . . . There is no
> more counterfeiting of an original, as there was in
> the first order, and no more pure series as there were
> in the second; there are models from which all forms
> proceed according to modulated differences. Only
> affiliation to the model has any meaning, since
> nothing proceeds in accordance with its end anymore,
> but issues instead from the model. (Symbolic Exchange
> 56)

Mechanical reproduction pushes the second-order simulacrum to
its limit, notes Baudrillard, because the producer as well as
the original referent disappears completely beneath a canopy of
reproduced, "dead" images. Once these images or signs of the
real become so overabundant that they are taken *for* the real,
the third order of simulacra or the era of simulation begins.[4]

Once in the third order, the boundaries between such binary
oppositions as: imaginary / real, or representation / reality
collapse, as each term "implodes" into the sign[5]. Signs no
longer have any real referents, argues Baudrillard, but are

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[4] "Taken," here, does not mean "mistaken." That is, individuals are not
fooled into believing an illusion over any fundamental reality, but rather,
there is no fundamental reality any longer—or at least no way to make such
distinctions.

[5] Unlike a Lacanian model in which a signifier slides below the bar, in
Baudrillard's simulation theory, signifier and signified collapse into the
bar itself.

instead hopelessly indeterminate. Reality itself becomes
problematic. Although this may sound like standard
postmodernist fare, Baudrillard's "indeterminacy," unlike that
of his contemporaries, represents the endgame of
poststructuralism. For whereas Saussure showed the sign to be
arbitrary, having no positive value outside of a system of
differences, and Derrida and Barthes metaphorically "liberated"
the signifier to allow its "freeplay," Baudrillard takes this
logic to its cybernetic limit, stating not only that signs have
ceased to refer *to* the real, but that these signs now substitute
themselves *for* the real. The real can no longer be experienced,
proclaims Baudrillard, but one experiences instead a hyperreal
consisting of signs of the real. Reference and representation
are extinct—all signs and images are but simulacra, capable only
of *simulating* exchange with the real.

Although transcendental signification or reference may
always already have been impossible using sign systems, notes
Baudrillard, the era of simulation is inaugurated not only "by a
liquidation of all referentials," but by "their artificial
resurrection in the systems of signs" (<u>Simulacra and Simulation</u>
2). These signs of the real, reproduced according to models or
codes, and reproducible *ad infinitum* from same, make
indeterminacy the only possibility as these models or codes
become the principal determinants of thought, behavior,
production, labor, and so on.

Hence "implosion": signs of the real and codes for their
proliferation and/or interaction constitute a new (hyper)real
while reality, meaning, knowledge—all things dependent upon
"determinate equivalence"—decay as images or signs of their
preservation re-circulate endlessly through various forms of
media, entertainment, etc., where they are consumed and

reinscribed as models of thought and behavior (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 7, Kellner 83).

The result is "the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself"—the illusion that the real has not been reproduced from "memory banks" or "models of control," (i.e., codes) but that there remains a sovereign difference between the real and the imaginary (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 23, 2-3).

To understand the significance of Baudrillard's arguments, and to appreciate what they afford for literary as well as cultural criticism, consider the following:

In his book Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Fredric Jameson characterizes the preoccupations of modernist and postmodernist thought, stating that the moderns "thought compulsively about the New and tried to watch its coming into being," while "the postmodern looks for breaks . . . for shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and of the way they change" (Jameson ix). Likewise, Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition questions whether postmodernism is the continuation or the negation of the modernist project—whether postmodernism marks the ultimate triumph or the ultimate failure of modernism. Both Jameson and Lyotard, like many postmodern critics, are particularly unsettled by the invisibility of the modernity/postmodernity intersection—by the fact that the very history of ideas is "out of joint" at this particular junction of articulation (Derrida xx-xxi). Each recognizes, in other words, that an epistemic break exists between modernity and postmodernity.

What can we learn about this epistemic break if one voice before it harmonizes with another voice after it? What can we learn by historicizing reflexively? We have already established that Baudrillard is the one looking back, and offering an explanation for what he sees. This paper examines what happens

when Faulkner is placed into Baudrillard's history as the one looking forward.

Like Baudrillard, in <u>If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem</u>, Faulkner is also preoccupied with reproduction—with the effects of reproduction upon the sign, and with the sign's effect upon the subject. Accordingly, Faulkner dramatizes many of the processes described by Marx and by Benjamin, eventually prefiguring the very revision of Marx and Benjamin put to paper by Baudrillard. Faulkner—like Baudrillard—organizes the evolution of the sign around reproduction. But Faulkner can only speculate about or forecast the effects of sign-saturation that Baudrillard looks back upon and calls "postmodernity"—Faulkner is the one who "looks forward." Baudrillard confirms Faulkner's suspicions. Or Baudrillard is Faulkner's "I told you so." Faulkner even dramatizes the implosion of the social in the masses by presenting one of <u>Jerusalem</u>'s narratives from the point of view of one such reproduced subject: Harry Wilbourne.

"Reproduction" is the dominant theme of Faulkner's novel. Most notably manifested in the form of sexual reproduction (pregnancy is the very hinge upon which both of the novel's narratives turn), Faulkner's use of reproduction mirrors that of Baudrillard as Baudrillard writes his evolutionary history of the simulacrum. Each describes many manifestations or instantiations of reproduction. Meanwhile, each thinker is working towards an explanation of reproduction and its effects upon the subject. Furthermore, each is trying to show an evolutionary process. Faulkner, however, must play the soothsayer to Baudrillard's archeologist. That is, while Faulkner can only speculate on the effect of emergent technologies upon the subject, Baudrillard makes visible a buried past.

Posing Baudrillard and Faulkner against one another, this paper winds up being as much about Baudrillard as about Faulkner. This paper is less about using Baudrillard to read Faulkner and/or Faulkner to read Baudrillard, but about their reflexion across the break separating modernity from postmodernity.

<u>Point of Departure</u>

At the level of the plot, "The Wild Palms" is a simple, perhaps even kitchy story. It is the tale of the hopeless and hapless hospital intern Harry Wilbourne and his love affair with the artist, wife, and mother Charlotte Rittenmeyer. From the moment of their first meeting, Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer are engaged in a process of sorting what is imaginary from what is real—a process which, at first, is not only possible, but crucial to the development of their burgeoning relationship. Because this will cease to be the case as the story progresses, the earliest chapter of "The Wild Palms" serves as both a point of departure and a basis of comparison for the rest of the narrative.

The story begins on the evening of Harry's twenty-seventh birthday, during which Harry, under pressure from his roommate and fellow hospital intern, Flint, attends a party at a painter's studio in New Orleans' Vieux Carre. Arriving at the party "in a borrowed costume such as he had never worn before," Harry stands mesmerized before the host's paintings, the likes of which he has seen only in "photographs and reproductions," until Charlotte appears beside him (Faulkner 31, 33). Charlotte, who arrived with her husband, Francis Rittenmeyer, and who goes by the nickname "Charley," tells Harry not only that she is a painter, but that she's a better one than Crowe, the party's host (Faulkner 34).

From the story's onset, boundaries between what is real and what is imaginary are clearly drawn, and any uncertainty or indeterminacy is quickly resolved by way of its assignation to either pole of the binary opposition. The descriptions above reinforce this: For the first twenty-seven years of his life, Harry looked at magazine reproductions of paintings "completely without curiosity because it was completely without belief, as a yokel might look at a drawing of a dinosaur" (Faulkner 33). But now, face to face with original works of art, "the yokel was looking at the monster itself and Wilbourne stood before the paintings in complete absorption" (Faulkner 33). Likewise, soon after meeting Charlotte, Harry is compelled to reveal that he borrowed the tuxedo he's wearing and that he's never worn one before; an admission which she reciprocates by telling him, "'I lied to you. I don't paint. I work with clay, and some in brass, and once with a piece of stone, with a chisel and maul'" (Faulkner 35).

In "The Precession of Simulacra," Baudrillard states that the very possibility of staging illusion is dependent upon the polarization of the real and the imaginary (Simulacra and Simulation 19). In the earliest chapter of the narrative this polarity is clearly intact, because pretending is still possible for Harry and Charlotte, as is ceasing a charade once it is exhausted or it proves to be ineffective. An example of this is Harry's and Charlotte's abortive attempt to consummate their affair in a cheap New Orleans hotel. Here, as with his "costume," Harry takes to pretending, entering the hotel with a suitcase containing two bricks wrapped in a towel and signing "two fictitious names" on the hotel register (Faulkner 39). Once in their room, however, the act breaks down as Charlotte says, "'Not like this, Harry. Not back alleys. I've always said that: that no matter what happened to me, whatever I did,

anything anything but not back alleys'" (Faulkner 40).
Charlotte's elaboration, however, reveals that the situation is
unsuitable precisely because it is not "real," reality being
conflated with tangibility:

> 'I told you how I wanted to make things, take the fine
> hard clean brass or stone and cut it, no matter how
> hard, how long it took, cut it into something fine,
> that you could be proud to show, that you could touch,
> hold, see the behind side of it and feel the fine
> solid weight so when you dropped it it wouldn't be the
> thing that broke it would be the foot it dropped on
> except it's the heart that breaks and not foot, if I
> have a heart. But Jesus, Harry, how I have bitched it
> for you.' (Faulkner 41)

Charlotte lets it be known that although her relationship with
her husband may be as cold as the hearth in their apartment at
least it is as "real," evidenced by Charlotte's equation of
tangibility with reality (McHaney 65). What Charlotte wants is
to take her affair with Harry out of the realm of the imaginary
and make it real, since meeting Harry has confirmed what she has
"'read in books but . . . never . . . actually believed: that
love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love
is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it
cheap you have cheated yourself'" (Faulkner 41). Ironically, it
is Harry's poverty that prevents Charlotte from committing to
leave her husband and two daughters to be with Harry.

    This financial situation is remedied, however, when Harry,
left alone in front of the hotel following Charlotte's
departure, dumps the bricks from his suitcase into a garbage
can, uncovering a discarded wallet containing $1278. At this
time, Harry takes to pretending once more as he walks towards a

post office branch which he knows to be closed in order to "cover his tracks." As he walks, he rehearses his "story":

> *. . . I ought to keep out a dollar for the reward . . . I could even keep out taxi-fare and he should not mind. Not that I want to ride but that I've got to make it last, make everything last so there wont be any gaps between now and six oclock when I can hide behind my white jacket again, draw the old routine up over my head and face like niggers do the quilt when they go to bed.* (Faulkner 44)

Once back at the hospital and "out of character," Harry considers reading a book before cursing, "*That's it. It's all exactly backward. It should be the books, the people in the books inventing and reading about us—the Does and Roes and Wilbournes and Smiths—males and females but without the pricks or cunts*" (Faulkner 44-5). Besides the fact that this exclamation further reinforces the theme of the real/imaginary duality, Harry's execration will later prove to be prophetic. But for the meantime, Harry and Charlotte depart together, with Harry losing his virginity to her in one of the drawing rooms of the New Orleans-to-Chicago train.

(De)Evolution—Phases of the Image

As stated earlier, "The Wild Palms" represents as well as *is representative of* the movement from representation to simulation theorized by Baudrillard. "The Wild Palms" practices what it preaches, critiquing itself as a simulation in the guise of representation.

On the differences between representation and simulation, Baudrillard writes that representation relies upon a distinction between the real and the imaginary that is no longer possible to make, since each been subsumed into the sign. This description

is accompanied by Baudrillard's four "phases of the image,"
which illustrate "[t]he transition from signs that dissimulate
something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing," or
the transition from representation to simulation:

> it is the reflection of a profound reality;
>
> it masks and denatures a profound reality;
>
> it masks the *absence* of a profound reality;
>
> it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is
>
> its own pure simulacrum. [6] (<u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 6)

The correspondence between these phases and the four generations
of sculpture created by Charlotte in Chicago is remarkable. And
because the evolution of these sculptures acts as a metaphor for
the evolution of the narrative, this correspondence is
remarkably important. The "story" of Charlotte's sculptures is
an example of *mise en abyme*—a miniature text within another
text, mirroring the greater work as a whole. Specifically, this
is an example of one particular form of *mise en abyme*—that of
simple duplication.[7]

   Charlotte's first sculptures are clearly representational,
being described as "a collection of little figures—deer and
wolfhounds and horses and men and women, lean epicene
sophisticated and bizarre, with a quality fantastic and
perverse" (Faulkner 74). Charlotte's papier-mâché is not unlike
Baudrillard's stucco, "transubstantiating . . . all nature into
a single substance" (<u>Symbolic Exchange</u> 51). Yet Charlotte's

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[6] These "phases of the image" closely correspond with Baudrillard's "Orders of
Simulacra": the counterfeit, the pure series, and the simulation of the
model. Of the third-order simulacrum, Baudrillard writes, "In this case it
is a matter of a reversal of origin and end, since all forms change from the
moment that they are no longer mechanically reproduced, but *conceived
according to their very reproducibility*, their diffraction from a generative
core called a 'model'. We are dealing with third-order simulacra here.
There is no more counterfeiting of an original, as there was in the first
order, and no more pure series as there were in the second; there are models
from which all forms proceed according to modulated differences" (<u>Symbolic
Exchange</u> 56).

second set of figurines, designed and destined for department
store windows, symbolizes a step away from representation.
Charlotte describes these figurines as "'historical figures
about Chicago. . . . Mrs O'Leary with Nero's face and the cow
with a ukelele, Kit Carson with legs like Nijinsky and no face,
just two eyes and a shelf of forehead to shade them with,'" as
well as "'buffalo cows with the heads and flanks of Arabian
mares'" (Faulkner 74). This set of figurines exemplifies the
initial rift between the real and the imaginary—the transition
from the first to the second order of simulacra, whereby the
image is still assumed to refer to the real, but incompletely,
denaturing reality in the process.

    As she fills this order, it becomes clear that the market
has begun to dictate what Charlotte produces. Her figurines
become disfigured by commodification, and even the act of
sculpting itself becomes a spectacle when Charlotte begins
working "with an audience" (Faulkner 75).

    This movement marks the beginning of what Baudrillard calls
the accumulation of "dead labour over living labour"—an
accumulation which, once at its hegemonic limit, will inaugurate
the third order of simulacra (Symbolic Exchange 56). Analogous
to Marx's description of the simultaneous spectralization of
both product and its producer when products becomes commodities,
(Derrida 147-76), the producer of the second-order simulacrum
becomes a simulacrum along with that which is produced
(Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 55). This common, symbolic
"death" is evoked by Charlotte in "The Wild Palms" when she
eulogizes the completion of her second-generation sculptures,
describing the effigies as "'something created to live only in
the pitch airless dark, like in a bank vault or maybe a poison
swamp,'" and lamenting her own Barthesian "death," stating,

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[7] Simple duplication, writes Lucien Dällenbach, occurs when "a sequence . . .

"'And now I'm not an artist anymore'" (Faulkner 76-7).
Charlotte has become alienated by the commodification of what
she produces.

At the same time, what she produces demonstrates the
widening rift between sign and signified which accompanies the
second-order simulacrum: Mrs. O'Leary, Kit Carson, and Nijinsky
are "real" historical figures, but they are "misrepresented" in
images or signs. Each is better known for his or her folkloric
re-creation in signs—for his or her *re*-production or
"conjuration" (Derrida 50), instead of as a real historical
figure.

The very crux of Baudrillard's project, however (as well as
the principal concern of this study), is the inauguration of the
third order of simulacra, or the transformation "from signs that
dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is
nothing" (<u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 6). Mechanical reproduction
pushes the second-order simulacrum to its limit, notes
Baudrillard, for the producer as well as the referentials of
what is produced disappear completely beneath a canopy of
reproduced, "dead" images. Once these images or signs of the
real become so overabundant that they are taken *for* the real,
the third order of simulacra, or the era of simulation, begins.

Each of these processes manifests itself in the narrative
as Charlotte's third-generation sculptures symbolize the turning
point from second- to third-order simulacra, or from
representation to simulation. Consisting of marionettes to be
photographed "for magazine covers and advertisements," this
generation of sculpture includes "a Quixote with a gaunt mad
dreamy uncoordinated face, a Falstaff with the worn face of a
syphilitic barber and gross with meat . . . Roxane with spit
curls and a wad of gum like the sheet music demonstrator in a

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is connected by similarity to the work that encloses it" (35).

ten cent store," and "Cyrano with the face of a low-comedy Jew in vaudeville" (Faulkner 77-8). With these sculptures, Charlotte anthropomorphizes personages that only ever existed in signs. There never was any "real" Quixote, Falstaff, Roxane, or Cyrano—and yet works such as Charlotte's maintain the illusion that there was. In Baudrillard's terms, Charlotte's third-generation sculptures are third-order simulacra—signs which refer not to the real, but only to other signs in accordance with "the structural law of value" (Symbolic Exchange 1). Moreover, Charlotte's marionettes are *conceived according to their very reproducibility*; designed for the camera which captures their images, and which makes it possible to create an infinite number of reproductions which likewise "dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 5). Thus Charlotte's third-generation figures, like their correlatives in Baudrillard's writings, mark the implosion of the imaginary and the real, of sign and referent, ushering in the hyperreal, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Simulacra and Simulation 1).

Charlotte's final figurine, The Bad Smell, "a little ancient shapeless man with a foolish disorganized face" (Faulkner 81), embodies the image in its final phase: the pure simulacrum. The Bad Smell refers not to other signs, but only to itself as a sign. Charlotte comments upon her last sculpture and its lack of referents, saying, "'That's all it is, just a bad smell. Not a wolf at the door. Wolves are Things. Keen and ruthless. Strong, even if they are cowards. But this is just a bad smell'" (Faulkner 81). Frequent references are made to the tiny figurine, without any mention of its use or its significance—it signifies nothing as evidenced by Charlotte's description of the effigy as a non-entity.

Doctor Doctor

While Charlotte primarily demonstrates the effects of the natural, market, and structural revolutions of value upon the sign, Harry demonstrates the parallel effect of this movement upon labor. As illustrated by Charlotte's sculptures, labor and the signs of its reproduction become coextensive—imploded—once the era of simulation is inaugurated. Harry, by way of his various occupations, illustrates this implosion from the opposing pole—opposing, that is, until the poles collapse into one another.

Whereas Baudrillard's "Precession of Simulacra" informed the discussion of Charlotte's art-turned-hyperreal commodity, another essay, "The End of Production," provides the lens through which to examine the nature of work in "The Wild Palms."

In addition to pronouncing the end of political economy, "The End of Production" proclaims

> The end of labour. The end of production. . . . The
> end of the signifier/signified dialectic which
> facilitates the accumulation of knowledge and meaning,
> the linear syntagma of cumulative discourse. And at
> the same time, the end of the exchange-value/use-value
> dialectic which is the only thing that makes
> accumulation and social production possible. The end
> of the linear dimension of discourse. The end of the
> linear dimension of the commodity. The end of the
> classical era of the sign. The end of the era of
> production. (Baudrillard, <u>Symbolic Exchange</u> 8)

"[L]abour is not a *power*," states Baudrillard, but "has become one *sign* amongst many" (<u>Symbolic Exchange</u> 10). Capitalism is no longer "dominated by . . . money forms, or by reification, but is a pure social relation" in which labor is no longer

productive, but reproductive (Gane 84). That is, labor in Baudrillard's capitalism exists only for its own sake—labor is the articulation of a *code* of production that has absorbed all *modes* of production. What labor reproduces, notes Baudrillard, are the signs of labor itself, making accountable one's investment in a system of socialization[8] which determines, among other things, one's social status. Baudrillard argues that labor and production have either been made superfluous or obsolete by mechanization or have been abolished altogether by capital, with signs themselves becoming commodities. Such is work in the era of simulation: no longer productive, but participatory in a socializing "scenario of production" (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 11).

In "The Wild Palms," Harry Wilbourne moves very rapidly from being *representative* of his father who "had been a doctor before him" (Faulkner 27), to being a *simulator* who is capable only of reproducing the signs of his subsistence. When in medical school, Harry found that the employment opportunities that were available to his father during his medical training have become obsolete by his own time. Harry's father "had been janitor of his dormitory and had also waited on table in commons," but Harry entered medical school only to find that "there was steam heat in the dormitories . . . and the college was served by a cafeteria requiring no waiters. . . . [T]he only way a young man could earn money in school . . . was by carrying a football or stopping the man who did carry it" (Faulkner 27-8). In other words, the jobs held by his father had been displaced by mechanization or otherwise replaced, and as a result, the only available means for Harry to earn money was as a producer of signs in an unproductive spectacle. A football game, after all, produces nothing but signs—it is an event.

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[8] To Baudrillard, to reproduce the signs of labor is to be socialized under

The trend towards simulation continues when Harry and Charlotte relocate from New Orleans to Chicago, where Harry finds a job testing patients for syphilis "in a charity hospital in the negro tenement district," which treats "victims of alcohol or pistol- and knife-wounds" (Faulkner 72-3). Harry describes his occupation as superfluous or redundant, telling Charlotte, "'You dont need a microscope or Wassermann paper. . . . All you need is enough light to tell what race they belong to'" (Faulkner 73). Furthermore, when Harry loses this job, he (re)produces for Charlotte the signs of his continued employment, sitting on a park bench during his former work hours, and returning home at quitting time.

Harry's employment becomes a pure simulation during his and Charlotte's exodus to Utah, where Harry becomes the doctor at a coalmine. While interviewing for the job in Chicago, Callaghan, the mine's boss, tells Harry, "'I dont care two damns in hell how much or how little surgery and pharmacology you know or dont know or how many degrees you might have from where to show it,'" as he reminds Harry that he is not being hired to take care of the mine *workers*, but "'to protect the mine, the company'" (Faulkner 108-9). Upon arriving at the mine, the manager, Buckner, notifies Harry that most of the mine's workers—immigrant laborers—walked off the job sometime after the payroll ended months before. Buckner minces no words as he explains to Harry the reasons for his, as well as his own, employment:

> '[Callaghan's] got to keep his mine looking like it's running and that's what I am supposed to do. So he can keep on selling the stock. That's why you are here—a doctor. . . . [L]aws and regulations for

the guise of production.

running mines . . . say there must be a doctor.'
(Faulkner 159)

At the mine, Harry does not work as a doctor, but works to reproduce the signs *of his own profession*. The mine is a *scenario* of work at which Harry reproduces the codes which dictate how a mine must be run—Harry is present strictly to fulfill a codified requirement by reproducing *signs* of labor. Even Buckner is transformed from a manager of a coal mine into a simulation of one. He becomes, instead, an "accountant" who must simulate the management of employees he no longer has. The model—the code—now dominates: Harry does not practice medicine, but *his profession practices him* as the scenario of work conceals the fact "that the real of work, the real of production, has disappeared" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 26).

The scene/scenario at the mine depicts the end of class conflict that Baudrillard claims accompanies the era of simulation: Though the immigrant workers at Callaghan's mine are undeniably both the products and the victims of capital, Faulkner is clear to show that they are not oppressed *for* their labor power, but *by* labor—by capital, itself. In other words, the mine's success is not dependent upon the production of coal, but upon the sale of stock to investors—an example of what Baudrillard calls the "hegemony of dead labour over living labour" (Symbolic Exchange 15). The departure of several groups of workers from the mine does not affect the mine's profitability, nor does it affect the wages of those who continue to work, for wages are no longer paid for production, but for the reproduction of quantitative *signs* of production. (Or, in the case of Callaghan's mine, the same wage is paid for producing as not—that is, no wages.) "Wages are equivalent to labour power only from the perspective of the quantitative

reproduction of labour power," writes Baudrillard (Symbolic
Exchange 19). A "strike" would be pointless, since it would be
absorbed by a code unaffected by the removal either of labor
power or of its sources. The mine's workers do not violently
sell their labor power, but reproduce their own subjugation.
"Society has to reproduce itself as class society, as class
struggle," states Baudrillard, "it must 'function' at the
Marxian-critical level in order the better to mask the system's
real law and the possibility of its symbolic destruction"
(Symbolic Exchange 31).

Those who remain at the mine labor under the
misapprehension that their coal production determines their
wages. Buckner tells Harry:

> '[the laborers] don't understand dishonesty. . . .
> they think they are making overtime. Doing all the
> work. . . . They wanted to put their women in [the
> mine] too. I understood that after a while and
> stopped it. That's why they dont sleep much. They
> think that when the money comes tomorrow, they'll get
> all of it. They probably think now you brought it and
> that Saturday night they'll all get thousands of
> dollars apiece.' (Faulkner 158-9)

As was the case with Charlotte when she became the producer
of commodified art, Harry, Buckner, and the immigrant laborers
suffer "death" and are "resurrected" in the form of hyperreal
specters. On labor and "death," Baudrillard writes:

> Labour power is instituted on death. A man must die
> to become labour power. He converts his death into a
> wage. But the economic violence capital inflicted on
> him in the equivalence of the wage and labour power is
> nothing next to the symbolic violence inflicted on him
> by his definition as a productive force. Faking this

equivalence is nothing next to the equivalence, *qua*
signs, of wages and death. (<u>Symbolic Exchange</u> 39)

Once the third order of simulacra is inaugurated, the real
becomes—like the stucco counterfeits of the first order—the
product of a single substance in an endless number and variety
of shapes. The *prima materia* of this new real, the hyperreal,
is the sign, itself. In the age of simulation, such signs
maintain "[t]he hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself"
(Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 23).

Charlotte's artistry and Harry's profession are not only
reduced to operational signs of themselves, but they implode
into one another: Charlotte's art is transformed into the labor
of sign reproduction, and Harry's occupation is reduced to the
reproduction of signs of labor. Their differences are only
simulated, and their influence upon one another is vertiginous
as they constitute models for their own reinscription. Each is
but a variant of sign reproduction in an exploitative,
capitalist system.

<u>Into the Nebula</u>

The narrative begins its entropic journey towards
hyperreality with the presentation of two processes which,
examined separately, appear to be but continuations of the
pretensions examined earlier. Taken together, however, these
processes are shown to be interrelated, propelling by way of
their reciprocation the vertiginous unraveling of the imaginary
from the real. Consisting of Charlotte's attempts to turn the
imaginary into reality, and Harry's unbridled inscription of the
unreal into the imaginary, this vicious cycle illustrates the
irreference of images while adumbrating two halves of a circuit
which, once closed, will exist only in spectral form as a code
in the mirror of signification.

Characterized by the aforementioned commodification of Charlotte's art as well as the increasing irreality of Harry's (un)employment with the charity hospital, Harry's and Charlotte's first tenure in Chicago ends when, unable to pay their rent, they disembark for Wisconsin and a lakeside cabin offered to them by the cabin's part-owner, their friend, McCord. With McCord at the wheel and $100 worth of food in the rumble, Harry and Charlotte arrive at what appears to be an idyllic, if not paradisiacal setting for their romantic development where Faulkner's hearth imagery once more sets the tone: Unlike Charlotte's New Orleans home, where a "cold hearth" symbolized her loveless marriage, at the cabin Harry and Charlotte "'can run all northern Wisconsin up [the] chimney'" should they want (Faulkner 88). Rather than fan the proverbial flames, however, Harry and Charlotte, under Charlotte's tutelage, begin a process of substituting the signs of the romantic ideal for its real fulfillment—an entirely ineffectual process from an objective standpoint, but a far from futile endeavor to Charlotte.

As revealed by her sculptures as well as her descriptions of the creative process, Charlotte works to make real that which she has encountered in the imaginary. And Harry's musings about their Chicago apartment reveal that Charlotte's very *raison d'être* is to make real the love whose concept she acquired from books: "*She chose a place not to hold us but to hold love*," thinks Harry; "*she did not just run from one man to another; she did not mean to swap one piece of clay she made a bust with for another*" (Faulkner 72). What Charlotte ends up fabricating in the process, however, resembles her second-generation sculptures as she continues to substitute tangibility for reality—signs of the real for the real—while embracing the second-order simulacra of her own reproducing.

This process and the logic which informs it manifests itself at the cabin, where Charlotte begins a relentless transmittal of the signs of illicit love in an attempt to squelch those of the bourgeois roles from which she is trying to escape. When paid a visit by Bradley, a neighbor from across the lake, Charlotte makes short work of shattering the illusion that she and Harry are married by calling Harry *by his last name* in front of the stranger. And though she does this, she dismisses her own role as saboteur of the image when she says to Harry, "'Why dont you grow up, you damned home-wrecking boy scout? Dont you know yet that we just do not look married thank God, even to brutes?'" (Faulkner 92). She also chides, "'My God, I never in my life saw anybody try as hard to be a husband as you do,'" reasoning, "'If it was just a successful husband and food and a bed I wanted, why the hell do you think I am here instead of back there where I had them?'" (Faulkner 99).

As Janet Carey Eldred has pointed out, Charlotte's motives are informed by her ideas about romantic love, which are, in turn, formed by the romantic tradition. Eldred writes: "Like Tristam and Isolde and Lancelot and Guenevere, Faulkner's lovers defy all, consummating their union only by going against established social, legal, and moral norms. (Love within marriage is, in this tradition, a contradiction in terms)," followed by the assertion that "[Harry's and Charlotte's] defiance surfaces most explicitly in their battles against the pressures of bourgeois marriage and respectability" (147). Eldred does not specify, however, that Charlotte's "battles" against the bourgeois are waged exclusively within systems of signification and are fought solely with *signs* of rebellion. These rebellion-signs continue to be produced by Charlotte when

she personifies herself as Lilith[9] while calling Harry "'Adam'"
(Faulkner 93).

From the reader's perspective, Charlotte's "battles" are
clearly futile, as they are fought with illusory weaponry.
Charlotte, despite her efforts, is shown to be incapable of
(re)creating the Paradise she so desires by pretending, or by
using signs, alone. The romantic ideal she aspires to make real
with Harry—her "Garden"—remains post-lapserian, forbidden to her
no matter how forcefully she wills it to be otherwise. It is
plain to the reader that Harry, despite his malleability, hardly
fits the bill of the romantic hero, preferring instead to absorb
himself in his obsessive-compulsive accounting of the dwindling
food in the cupboard. When he is not so occupied, he is either
being seduced, repeating an uninflected "'yes'" as Charlotte
plays the romantic aggressor, or else he is half-asleep, "merely
existing in a drowsy and foetuslike state" (Faulkner 93, 94).
Increasingly, Harry appears to be but a prop in Charlotte's
passion play, until even he is able to cease fixating long
enough to realize: *There is nothing here that I am needed for.
Not even by her*" (Faulkner 96). Harry recognizes, in other
words, that his principal value to Charlotte is as a co-
reproducer of signs of illicit love. Harry realizes that,
although may not be a romantic hero at all, Charlotte can use
him to reproduce the signs of one.

But however clear the futility of her motives may be to the
reader, Charlotte remains and will continue to remain unaware of
her own role here as a parodic actor and later as a simulator.
Charlotte cannot make nor will she ever make the distinction

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[9] In Jewish folklore, Lilith is described as a beautiful woman from the navel,
up, and burning fire from the navel, down. Charlotte's question, "' . . .
are you going to bed with me just because somebody happened to remind you I
divide at the belly?'" alludes to the folkloric description of Lilith
(Faulkner 93).

between mere emulation using tangible sources of sign production (e.g., Harry), and the real. Charlotte may wish to 'make real,' but all she is capable of doing is reproducing signs as substitutes for absent or nonexistent referents—an affliction which, as we will soon see, diseases Harry in a much more profound way. But what is the cause of this affliction? The earliest clues to finding an answer to this question are found after Harry and Charlotte return to Chicago, where Harry's earlier rumination "*It's all exactly backward. It should be the books, the people in the books inventing and reading about us*" begins to take on new meaning (Faulkner 44).

While Charlotte demonstrates how forms of representation can act as models for thought and behavior, Harry, by way of his pulp fictions, illustrates how models are inscribed into the imaginary where they can then be recirculated *ad absurdum*. Here again, the medium informs the message; Harry's "medium" being the "confession magazines" to which he sells "stories beginning 'I had the body and desires of a woman yet in knowledge and experience of the world I was but a child' or 'If I had only had a mother's love to guard me on that fatal day'" (Faulkner 103). Through Harry's pulp fictions and his ruminations upon them, an elaborate, circuitous network of sign reproduction and dissemination comes into focus. The interrelationships between sign reproduction, meaning, capital, commodification, and the formation of models as social determinants become clear as each appears part of a greater process. This larger cycle or circuit of signification illustrates the ways in which images begin and maintain their "orbital recurrence" (Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 3), which is how the hyperreal is inaugurated as well as maintained.

Whereas initially it was Charlotte who worked on her puppets "in one sustained rush of furious industry" (Faulkner

78), once back in Chicago, it is Harry who works "in one sustained agonizing rush" on his pulp stories (Faulkner 103). They may begin "'At sixteen I was an unwed mother,'" but Harry has no delusions of grandeur regarding what he creates—his stories are "moron's pap" and he knows it (Faulkner 104, 103). What is more important to Harry is that his pulps signify "respectable" employment—a point he makes during his final conversation with McCord when he says,

> 'I was no more ashamed of them that the city employee buying his own bungalow on the installment plan in which his wife can have the best is ashamed of his badge of office, the rubber plunger for unstopping toilets which he carries about with him.' (Faulkner 112)

As Harry recollects his obsession with "respectability," it becomes clear to the reader that the status quo that forms him and against which he measures himself is but a collection of signs.

Harry, lamenting the fact that he "'had turned into a husband,'" (which is to say that he and Charlotte began reproducing the signs of bourgeois marriage), states:

> 'At first I used to have to watch myself, rehearse myself each time so I would be sure to say "my wife" or "Mrs Wilbourne", then I discovered that I had been watching myself for months to keep from saying it; I have even caught myself twice since we came back from the lake thinking "I want my wife to have the best" exactly like the any husband with his Saturday pay envelope and his suburban bungalow full of electric wife-saving gadgets and his table cloth of lawn to sprinkle on Sunday morning that will become his actual

> own provided he is not fired or run down by a car in
> the next ten years . . .' (Faulkner 112)

Reinforcing this connection between conformity to the status quo and reproduction of signs of bourgeois marriage, Harry continues,

> 'All I lacked was official sanction in the form of a
> registered Social Security number as head of a family.
> We lived in an apartment that wasn't bohemian, it
> wasn't even a tabloid love-nest, it wasn't even in
> that part of town but in a neighborhood dedicated by
> both city ordinance and architecture to the second
> year of wedlock among the five thousand a year
> bracket.' (Faulkner 113)

This existence, notes Harry, turns one into a "'doomed worm blind to all passion and dead to all hope'" (Faulkner 112), for bourgeois status quo "respectability" not only transforms modes of production into reproductive scenarios of work, but turns domestic life into its double—its own scenario as well. Harry complains, for example, that he and Charlotte, because they "'were too busy'" being "respectable," no longer made love but reproduced empty signs of lovemaking: "'Just the seminal groaning of box springs; the preprandial prostate relieving of the ten years' married'" (Faulkner 109). "'[W]e had to rent and support a room for two robots to live in,'" laments Harry (Faulkner 109).

It is remarkable, then, that Harry, as he conflates the end of love with the emergence of modern civilization, cites not only the status quo of "respectability" as a contributor to the death of love, but implicates several image-reproducing media as well. Specifically, Harry cites these media as self-regulating social determiners of thought and behavior through which society forms and maintains control over itself. Given this cybernetic

form of Foucauldian circulation, Harry's 'death of love' speech can just as easily be read as a proclamation of the death of the real, announcing "the end of panoptic and perspectival space" (Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 30):

> 'Love . . . . can't last. There is no place for it in
> the world today . . . . We have eliminated it. It
> took us a long time, but man is resourceful and
> limitless in inventing too, and so we have got rid of
> love at last just as we have got rid of Christ. We
> have radio in place of God's voice and instead of
> having to save emotional currency for months and years
> to deserve one chance to spend it all for love we can
> now spread it thin into coppers and titillate
> ourselves at any newsstand, two to the block like
> sticks of chewing gum or chocolate from the automatic
> machines. If Jesus returned today we would have to
> crucify him quick in our own defense, to justify and
> preserve the civilization we have worked and suffered
> and died shrieking and cursing in rage and impotence
> and terror for two thousand years to create and
> perfect in man's own image; if Venus returned she
> would be a soiled man in a subway lavatory with a palm
> full of French post-cards—' (Faulkner 115)

Although Harry identifies only the creation and sale of his pulp fictions as his contribution to the status quo, the preceding discussion illustrates how the *content* of those pulps also contributes to a repository of codified images whose reproduction in the socius constitutes the status quo. Harry's stories are by definition irrepresentative, as they are written from a female perspective and based upon a model established by the confession magazines themselves. Thus we can see how the real is about to get vertigo, for if the status quo is

maintained by the recirculation of images, and if forms of media representation accelerate this recirculation with increasingly large scales of reproduction, then the content of Harry's pulps, once injected into this network, threatens "every real process" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 2). For with the increase in audience size accompanying the move to broadcast and other forms of mass media indicted by Harry's eulogy comes the probability of the massification of society. And because entirely irrepresentative images such as Harry's pulp stories become infinitely reproducible as models or codes, then "a real without origin" becomes quite possible. Individuals like Charlotte are at the receiving end of this process, forming their desires in relation to the sign, and then taking these fantasies for reality. Baudrillard describes this phenomenon as "the implosion of meaning in the media" (Simulacra and Simulation 82).

In the following section of this paper, this implosion will be shown to have already taken place as the closure of the circuit illustrated here ushers in the third order of simulation, in which the real is always already reproduced.

<div align="center">Mirror Mirror</div>

The remainder of "The Wild Palms" illustrates how the massification of society—that is, the transformation of individuals into copies or instantiations of models—has occurred on a huge scale, making commodified media images indistinguishable from reality (Kellner 68). Furthermore, the proliferation of commodified, reproduced objects reinforces the death of the real as signs of the real ascend to become the new (hyper)real. Everything is shown to have "*always already been reproduced*" (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange 73; emphasis in original), *including the narrative itself* as Harry journeys into

the mirror of the real, or the "operational double" of the real: the hyperreal (Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 2).

What I am calling the "mirror" motif works in more than one way: On the one hand, it illustrates the equivalence of the imaginary and the real, and on the other, it shows how the mirror's reflection can become caught in an infinite regress amongst many mirrors—there are copies without originals. The metaphor is true: mirrors can reflect real objects (first order), and an object can be confused with its mirror image (second order). But the mirror image can itself be reflected (third order). The fact that there are doubled characters (if not tripled) shows how it is the *subject* who is reproduced—the hyperreal subject is the reflection of the reflection.

Although Harry may have at first appeared as the supplement of an "original" father, or the heir apparent to the middle-aged doctor (i.e., an original and its reflection), by narrative's end we can see instead that he is but one of *n* subjects reproduced *simultaneously*, all giving form to the same codes at the same time. Harry and Buckner, Charlotte and Buckner's wife, Billie, and even Harry and Charlotte appear more alike than not. Harry, meanwhile, starts "sniffing out" the sources for this culture of copies. We see here that he has located a few, describing them with damning testimonials. What he is unable to do, however, is undo the damage—Harry is still a subject formed in relation to this culture of copies.

In the previous chapter of the narrative, a motif of inversion, reflection, and disjunction accompanied Harry's and Charlotte's return to Chicago. During this time,

> Charlotte's job was in a store which had been one of her first customers for the first figurines she had made. It included window- and showcase-dressing, so that *her day sometimes began when the store closed in*

> *the afternoon and that of the other employees ceased*.
> So Wilbourne and sometimes McCord would wait for her
> in a bar just around the corner, where they would eat
> an early dinner. Then McCord would depart to begin
> his *upside down* day at the newspaper and Charlotte and
> Wilbourne would return to the store, which would now
> take on *a sort of bizarre and infernal inverted*
> *life*—(Faulkner 102; emphasis added)

It is also during this time that Harry and Charlotte appear to
have reversed roles, as if they were interchangeable and
identical. For example, Harry takes over the production of
commodified, reproducible art, as Charlotte steps into the role
vacated by Harry—that of the meaningless, menial job. But as
the narrative approaches its climax, it becomes clear that as
more and more reproduced images, behavioral characteristics,
etc. appear together and even begin to subsume one another in
still more elaborate reproductions or mirror-images that they
are shown not to be reflections of one another, *but reflections*
of the model in the mirror of the real.

The first instantiation of the "mirror motif" occurs not
long after Harry and Charlotte arrive at Callaghan's mine. In
search of the mine's manager, they enter a cabin where "a man
and a woman, sitting identical in woolen shirts and jeans pants
and shoeless woolen socks on either side of a dog-eared pack of
cards laid out for a game of some sort on a plank across a nail
keg, looked up at them in amazement" (Faulkner 153). Buckner
and Billie, the amazed couple, appear to be mirror images of one
another, just as Harry and Charlotte did in the previous
chapter. It soon becomes clear, however, that there is not only
an "axis" between each member of each couple, but between the
couples themselves: "Then one day the thermometer reversed
itself from fourteen below to forty-one below and they moved the

two mattresses together and slept as a unit, the two women in the middle" (Faulkner 162).

This image symbolically illustrates the similarities of the couples that are evident as well as those that are yet to become apparant. We already know that both Charlotte and Billie have masculine nicknames ("Charley" and "Bill"), and that both Buck and Harry have been reduced to simulating their respective professions. But now we discover that Billie has been pregnant for "'About a month'" (Faulkner 151), and is seeking an abortion. The significance becomes plain when, about a month after Harry performs this abortion and the Buckners depart, Charlotte reveals that she, too, has become pregnant and that she, like Billie, also wishes to terminate her pregnancy. Furthermore, Charlotte justifies her choice in the exact same terms as she did when serving as Billie's delegate to Harry: it's "'for love'" (Faulkner 163).

We can see that, besides retaining her tenacious grip upon her romantic ideals, Charlotte has come to equate the code with reality: "'It's not us now,'" states Charlotte, regarding the impact of her pregnancy upon their relationship, "'I want it to be us again, quick, quick'" (Faulkner 177). This code, however, (that of romantic love as it appears in representation), is the very source of Billie's and Charlotte's similarities, just as the code of production is the source of Buck's and Harry's.

In the meantime, Harry, unwilling to perform Charlotte's abortion, attempts to stall until such an operation would prove too risky. During this time, they move to San Antonio, where reproduced objects and images abound and begin to dominate the narrative.

After arriving in San Antonio, Harry enters a brothel hoping to secure "a pill of some sort" to induce abortion

(Faulkner 176). Once inside, Harry is surrounded by reproductions of various kinds:

> Then the door opened, a negro maid conducted him down
> a dim hallway and into a room containing a bare
> *veneered* dining table bearing an *imitation* cut-glass
> punch bowl and scarred by the white rings from damp
> glass-bottoms, a *pianola* slotted for coins, and twelve
> chairs ranged along the four walls in orderly sequence
> like tombstones in a military graveyard, where the
> maid left him to sit and look at a *lithograph* of the
> Saint Bernard dog saving the child from the snow and
> another of President Roosevelt[10], until there entered a
> double-chinned woman of no especial age more than
> forty, with *blondined* hair and a lilac satin gown not
> quite clean. (Faulkner 177; emphasis added)

Harry is surrounded by that which is mechanically reproduced, or by machines which, themselves, reproduce. Reality now appears to consist of reproductions and simulations—the real has undergone a "resurrection in the systems of signs" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 2). Images have become third-order simulacra, dissimulating "the *absence* of a profound reality" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 6).

The big question is this: how is the recirculation of images related to the migration of reality into reproductions? We have seen that the two are related via Harry's magazine stories and Charlotte's romantic ideals. But as Harry gazes out the window on the bus ride to San Antonio, he sees

> the dark fleeing snow-free countryside and the little
> lost towns, the neon, the lunch rooms with broad
> strong Western girls got up out of Hollywood magazines

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[10] This could also be considered an oblique "reproduction" reference in two ways: 1. FDR was the *second* "President Roosevelt, and 2. In 1938, FDR was in his *second* term as President.

> (Hollywood which is no longer in Hollywood, but is
> stippled by a billion feet of burning colored gas
> across the face of the American earth) to resemble
> Joan Crawford . . . (Faulkner 176)

Faulkner's "Hollywood" is no different from Baudrillard's "Disneyland," which "exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that *is* Disneyland" (<u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 12). Baudrillard continues:

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make
> us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los
> Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no
> longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to
> the order of simulation. It is no longer a question
> of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of
> concealing the fact that the real is no longer real,
> and thus of saving the reality principle.
> (Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 12-13)

Put another way, "The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp" (Baudrillard, <u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 13).

Both Faulkner and Baudrillard state that there is no difference between 'inside' and 'outside'; that Hollywood and Disneyland, as the sources of massive sign reproduction/regeneration, have become hyperreal loci of deterrence: the signs "outside" and the signs "inside" recirculate so that each maintains the other—one simulating representation, and the other simulating reality. This is what Baudrillard calls the "end of panoptic and perspectival space" (<u>Simulacra and Simulation</u> 30): Hollywood and Disneyland are not generators of the "current" which flows through the circuit of

signification, but are "circuits" themselves. Each allows the recirculation of signs to maintain its hegemony. To Faulkner as well as to Baudrillard, the maintenance of the artificial boundary which separates (or rather simulates) the "inside" from the "outside" is that which maintains "the reality principle"—as long as there is an artificial distinction being made between "Hollywood" and "not-Hollywood," then the reality principle is intact.

It is clear, through Faulkner's account of the "Western girls got up . . . to resemble Joan Crawford" that the "inside" and the "outside" have collapsed. Hollywood acts first as an agent of massification, homogenizing experience via massive reproduction of the model, and as a result, the real and the imaginary become coextensive. This account is reinforced by the madam's comment to Harry, "'I got American girls here or Spanish (strangers like Spanish girls, once, anyway. It's the influence of the motion pictures, I always say) . . .'" (Faulkner 178).

Following the arrival of Harry and Charlotte in San Antonio, the death of the real is once more heralded by Faulkner's hearth imagery: Whereas a cold hearth in her apartment symbolized Charlotte's loveless marriage, and the fireplace at the cabin symbolized the potential for their love, immediately prior to Harry's botching of the abortion that will end Charlotte's life, the fireplace of their San Antonio apartment is parenthetically described as "a broken grate hanging by one side and stuffed with faded frilled paper which had once been either red or purple" (Faulkner 185). If "home" is where the hearth is, then reality has become quite *unheimlich*.[11]

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[11] Note how Faulkner takes a "classic" literary device and uses it to critique a distinctly contemporary condition: The hearth goes from symbolizing the home (the real), to modern love (imaginary), to the hyperreal.

This chapter has illustrated an implosion at one level, showing how "the reality principle" is kept alive by the mass media as the mass media contributes to the death of the real. The next chapter of this paper will show the effects of that implosion from the point of view of the subject who is constituted in relation to the hyperreal. However, it is of paramount importance to the critique of the novel as well as to this analysis that the particular subject being reproduced is none other than Harry himself. Thus, there will be another implosion, this one occurring in our very own hands, implicating us in the process: this implosion is the implosion of the narrative itself. If Hollywood generates the new real by reproducing itself in the subject, then what does reality look like to this subject? Answer: not unlike a Hollywood motion picture! We have seen the collapse of the "inside" and the "outside" from the resurrected "outside"—we will now see it from the reproduced "inside" and realize that they have collapsed into one another.

<div align="center">Implosion</div>

As was stated in the introduction, Charles Hannon claims that "The Wild Palms" simulates a motion picture, while Pamela Rhodes and Richard Godden describe the narrative as "a pulp novel written over the grave of Charlotte" (98, 99). I assert, however, that a combination of these insights affords the richest analysis: "The Wild Palms" *is* a retrospective of Harry's, but rather than being contained within a pulp novel, it is instead a "fingerprint" of Harry's own memory, simulating the camera eye (the eye of the new real). That is, Harry is looking back upon his life with Charlotte using the mind's eye given to him by an emergent media culture. Harry's perception is formed in relation to various forms of media (radio, pulp novels,

motion pictures, magazines, etc.), each of which contributes to a burgeoning hyperreal. Given what we now know about the recirculation and internalization of codes, Harry provides a means to view hyperreality from the standpoint of the codified subject. The result is collapse: the subject and the object are the same, as are the form and the content. The narrative "implodes"—and thus so does the book within our hands.

Earlier, we examined the (de)evolution of Charlotte's figurines as a simple mirror in the text reflecting the narrative's overall shape. We must now return to the concept of *mise en abyme* to explain another of its forms: the aporetic duplication. Unlike simple duplication which occurs when one text is clearly nestled within another and is characterized by its similarity to the work which contains it, aporetic duplication describes "a sequence that is supposed to enclose the work that encloses it" (Dällenbach 35). "The Wild Palms," we will discover, is not only a work that utilizes aporetic duplication, but is, itself, a part of the reflexion.

Immediately after botching the abortion that eventually ends Charlotte's life, Harry is found indulging in one of what Rhodes and Godden call his "mental home movies" (99). Back in New Orleans, and once more killing time in Audubon Park, Harry watches "against his eyelids" the scene of Charlotte's final farewell to her husband and her children before departing to the Mississippi coast (Faulkner 186). Harry's thoughts and his memories clearly take narrative, cinematic form, and having already made the exclamation that 'Hollywood is no longer in Hollywood,' (that the "inside" and "outside" have collapsed), these "mental movies" are hardly irrelevant to the social critique being made by Faulkner. For if, as we have asserted, there is no difference between "inside" and "outside"—between personal space and media space—then the cinematography of

Harry's mental projections is absolutely critical to the critique of the narrative.

So, when the final chapter of the narrative begins, "With the part of his mind he was not using now he could see it" (Faulkner 237), it becomes clear to us that everything we have read up to this point has been just another retrospective of Harry's—another "mental movie." The form of the narrative informs this, with metaphors for the apparatus of film projection throughout: The bungalow Harry and Charlotte rent from the middle-aged doctor and his wife is obscured by a "*screen* of oleanders" (Faulkner 5; emphasis added). The middle-aged doctor follows the "jerking pencil of light" (Faulkner 11) emitted by his flashlight over to his tenants' bungalow, where he discovers that Harry is both Charlotte's illicit lover and her abortionist as well. This discovery, too, is expressed in cinematic, theatrical metaphors: "the veil was going now, dissolving now, it was about to part now and now he did not want to see what was behind it" (Faulkner 14). After this, everything becomes caught up in movie vision: Charlotte becomes the tragic romantic lover she always imagined herself to be, Harry goes through a trial which is as much of a spectacle as any Hollywood courtroom scene, etc.

Looking back upon the narrative (i.e. Harry's memory), it becomes possible to explain the presence of certain events or devices which seemed out of place earlier: The author of the countless intrusive parenthetical comments which litter the narrative are revealed as Harry's commentary upon his own "film." We also realize that the flat dimensions of Charlotte's character and of the plot as a whole are a result of this cinematic recollection. For instance, Charlotte's *deus ex machina* declaration of love, which occurs before she even knows what name Harry goes by, is as likely to be Harry's

embellishment as not. (Charlotte, during her second meeting with Harry, asks him, "'What to—Do they call you Harry? What to do about it, Harry?'" to which he replies, "'I dont know. I never was in love before'" (Faulkner 37).) We can also see that Harry has learned how to "act" in his own "movie." Take, for example, the fact that he bungles the trip to the brothel, panicking and tripping over his own tongue as he asks the madam for some sort of help terminating Charlotte's pregnancy. After being roughed-up and thrown out by the brothel's bouncers, Harry enters a drugstore where the clerk asks, "'What happened to your face, mister?'" (Faulkner 180). Harry—suddenly less innocent and more sophisticated—replies dryly, "'Fight . . . I knocked up my girl. I want something for it'" (Faulkner 180). This improvement in "acting" does not necessarily reflect a change in behavior, but instead indicates Harry's increasing inability to escape from the visual and textual language of Hollywood. The narrative becomes progressively hyperreal.

The narrative form informs this cinematic content. On more than one occasion, Harry's "gaze" mimics that of the camera eye, possessing the same, rigidly-defined field of view:

> The Kliegs were off, the standards shoved away into a corner and only a single dome light burned, and there was another nurse—he had not remembered four of them—drying her hands at a sink. But she dropped the towel into a bin at that moment and passed him, *that is, walked into then out of his vision*, and was gone. (Faulkner 256; emphasis added)

Charles Hannon observes how Faulkner incorporates "film and photo terminology into the body of his text" (143), including "the visual and audio terminology of film projection" (147). Hannon's analysis of Charlotte's death as the end of a film illustrates this:

As film speed is measured in frames-per-second,
Charlotte's image, as she is wheeled out of the house,
recedes from Harry's view 'by no human agency but by
time perhaps, by some vent-pipe through which the
irrevocable seconds were fleeing, crowding.' Finally,
in the hospital, Harry remarks the bright line of
Klieg lights—a lamp used in taking motion
pictures—circumscribing the doors to the operating
room; his first indication that Charlotte has died
comes when the Kliegs are turned off, yet still there
is the sound of 'a blower, a ventilator, going
somewhere near the ceiling too, invisible or at least
concealed, camouflaged.' When this final reminder of
the apparatus of projection, the fan that cools the
projecting lamp, is switched off, Harry is cast in
terms of one who walks out of a movie house and into
the bright of day. (147-8)

Bringing Hannon's observations into the context of our
discussion, it is not difficult to see how the "outside" and the
"inside" have collapsed. This movement parallels Baudrillard's
description of "the implosion *of the medium and of the real*"
(Simulacra and Simulation 82; emphasis in original). We can see
what Baudrillard means by "the end of panoptic and perspectival
space" (Simulacra and Simulation 30), for how can there be a
panopticon if the center and the periphery are
indistinguishable? Likewise, how can there be perspective if
there is no longer a sovereign subject? One watches oneself
through the medium, and in Harry's case, the medium is the
movie. The medium and the message of the narrative implode; the
form and the content collapse into one another, and thus the
narrative demonstrates the very same collapse as that described
by it.

Faulkner's critique, then, is one with an edge: We can see how the narrative simulates a motion picture in the form of Harry's memory. But if the novel's readers cannot detect this, then they are as bad off as Harry, for they are as blind to representation and its impact upon consciousness as he. Faulkner, after all, took serious issue with the commodification of art, and its demotion to the kitch of the middle class. In fact, he saw his own short stories as well as his own stints as a Hollywood dialogue doctor in much the same way as Harry sees his pulps. These facts have been demonstrated elswhere.[12] In the context of this discussion, however, this observation takes on richer meaning.

We can see that "The Wild Palms" is *mock*-schlock—its commercial flavor, its spectacular nature, etc., are *parodic*. But beyond being a damning critique of popular art, itself, "The Wild Palms" illustrates how the commodification of art also has an impact upon reality as well as upon the subject formed in relation to it. It is clear, in the end, that Faulkner isn't simply upset about the defacing of art by commodification, but instead, he is trying to communicate the unfortunate fact that the damage isn't limited to the medium alone.

So how does Charlotte's fate fit into all of this? Quite simply, Charlotte's death is situated at the very center of Faulkner's critique, for Charlotte's demise is "exhibit A" in Faulkner's case against bourgeois art, massification, and hyperreality.

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[12] See, for example, the discussion of Faulkner's correspondence with Joan Williams in Eldred's "Still Life": "'You are faced with a choice too. I think you have already accepted it: the choice between art and the middle class. . . . You cant be both, and being an artist is going to be hard on you as a member of the human race. You must expect scorn and horror and misunderstanding from the rest of the world who are not cursed with the necessity to make things new and passoinate; no artist escapes it'" (quoted in Eldred 148-9).

We can see from Charlotte's reactions to her own pregnancy that she views her body and its real processes as intrusions into a romantic hyperreality formed by fiction.[13] And for this, both she and Harry must suffer the consequences, for if they do not, Faulkner would proclaim the real to be dead. Faulkner possesses an almost fanatic belief in a fundamental reality—a fundamental truth. If Faulkner is, as Hannon asserts, using If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem to search for "possibilities of emancipation from the various prisons of modernism and late modernist culture" (134), then it is very difficult to explain this harsh treatment of Charlotte. It is for this reason I assert that Faulkner, like the tall convict in "Old Man," balks or retreats when faced with the void of absolute irreference. But whereas the tall convict is imprisoned by freedom from physical constraints, Faulkner cannot deal with a world consisting of signs void of significance. Hence the equation: if Charlotte survives her abortion, the real is dead. If Charlotte survives, then her experience of the real as a mere extension of and intrusion into simulation is a declaration of acceptability—of acquiescence to the death of the real. Charlotte's demise, however, is her martyring. Charlotte dies for what Faulkner sees as the sins of hyperreality. In a way, Faulkner sees Harry's fate as worse: forever divorced from the real, forever limited to the memory of the real.

So Faulkner, although proto-postmodern, recants his postmodern tendencies in the end. To Faulkner, postmodernity and the death of the real occur only when one ignores the real in deference to the indeterminate sign. The death of the real, to Faulkner, is a matter of faith, and Faulkner believes in the real. In the end, Faulkner remains a consummate modernist, even as the world slouches towards postmodernity. In this way, Faulkner is not

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[13] Charlotte says, "'We cant help it. It's not us now. That's why: don't you

unlike the middle-aged doctor, whose initial curiosity turns to abject fear of what is (or rather what *isn't*) behind "the veil" (14). And when everything is said and done, "*Between grief and nothing*," Faulkner, like Harry, "*will take grief*" (273).

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see? I want it to be us again, quick, quick'" (Faulkner 177).

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