

**Wondrous Detritus: Thingness and Alternative Spirituality in
American Modernist Fiction**

by

Kumiko Kobayashi

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in The University of Michigan
2012**

Doctoral Committee:

**Professor Sara B. Blair, Chair
Professor Jonathan E. Freedman
Professor Susan M. Juster
Professor Patricia S. Yaeger**

Acknowledgements

I wrote my dissertation in Tokyo, a city located in the “Far East” (viewed from Ann Arbor)—roughly a 11-hour flight from Detroit. Although this at times slowed the progress of my writing, my dissertation chair Sara Blair’s unfailing commitments to my project made it possible for me to complete the task. Perhaps the most fortunate decision I made my time at Ann Arbor was to take Sara’s course on American Modernism, in the very first term of my graduate school career. Since then, she has continued to empower me and encourage me to take risks.

I’d also like to express sincere gratitude to Patricia Yaeger, who was chair of my preliminary exam committee; Patsy has made countless suggestions to develop my writing and given warm encouragement when I needed most. Jonathan Freedman helped to widen the scope of my project, and I really appreciate his great sense of humor. Susan Juster provided me invaluable supports as a historian, for which I am truly thankful.

Generous funding from the Fulbright Scholarship, the Rackham Graduate School, and the Research Fellowships of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for Young Scientists, allowed me to pursue my research. I would also like to thank You-Sun Crystal Chung and Xiwen Mai for their terrific friendship. I always remember we had a lot of laughter in our tiny GSI office in Tisch Hall.

Lastly, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Shunji and Fukuko Kobayashi, and especially to my mother, Fukuko, who is also an Americanist and who cultivated my interest in American literature.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1	
“Life is . . .”: Nathanael West’s Anti-symbolism in <i>Miss Lonelyhearts</i>	17
Chapter 2	
“Only the Flat Irons”: Counter-monuments in <i>The Sound and the Fury</i>	40
Chapter 3	
Damned Facts: Materiality and the Animation of Facts in <i>An American Tragedy</i>	68
Chapter 4	
Beauty is Trash, Trash Beauty: The Enchanting Heaps in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	92
Coda: A Nameless Religious Experience and Material Things	129
Bibliography.....	136

List of Figures

Figure 1.

The Confederate Monument, Courthouse Square, Oxford, Mississippi, 1907..... 66

Figure 2.

The Monument of W. C. Falkner, Ripley Cemetery, Mississippi, 1889..... 67

Introduction

I would like to begin my dissertation with a canonical passage in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, a passage that fully encapsulates the issue that I want to pursue in the following pages: the felt eclipse among writers of the modernist era—and moderns more broadly—of the transcendental and a recourse to a certain kind of materiality to achieve a renewed sense of belief. On talking with an Italian soldier who claims that “the soil is sacred” (184), Frederic Henry avoids openly taking issue with the soldier's unabashed patriotism, presenting instead the novel's most extensive inner monologue, which revolves around the incorrigible bifurcation of language: one aspect belongs to the abstract and religious, whilst the other is decidedly concrete and prosaic:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (184-185)

The loss of materiality is suggested as the crucial cause of spiritual decay in the modern era. The desperate paucity of meaningful objects—of objects that speak of the possibility

of transcendental experience—has made it impossible to feel a certain kind of spiritual presence. As Loren Glass points out, the passage eloquently provokes a sense of “disenchantment,” a definitively modern disposition most frequently connected with “the lost generation,” of which Hemingway was a champion and a key figure (209).

What is relevant to my argument is that such disenchantment is deeply tied to a certain kind of semantic exploitation endemic to modernity. Henry (a thinly veiled Hemingway) laments that words once used to express transcendental experiences—of the “sacred,” the “glorious,” and “sacrifice”—have undergone a thorough abstraction by their overuse in various forms of mass advertisement, including the ubiquitous instances of jingoistic billposters. The language of the sacred has become corrupted and promiscuous, showing up anytime anywhere, drained of all the meanings that it once possessed. Only proper nouns, Henry says to himself, can maintain their own dignity and so remain truly meaningful. Henry’s disillusionment derives from the elusiveness of meaning caused by the chasm between the abstract and the concrete, the authentically religious and the plainly nonsymbolic. Hemingway thus locates meaningfulness within the robust materiality of proper nouns; their firm embeddedness in quotidian contexts is a potential route to transcendence.

My dissertation explores the type of modernist project that Hemingway evinced in *A Farewell to Arms*. If the conventional notion of religious feeling came to look especially volatile under the sway of modernity, how could spirituality be felt, discovered, and expressed? How to arrest the rapid process of abstraction that caused a semantic stalemate, turning once precious, transcendental objects into mass-produced goods completely tamed by the capitalist imperative to classify every matter into two kinds:

products or waste? All the four novelists I deal with in the subsequent chapters—Nathanael West, William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, and Scott Fitzgerald—were deeply enmeshed in their contemporary consumer culture and acutely felt the waning of spirituality, which they considered most apparent in the futility of organized religion. As Hemingway proposed that spiritual enervation was brought forth by the exploitation of materiality in modern society, these four writers sought to rediscover spirituality by embracing the kind of materiality within certain objects that reject facile signification, such as trash, waste heaps, unclassified newspaper articles, and counter-monuments. By examining how each novelist transformed familiar objects into bearers of the magical, I intend for my argument to contribute to current scholarship of modernist literature, a field whose inclination toward secular issues became especially explicit toward the end of the twentieth century.

While modernist studies in the 1980s and 1990s largely focused on exposing the constructed nature of ranks and social identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, age, etc.), citizenship, and nation-state, critics after 9/11 have begun to show an acute concern for questions that were suppressed or left unasked by proponents of the influential (new-) historicist approach. How were religious discourses interwoven into the aforementioned issues of racial, national, and class boundaries that U. S. modernity scrupulously attempted to police?¹ In looking back over the cultural and academic climate in the late

¹ Pricilla Wald's *Constituting Americans* (1995) is a representative work on citizenship, a category which became increasingly hard to define in the late nineteenth century. Carrie Bramen's *The Uses of Variety* (2000) explores how the process of Americanization operated in turn-of-the-century U. S. culture, in which emergent immigrant cultures coexisted with the dominant culture, forming a kind of cultural pluralism. Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* (1995) also explores the impact of the Immigrant Act on the

twentieth century, Lawrence Buell, writing in 2007, recognized a marked discrepancy between the U. S. public culture that increasingly leaned toward evangelical Christianity and contemporary American literary studies, which “has moved decisively *away* from religiocentric explanations of the dynamics of cultural history” (32, emphasis original).

For instance, Buell contends that in the 1950s Melville studies considered

the question of Melville’s religious orientation—how deeply marked he was by Calvinism, whether or not he was God-defiant to the last, etc—was a burning question. By century’s end, *Moby-Dick*’s whiteness had come to seem more compelling for its racial than for its religious symbolism, its politics much more so than its metaphysics, and the author’s attitudes toward cannibalism and body-piercing more consequential than his religious convictions. (32-33)

Such a secular turn—from the religiously-inflected New Criticism and archetypal/myth criticism of the 1950s to postcolonial studies in the late twentieth century—could certainly be observed in American modernist scholarship as well, within which the materialist approach became most prominent. Critics argued with notable acuity that the definitive change in the cultural landscape of modern U. S. society was brought about by the inundation of mass-produced commodities, which drastically changed people’s perception of objects and their meanings. For instance, Rachel Bowlby’s *Just Looking* (1985) offered an influential reading of the centrality of women in turn-of-the-century consumer culture, in which women simultaneously took on the passive role of “commodified self-display” and the more agential role of “consumer” (11). Itself drawing on Marxist feminist criticism, *Just Looking* can be seen as one of the best examples of the

pluralist politics shown in the texts of the 1920s. Michael Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism* (2000) illustrates marked similarities between New Deal policies and modernist arts.

consumer-commodity theoretical approach, which oftentimes concerns itself with the emergence of consumer culture at the dawn of the twentieth century.

While I am greatly indebted to those Marxist critiques for my understanding of American modernism as a response to structural challenges of American modernity, I am also aware of the conspicuous absence of religion as an object of analysis, a discursive formation, or a cultural context in those studies.² If material objects in capitalist society cannot but become objects for consumption, why did Hemingway contrast advertisement (the visualization of the commodified words of religion) with concrete objects, denouncing the former as producing a semantic deadlock and hailing the latter as the key to a certain kind of transcendental spirituality unavailable to organized Christianity? Because of its exclusive focus on the processes of alienation and reification within the capitalist market economy, Marxist criticism seems to have placed too much emphasis on reified objects devoid of what Hemingway termed the “dignity” that concrete matters inherently possess.

Like Hemingway, the four writers I deal with in the subsequent chapters turned to a certain kind of materiality that figures as an excess beyond capitalist systems of production and consumption, thereby opening the possibility of attributing alternative spirituality to objects. For instance, in the case of Nathanael West’s *Miss Lonelyhearts*, the futility of the columnist’s words of Christian benevolence in the medium of mass newspaper is juxtaposed with the uncanny materiality of words that become “things,”

² Such a secular tendency seems to be widely shared across disciplines. Some art historians offer very useful exposition on the secularization of academia (see Promey). James Elkins also points to a crucial divide between popular religious art and modernist/postmodernist art. Art historians obviously take a more serious interest in the latter type of art, mostly located in museums and rarely in churches.

challenging Miss Lonelyhearts's obsession with the Eucharistic identification with the other.

Recent American literary criticism has begun to pay closer attention to religious issues, a critical trend which the editors of *Early American Literature* in 2010 termed "the 'religious turn' in literary studies" (Stein and Murison 1). Among an impressive array of religious approaches in American literary studies,³ Pericles Lewis's *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (2010) seems closest to my interest. While I agree with Lewis's suggestion that "for the modernists, transcendence generally meant experiences that originated in the ordinary world, not the supernatural, but that opened some sort of insight beyond the realm of the ordinary" (20), my approach to the issue differs from his with respect to its scope, which is mostly European in its selection of texts by such figures as Proust, Kafka, and Durkheim. More importantly, I am interested in probing the reason why American modernist writers specified the concreteness of objects as a site of religious experience no longer available in the Church.

My reading of materiality is much inspired by the fresh view of things posited by the new materialist criticism that began to appear at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2001, *Critical Inquiry* published an award-winning issue titled "Things," guest edited by Bill Brown, who provided an extremely insightful articulation of the ontology of things. As I delineate fully in Chapter 1 of my dissertation, the basic tenet of

³ See for instance, Amy Hungerford in *Postmodern Belief* (2010), which deals with writers after 1960 and their investment in the nonsemantic aspect of language to express faith. Crawford Gribben's *Writing the Rapture* (2009) overlaps with Hungerford's periodical interest, but his is specifically focused on prophecy fiction, which has become especially popular in these few decades. Gregory Jackson's *The Word and Its Witness* (2009) offers an innovative account of realist novels that locates them within the tradition of homiletic literature.

the “thing theory” Brown espouses is that things have a life, or qualities that cannot fully be incorporated in commodity form, which Marxists tend to overlook because they situate materiality itself within the realm of class struggles under the oppressive system of capitalism.

The relevance of thing theory to my argument lies in its moral implications. How should we properly treat things as things? Brown pursues this ethical conundrum by distinguishing *things* from *objects*, defining the latter as those in the service of human beings, and the former as those potentially recalcitrant to our utilitarian treatment: “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us” (“Thing Theory” 4). As a possessor of thingness, a thing reveals its agential potency, exerting the potential for subversive power over a human/matter dichotomy that modernity sought to reinforce through various technologies of classification and distribution. It was a kind of rational management of production which Marxism harshly condemned as the cause of alienation, stripping laborers of their sense of self, turning them, in other words, into subhuman entities.

Thing theory thus probes “otherness as such” via investigation into the thingness of things, and by extension, offers a new way to think about various modes of representation regarding those human agents standing at social peripheries. Throughout the dissertation, I carefully track the ways in which each novelist transforms a given object into a spiritual entity, whose magical power is directed toward the reinvigoration of a character often described as the lowest in social ranks. Significantly, the novels I discuss represent waste, useless, and trash objects as those equipped with a quality of wonder. As Brown notes, the thingness of objects is “temporalized as the before and after

of the object” (5). As an object’s afterlife, extrinsic to commodity form, trash creates a moment of possible magical transcendence, animates reified human beings, and challenges the validity of such socially sanctioned objects as advertisements, public monuments, and scientific data.

With this interest, my dissertation aligns itself with the ongoing discussions about the ontology of things in various historical contexts, ranging from Elaine Freedgood’s investigation of Victorian commodities in *The Ideas in Things* (2006), and Peter Schwenger’s psychoanalytic approach to modernist engagement with objects in *The Tears of Things* (2006), to a collection of essays on the materiality of photographs titled *Photographs Objects Histories* (2004), and Bill Brown’s *A Sense of Things* (2004), a fascinating account of turn-of-the-century American protomodernist renditions of thingness that went in tandem with contemporaneous anthropological discourses of materiality. In dialogue with these readings, what I want to highlight is the hitherto unattended aspect of the interpenetration of materiality and spirituality in American modernist novels, as *A Farewell to Arms* so poignantly expresses in the aforementioned passage. To be sure, thing theory manages to recuperate the potential aspect of things left unenvisioned by commodity culture criticism, but its largely secular standpoint doesn’t really articulate the reason why modernist writers repeatedly showed qualms about the inefficacy of disembodied spirituality, and turned instead to the materiality of objects as embodying an alternative spirituality. The absence of the religious as a category of concern in thing theory seems all the more surprising, given the fact that none other than Bill Brown himself called for a more multifaceted analysis of the current religious conflicts than the one practiced by such Marxist critics as Slavoj Žižek, who contended

that the rise of ultra-fundamentalism in Islamic cultures should be read not as religious proper, but as an economically motivated reaction against global capitalism. Brown criticizes these theorists as “unwilling to grant the religious and theological aspirations of 9/11” (“The Dark Wood” 46-47), but his otherwise very impressive readings of modernism have not yet touched upon the very aspirations that his artists of choice seem to have embraced.

Here again, the aforementioned passage in *A Farewell to Arms* works as a telling example. In it, the narrator connects the holy deaths of soldiers with “the stockyards at Chicago,” suggesting the futility of soldiers’ sacrifices by comparing their dead bodies to heaps of spoiled meat. Hemingway’s reference to the Chicago stockyards may very well stem from his occasional exposure to the sites in his childhood, but more importantly, it recalls Upton Sinclair’s 1906 bestseller *The Jungle*, a novel which shares with Hemingway’s the same kind of seething repugnance for modernity’s relentless mass production as a cause of spiritual decay.

What appeared most devastating in the Chicago stockyards for Sinclair was their seamless processing of meat, in which “everything about the hog except the squeal” was turned into products (42). Unlike soldiers, whose bodies at least can be buried in the ground, every part of the hogs was turned into profitable objects, including their dunghills and spoiled meat, leaving no possibility for the hogs to retain their own “dignity,” to use Hemingway’s phrase. Indeed what makes hogs more like humans than animals is the very element that cannot be made into a product, the squeal: “they were so very human in their protest—and so perfectly within their rights!” (44). Conversely,

factory workers who process the carcasses have lost their voices of protest and become more akin to fragmentary objects, the “cogs in the great packing machine” (96).

A political radical greatly influenced by Marxist theory, Sinclair viewed Packingtown as the perfect locus of the human alienation, which must be superseded by a labor union with a socialist bent. Just as Frederic Henry feels disenchanting by the religious propaganda of a warfare that produced heaps of soldiers’ bodies, *The Jungle*’s main protagonist Jurgis becomes disillusioned by the exploitive mass-production system of the meatpacking factories. What Jurgis discovers as his saving belief is the capacity to raise a protesting voice as a member of a labor union:

Since the time of his disillusionment, Jurgis had sworn to trust no man, except in his own family; but here he discovered that he had brothers in affliction, and allies. Their one chance for life was in union, and so the struggle became a crusade. Jurgis had always been a member of the church, because it was the right thing to be, but the church had never touched him, he left all that for the women. Here, however, was a new religion—one that did touch him, that took hold of every fibre of him; and with all the zeal and fury of a convert he went out as a missionary. (110)⁴

What should be noted is that, even though Jurgis is described here as an incorrigible skeptic of formal religion, he is not incapable of holding any kind of belief or faith. Rather, the passage reveals Jurgis’s moment of re-enchantment through disillusionment, a utopian moment that comes after he has been exposed to a bleak vision of the truths of modernity: a hope for the liberation from the spiritual malaise endemic to modern society.

⁴ Clearly gender functions as a key trope in this passage. As was typical of male naturalist writers, Sinclair wanted to establish male authority in his writings by attributing willpower to his male characters. However, it always ended up in failure, for the manliness featured in Sinclair’s novels (as well as in the works of Norris, London, and Dreiser) is constantly undermined by the presence of forceful, somewhat excessive female characters. For more detail, see Derrick.

By making his character into an evangelical figure of socialism, Sinclair sought to find a viable form of faith that seemed well attuned to the felt experiences of working-class people. To make religion consistent with their sense of actuality was his lifelong project. Born into a highly pious family, Sinclair had taken a missionary role in his adolescence, teaching biblical episodes to the working-class children around him, only to find that those stories “seemed to me futile, not to the point” since they “lacked relationship to the lives of little slum-boys” (*Profits of Religion* 86-87). Evangelical socialism was therefore Sinclair’s way to give ongoing and meaning form to both the religious and sociopolitical aspirations that he had retained from his youth.⁵

Throughout the dissertation, I pay attention to a moment Sinclair evinces in his writings, the moment when the writers in modernity reveal their craving for a certain kind of spirituality that resides in the very materiality of objects, a thingness that rejects facile signification, as it is made extrinsic to the seamless flow of the marketplace. I contend that the writers’ strong investment in alternative spirituality through thingness is a characteristically modernist gesture. As Alex Woloch notes, what defines modernist writers is their move “away from the observed object toward the observing subject, away from exterior description toward inner apprehension” (28). I want to argue further that they were not merely interested in “the observing subject” but in the presence of a certain object *within* the subject, an object that is not wholly incorporated into the subject, but is the otherness within the self, born out of an interaction with the thingness of objects that

⁵ In *Ministers of Reform*, Robert Crunden gives a very insightful account of Sinclair’s lifelong devotion to Christian evangelicalism, a faith he retained even after he openly castigated formal religion.

suddenly emerges within the everyday, seemingly nonreligious context. I suggest that such an interaction is what modernist writers viewed as an authentic religious experience.

Indeed, what motivated William James, whose interest in human consciousness greatly inspired modernist artists, to explore religion was precisely its personal as well as material quality. In *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (1902), James emphasizes the centrality of a material presence within human consciousness, an object that cannot be fully grasped but only be felt as a “something.” James argues that such extrasensory perceptions form the basis of religious experiences:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call “something there,” more deep and more general than any of the special and particular “senses” by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed. (44, emphasis original)

James terms this interstitial phenomenological space “transmarginal consciousness,” which is “some part of the Self unmanifested” (379), and in this borderland mindscape a certain kind of spiritual materiality inhabits.

Modernist writers, I suggest, defined a spiritual experience as a moment of interaction between an uncontainable aspect of objects and the subject’s transmarginal consciousness. In each of the chapters that follows, I focus on how each novelist transforms a particular object into something spiritual by exposing its thingness, and how such unruly materiality resonates with the alterity of the human subject. In my first chapter, I focus on West’s *Miss Lonelyhearts*, paying particular attention to West’s idiosyncratic formulation of similes that resists mass media’s enormous capacity to turn once truly spiritual words into mere clichés. Featuring trashy objects and thing theory

side by side with the Eucharist and other religious symbolism, this chapter serves as a foundation of my dissertation, which traces in varying contexts the transformative process of a given object being turned into something completely unusable for dominant discourse (such as consumerism and populism), but spiritually revelatory for those people unassimilable to formal religion.

The concept of found objects as embodiments of alternative spirituality is central to my second chapter as well. When we think about the tangled relationship of modernity and religion in the early twentieth century U. S., the distinctive culture of the U. S. South emerges as an especially contested field of inquiry. H. L. Mencken, the arbiter of taste in the twenties, famously attributed the cause of the cultural decline in the South to evangelical Christianity, which he considered the perpetuator of superstitious, retrogressive thinking among southerners. In this chapter I take up Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* to explore how Faulkner found a nexus between the highly religious atmosphere of the New South (one in which he was deeply steeped), and the modernist aesthetics whose emphasis on the revolutionary and the transient were directly at odds with his cultural upbringings. My reading of the novel illuminates certain objects hitherto neglected in Faulkner scholarship—namely, monumental objects—as the point of convergence of the two lines of influence on Faulkner as a modernist of the South. The ubiquitous presence of monuments in the novel shows the profound degree to which Faulkner was a part of the culture of the Lost Cause, a culture commemorating the tragedy of Confederate soldiers by erecting countless monuments in the region. I suggest that Faulkner included traditional Confederate monuments to juxtapose them with a peculiar kind of monuments that deviated from the traditional notion of monumentality.

Faulkner, I argue, seems to designate monuments made of discarded objects as a more faithful embodiment of commemoration than ones made of marble and bronze.

Through a reading of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, my third chapter focuses on Dreiser's interest in "facts" as supernatural entities. Against the traditional image of Dreiser as an atheist and proponent of science, my analysis illuminates another side of Dreiser, a devotee of a self-imposed researcher of anomalous phenomena, Charles Fort. Dreiser incorporated in his fiction Fort's emphasis on the anti-theoretical impulse that a certain collection of facts inspires. Critics have long accounted for Dreiser's penchant for facts as proof of his allegiance to literary naturalism, in which facts function as the last instance in describing the social reality of modern life from an objective standpoint. I attempt to unsettle such a secularist reading by delineating the ways in which Dreiser was much influenced by Fort's conception of facts. An idiosyncratic collector of newspaper articles reporting anomalous happenings inexplicable by the normative science of the day, Fort viewed these accounts as embodying a class of objects or events resistant to abstract theory, calling it "a procession of the damned," "a procession of data that Science has excluded." For Fort, newspaper articles were important objects through which he gained access to something magical, something denounced as totally irrelevant by both dogmatic science and formal religion. It is my argument that Dreiser incorporated this magical aspect of Fort's facts in *An American Tragedy*, a novel often viewed as a masterpiece of American naturalism, and sought to describe the hard facts of a Godless reality in a highly secularized society. By exploring the haunting power of the newspaper articles which dominate Clyde Griffith's mind, my analysis probes how Dreiser recontextualized facts from the realm of science into that of the spiritual.

My final chapter focuses on Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* to pursue how the author sought to experience a sense of wonder in the age of disillusionment. Much like the other writers I discuss, Fitzgerald was deeply aware of the difficulty of having a sense of wonder in an urban culture in which formal religion seemed dysfunctional. Previous Fitzgerald studies dealing with religion have focused almost exclusively on his Catholic background, but as his first novel already shows, Fitzgerald was explicitly skeptical of dogmatic Christianity. What he turned to as a medium for exploring spiritual experience was not the traditional objects of Catholic ritual but instead a heap of trash, whose transcendental presence is repeatedly emphasized in *Gatsby*. The novel has often been considered as a uniquely revealing document of the culture of consumption in the twenties, but Fitzgerald seems to encapsulate the most powerfully epiphanic moments within those things outside the circuit of production and consumption, such as a discarded advertisement. Fitzgerald's investment in a sense of wonder through the transformative encounter with discarded objects can be regarded as his attempt to present a more positive view of modernity than the one his predecessors posited.

Collectively, these modernist writers saw spiritual manifestations within the thingness of objects. I suggest that they discerned a complicitous relationship between dogmatic religiosity and consumerism, both of which enervated the expressive power of language and objects. In order to attend to the actuality of the people whose precarious lives were constantly driven to self-effacement, modernists turned toward alternative spirituality via an unraveling materiality of words and things. Theirs is therefore an essentially ethical engagement with representing otherness, a kind of alterity that not only

arises through an interaction between the self and the other, but is always already
inherent to the self and things.

Chapter 1
“Life is . . .”: Nathanael West’s Anti-symbolism in *Miss Lonelyhearts*

In one of the letters written during his engagement with the Hollywood film industry, Nathanael West shows his qualms about projecting his own political beliefs onto his writings: “Is it possible to contrive a right-about face with one’s writing because of a conviction based on a theory? I doubt it” (“A Letter” 794). West’s decision to separate his political concerns from his writings in no way attests to any personal sympathy toward his predecessors’ slogan, “Art for Art’s sake,” but it does betray his acute sense of the political injustice of his times, since West had devoted “a great deal of time” to “a strong progressive movement,” including “the Anti-Nazi league” (794-5).

West could have incorporated his political consciousness in his writing as Steinbeck did in *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel West viewed as an exemplary work which channeled the writer’s political passion into his novelistic endeavor, albeit with the following reservation: “Take the ‘mother’ in Steinbeck’s swell novel—I want to believe in her and yet inside myself I honestly can’t. When not writing a novel—say at a meeting of a committee we have out here to help the migratory worker—I do believe it and try to act on that belief. But at the typewriter by myself I can’t” (795). Steinbeck becomes a reference point in West’s argument, for, while Steinbeck could so easily (or too easily) bridge the two activities (politics and literature) through his creation of “the ‘mother,’” West ended up bringing out his own version of a “motherly” figure named Miss

Lonelyhearts, a young bachelor with a feminine pseudonym who works as an advice columnist.

In some sense, nothing could be further from Steinbeck's representation of the hordes of migrant workers in the vast landscape of California. *Miss Lonelyhearts* chronicles one anonymous journalist's microscopic inner world, which undergoes a drastic change through his correspondence with his subscribers, a situation which he succinctly describes to his girlfriend as follows:

“Let's start from the beginning. A man is hired to give advice to his readers of a newspaper. The job is a circulation stunt and the whole stuff considers it a joke. [. . .] [B]ut after several months at it, the joke begins to escape. He sees that the majority of the letters are profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice, that they are inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering.” (32)

The novel begins at the very moment when Miss Lonelyhearts finds himself facing a severe writing block, desperately seeking a language that can reach all his letter writers. Just like the evangelical he reads about in a newspaper article, the columnist is trying to find a “universal language” that could only be legitimated with biblical authenticity (7).

This yearning for the “universal language,” in fact, is deeply embedded in the cultural context of the 1930s, where various religious symbols were circulated by populist sects to express their alleged sympathy for “the people.” The most important case was that of Father William Coughlin, a Catholic evangelical known as “the Radio Priest,” who, in his weekly radio broadcast, referred to Christ as the symbol of the suffering people in the Depression: “My friends, Christ and Christianity are the only active, unassailable forces which today have compassion on the multitudes. [. . .] He knows what it is to suffer from hunger. [. . .] [T]hrough all the vicissitudes of time his

teachings still endure, still shine even in the darkness of our nights of sorrow” (qtd. in Brinkley 99). Coughlin’s rendering of Christ’s teachings as the light in “our nights of sorrow” clearly resonates with a passage in *Miss Lonelyhearts*’s unfinished draft, in which he symbolizes “faith” as “a clear white flame on a grim dark altar” (1). Despite their common use of Christian symbolism of light and shadow to appeal to their followers, the two evangelical figures show contrasting measures of success: while Miss Lonelyhearts agonizes alone at his desk in front of the unfinished draft, Father Coughlin attracts more than 25,000 listeners in a convention hall and receives thunderous applause (Brinkley 82).

In the light of such religious fervor among those seeking consolation for the injuries of modernity, the success of *The Grapes of Wrath* and the financial failure of *Miss Lonelyhearts* are equally understandable: whereas Steinbeck’s image of archetypal motherhood in the figure of Ma Joad had become, as John Veitch suggests, the “echt symbol” of “populist ideology” (xiii), West took the same motherly attributes—consolation and procreation—and made them utterly inadequate for populist use. Although West’s subject matter was akin to Steinbeck’s in that both tried to capture the sense of ordinary people seeking salvation from a feminine (or feminized) savior, West departed from Steinbeck in his refusal to turn his character into “the symbol,” an abstract image that could fit on the banner of dominant ideologies.

This was West’s challenge: if a search for the “universal language” invariably promotes the mass production of free-floating symbols, how can a message be delivered that at least provisionally resists the full force of the media’s relentless circulation of words, a force that immediately turns specific images into ready-made symbols? To be

sure, West in *Miss Lonelyhearts* included a number of symbols, but he did so mainly to suggest his attitude of anti-symbolism, an attitude that distinguishes symbols from *mere things* which fail to become symbols. This anti-symbolist stance indicates, in my view, West's ethical choice in writing about what had become the central concern of writers during the Depression: the suffering people.⁶

In the following sections, my essay primarily focuses on West's apparently obsessive concern with "things" in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and the ways in which he uses them to show his own emotional investment in the suffering people of his time. In so doing, I elaborate on West's idiosyncratic stylistics, which are usually dealt with under the rubric of surrealism or in relation to the comic-strip form.⁷ By featuring a character who has two contrasting degrees of productivity—one as a writer who fails to write like Christ and the other as a daydreamer with a seemingly inexhaustible imagination—*Miss Lonelyhearts* reveals West's rejection of the particular writing style used to express one's unconditional surrender to a single object—be it God or a political activity—and his attempt to create another kind of style based on things irreducible to any fixed meaning.

* * *

West's provocative treatment of materiality and material objects shown in the novel is most convincingly addressed by the contemporaneous critic Josephine Herbst,

⁶ For the cultural dynamics in the thirties propelled by various social movements, see Denning.

⁷ Critics made various responses to West's commentary on *Miss Lonelyhearts* as "A novel in the form of a comic strip" ("Some Notes on Miss L." 401). The most extensive research on the novel vis-à-vis the comic-strip form is the one demonstrated by Rita Barnard who discerns the affinity between the novel and "the comic-strip ads of the thirties" (192).

who considered “things” as the key to understand the stylistic characteristics of *Miss Lonelyhearts*:

Man’s collaboration with *things*, the paraphernalia of his suffering, is realized in the metaphor where West’s vision takes effect. When a man smiles, his fat cheeks are “bunched like twin rolls of smooth pink toilet paper.” Miss Lonelyhearts proposes marriage “to a party dress.” Mrs. Doyle’s massive hams are like “two enormous grindstones.” [...] The tension between the visible and invisible [. . .] is set up and released by grim humor, outrageous paradox, by the use of an idiom which serves as the “connection” between the world of things and the dream world, between the nightmare and the vaguely aspiring. (14, emphasis original, underlines mine)

Herbst’s comment is useful in thinking about the connection between West’s stylistic experiment and his long-standing thematic investment in what Jay Martin termed “collective mythmaking,” an act of creation constituted by “the dream lives of all kinds and classes of people” during the Depression (170, 172). However, Herbst’s designation of the union of “*things*” and collective fantasy as the working of “the metaphor” appears rhetorically misleading. For, as Herbst’s textual quotes show, what Herbst calls “the metaphor” are mostly similes: two out of three quotes in her analysis use the word “like” as the connecting link between two given objects. Herbst’s otherwise penetrating reading of the collaborative relationship between “*things*” and the human subject thus occurs more in the context of similes, in which “*things*” become as active as human beings.

West’s emphasis on the significance of similes in the novel can be observed not only in the frequency of their appearance (59 times in 58 pages, by my count) but in West’s rather baffling process of revision as well. Parts of *Miss Lonelyhearts* were first published in *Contact*, an avant-garde literary magazine in the thirties with which West himself was involved. Based on his meticulous research on West’s revisions of the novel, Carter

Daniel argues that simplifications of syntax as well as the eliminations of repetition are the principal stylistic strategies for the “laconic precision” of West’s narrative voice (59-60). Although I celebrate with Daniel and many other critics the superbly economical style of *Miss Lonelyhearts* as a whole, one particular passage in the final version quite puzzles me, for it leads the reader to suspect that West deliberately uses a problematic style.

The passage appears in the scene where Miss Lonelyhearts walks around the small park, trying to exercise his imagination to turn a thing into something else. The earlier version expresses this transformative process in a single sentence:

He walked into the shadow of a lamp post that lay on the path like a spear, and like a spear it pierced him through. (“Miss Lonelyhearts” 80)

The final version divides this passage into two sentences:

He walked into the shadow of a lamp-post that lay on the path like a spear. It pierced him like a spear. (*Miss Lonelyhearts* 4)

By eliminating the inversion, the revised passage appears redundant in its repetition of “like a spear.” West thus seems to have made a risky decision to foreground the impact of simile.⁸ More significantly West at this point seems to have shifted his narrative voice

⁸ Another notable passage that (over)emphasizes Miss Lonelyhearts’s heavy reliance on similes as his essential means to perceive surrounding objects appears in the scene in which the columnist meets with one of his subscribers, Mrs. Doyle. On seeing her, Miss Lonelyhearts makes “a quick catalogue” of her physical appearance that is filled with similes: “legs like Indian clubs, breasts like balloons and a brow like a pigeon [. . .] she looked like a police captain” (27).

dangerously close to voices otherwise vastly different, namely, those of the letter writers whose style is invariably awkward, as in: “Gracie is deaf and dumb and biger [sic] than me but not very smart on account of being deaf and dumb” (3). Such a passage clearly exhibits the same kind of awkwardness as the one describing Miss Lonelyhearts’s perception that transforms “a lamp-post” into “a spear.” We should also note that their common redundancy aims at emphasizing something physical, such as “being deaf and dumb” and “a spear.” By presenting Miss Lonelyhearts’s visionary perception of things emphatically through similes, West relates the columnist’s sensitivity to his subscribers’ obsession with bodily matters. In this way, similes not only operate as the definitive formal characteristic of the novel but also connect Miss Lonelyhearts’s vision with that of his subscribers.

In general, then, the narrative voice of *Miss Lonelyhearts* can be closely connected with those of the subscribers’ letters. We must bear in mind, however, that Miss Lonelyhearts himself never lets “things” appear in his responses to the subscribers, since they are not sufficiently consecrated for religious use. Just as West separated his act of believing from that of writing, Miss Lonelyhearts seems to make a clear distinction between the act of imagining and that of writing. In his columns, Miss Lonelyhearts employs religious language even though on the intellectual level he is no less disillusioned by the power of religion than his incorrigibly sardonic colleague, Shrike. In fact, as Thomas Strychacz aptly observes, Shrike and Miss Lonelyhearts “constantly rewrite cultural traditions for a new context, bringing once-authoritative texts (the Bible, Pater’s *The Renaissance*, probably Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*) uselessly to bear on the inarticulate misery embodied in the letters” (174). But we should

simultaneously note the difference in the degree to which each of the two characters commits himself to this cultural rewriting. While Shrike aggressively presents his diatribe against the bourgeois pretension and the high modernists' enshrinement of "Art," thereby turning himself into a mouthpiece of West's own "late modernist" response to his predecessors,⁹ Miss Lonelyhearts seems more ambivalent about deconstructing the cultural tradition established by religion and art.

That Miss Lonelyhearts has an almost ineradicable penchant for religion and art as the foundation of universal order is illustrated by the sequence in which he indulges in a memory from his early teens: a moment when, as he waited with his younger sister for their father, a Baptist minister, to come home from "church," Miss Lonelyhearts began to play "a piece by Mozart," to which his sister danced "gravely and carefully, a simple dance yet formal." From this memory, he pictures an imaginative world filled with dancing children: "Every child, everywhere; in the whole world there was not one child who was not gravely, sweetly dancing" (15). The nostalgic imagination that seizes Miss Lonelyhearts clearly sets up a utopian space in which patriarchal religiosity (father and church) dovetails with art (Mozart and dancing children), starkly contrasting with the current situation in which he must send his religious messages to the unknown masses whose lives always seem to revolve around their destabilized families.

⁹ Shrike's extensive tirade against the modernity's cultural deadlock becomes most fervent when he attacks the bourgeois self-complacency which turns the works of high modernist into rapidly consumed goods. Shrike wryly comments, "The South Seas are played out and there's little use in imitating Gauguin. [...] You fornicate under pictures by Matisse and Picasso, you drink from Renaissance glassware, and often you spend an evening beside the fireplace with Proust and an apple" (33-34).

* * *

In order to give his sincere responses to the subscribers' pleas for a familial love that is unattainable to them, Miss Lonelyhearts decides that he must cultivate a special kind of love that only God could possess. His ideal form of love is modeled on a passage from his own favorite novel *Brothers Karamazov* that narrates Father Zossima's preaching on "Divine Love." In its insistence on all-embracing love, Zossima's teaching resonates with Steinbeck's celebration of motherly love:

"Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. [. . .] And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love." (8)

Zossima's sermon places "Divine Love" as the "highest" because of its all-inclusiveness—since it is love's ultimate form, one should aim at creating "the semblance of Divine Love," becoming, that is to say, one with God.

Miss Lonelyhearts thus features a particular form of religion that emphasizes total submission to a single object. As R. W. B. Lewis aptly notes, religion in *Miss Lonelyhearts* is founded on the concept of "the Eucharist—that holy *communion* after which Miss Lonelyhearts so yearns" (213-4, emphasis original). The basic tenet of the Eucharist is that, by eating the bread and drinking from the cup, the disciples of Christ incorporate Christ's body and blood, thereby becoming united with him even after his death. The Bible describes this sacramental rite that occurs in the Last Supper as follows:

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also

he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. (*King James Bible*, 1 Co. 11.24-5)

In this transubstantiation, metaphors serve as the key trope, for in such statements as “this is my body” and “this is my blood,” they transform *things* (the bread and the cup) into the *symbols* of Christ’s body and blood. And since the Eucharist supposedly enables union with Christ, the very form of metaphors (“X is Y”) rhetorically befits an expression of the fulfillment of the holy communion. That is to say, if the bread *is* Christ’s body, the disciple’s body that consumes the bread *becomes* Christ’s body as well. In Eucharistic form, then, metaphors produce symbols out of objects, urging the human subject to become one with symbol, an act of incorporation which ultimately brings forth union with Christ.

It is through this Eucharistic use of metaphors that Miss Lonelyhearts must write if he is to achieve the communion with his readers he seeks. The novel includes two incomplete drafts of his columns, which share a set of syntaxes and tropes. The first draft goes:

“Life *is* worth while, for it is full of dreams and peace, gentleness and ecstasy, and faith that burns like a clear white flame on a grim dark altar.” (1, emphasis original)

Then the columnist goes on to write the second:

“Life, for most of us, seems a terrible struggle of pain and heartbreak, without hope or joy. Oh, my dear readers, it only seems so. [. . .] See the cloud-flecked sky, the foam-decked sea. . . . Smell the sweet pine and heady privet. . . . Feel of velvet and of satin. . . . As the popular song goes, ‘The best things in life are free.’ Life is . . .”

He could not go on with it[.] (26)

Both drafts show Miss Lonelyhearts's vain attempt to present the definition of "Life" through a religious ecstasy enmeshed in various romantic imageries. As the ellipses in the last passage of the second draft ("Life is . . .") suggests, convention dictates that he present at least two definitions of "Life," but has to give it up. What phrase needs to come after the second "Life is . . ." remains a mystery but we can at least surmise the form the passage might take.

A clue lies in one of Shrike's relentless inveiglings of Miss Lonelyhearts's "Christ Business," in which Shrike parodies Miss Lonelyhearts by giving out two mocking versions of Miss Lonelyhearts's signature phrase: "Life [. . .] is a club where they won't stand for squawk," and, "Life for me is a desert empty of comfort" (34, 35). Shrike's caricatures of Miss Lonelyhearts's punchline make it reasonable for us to assume that the second "Life is . . ." should take the form of metaphor. However, Miss Lonelyhearts, who feels that he must write with the kind of love that is one with God, finds it impossible to adopt the form most suitable, namely, a Eucharistic metaphor that transforms two different items into one symbolic meaning.

As if to compensate for his stagnated writings, Miss Lonelyhearts incessantly envisions a dream world that illustrates the phenomenological conflict between what he *wishes* to perceive and what he *cannot but* perceive. During his regular brooding in the small park, he looks up at the sky for a "target" that would give him a sense of orientation in his murky situation:

He searched the sky for a target. But the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine. (5)

The scene illustrates Miss Lonelyhearts's predicament: while his yearning craves biblical symbols (angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves), what he actually sees are things that lack biblical authenticity (a broken kite and a soiled eraser) and therefore could never enter his column. Indeed, Miss Lonelyhearts, struggling to create metaphors in his abortive writings, tirelessly generates similes: a newspaper "is like" a broken kite, while the sky "look[s] as if" it were soiled paper.

By giving primacy to similes over metaphors in the novel, West seems to overturn the conventional hierarchy of the two tropes. As recent rhetorical research on metaphors and similes indicates, metaphors have long been considered "stronger" than similes. This hierarchal relationship between the two tropes dates back to the age of Aristotle who claimed that "The simile . . . is a metaphor differing only by the addition of a word, therefore it is less pleasant because it is longer" (qtd. in Chiappe and Kennedy 371). This binary is constructed by the tropes' respective literal models: while a metaphoric claim is modeled on a literal claim of category like "this is a banana" (a statement suggesting that the object has *all* the features needed to be a member of the category "banana"), a simile is modeled on such a literal claim about likeness as "this is like a banana" (a statement suggesting that the object only has *some* of those properties of a banana). As a result, metaphors have come to be regarded as "stronger," entailing as they do more properties of similarity (Chiappe and Kennedy 374). In other words, similes are "weaker" because

they denote only partial semblance between two objects; there remains some excess that cannot be subsumed into a single symbolic meaning.

This alleged weakness of similes—the implication of residue—provides West with a productive vehicle for stylistic and thematic challenge in *Miss Lonelyhearts*. As my earlier quotes demonstrate, similes in the novel are generally equated with everyday commodities like “twin rolls of smooth pink toilet paper” and “a broken kite.” To understand the ubiquitous presence of things and similes in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, we should turn our eyes to an ongoing critical inquiry into the status of things, especially as outlined in the theory of Bill Brown.

* * *

In his seminal work on the “thingness” of things, Bill Brown maintains that, even when a thing becomes an object—a phenomenon brought about when a human subject projects him or herself onto a thing—it still possesses something uncontainable within human perception, something that will not function as a mirror of the self. As a result, the “thingness” of things reveals the recalcitrant nature of things, unfathomable in the semantic field; in other words, objects contain a kind of residue that will not surface in the process of meaning-production:

We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution [. . .] has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject[.] (4, emphasis original)

By creating a list of malfunctioning commodities (the broken drill, the engine failure, and the dirty windows), Brown draws our attention to the affective quality of “thingness.” Encountering senseless things, for Brown, is a painful experience, for they frustrate our desire to generate meaning out of everything. The acknowledgement of “thingness” is, if not entirely impossible, no easy task.

Brown’s theory and my argument about *Miss Lonelyhearts* connect precisely at this point. I argue the novel’s focus rests on one’s painful experience of confronting the constitutive otherness that haunts objects, an element which Miss Lonelyhearts cannot eradicate from his consciousness, as the following passage indicates:

Miss Lonelyhearts found himself developing an almost insane sensitiveness to order. Everything had to form a pattern: the shoes under the bed, the ties in the holder, the pencils on the table. [...] On that day all the inanimate things over which he had tried to obtain control took the field against him. When he touched something, it spilled or rolled to the floor. [. . .] He fled to the street, but there chaos was multiple. Brown groups of people hurried past, forming neither stars nor squares. [. . .] No repeated groups of words would fit their rhythm and no scale could give them meaning. (11)

Much like Brown’s figure who suddenly has to face senseless things, Miss Lonelyhearts is compelled to face a united front of “inanimate things” which confound his will to order. Neither the objects in his apartment nor the people on the street can offer the harmonious accompaniment Mozart’s piano piece once did in his childhood. Everything around him turns into an unfathomable substance, infinitely removed from such biblical symbols as “olive-bearing doves” and “wheels within wheels.” If biblical symbols create an instant access to meaning, the otherness of things registers the excess of objects that cannot be fully conceptualized.

Miss Lonelyhearts's unbearable encounter with inarticulatable things reaches a climax when he encounters those unknown subscribers who send him letters filled with "inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering" (32). The affective quality of those people's writings, which William Carlos Williams once described as "unbearable letters" ("Sordid?" 8), shares a significant commonality. Jonathan Veitch argues that the subscribers' unanimous insistence on their own "physically" devastating experiences makes the letters "almost unbearable to read" (74-5). This emotionally jarring effect comes from the subscribers' "inarticulate" cry of physical pain. To be sure, their inarticulateness derives from their lack of vocabulary, but it must also be noted that their foregrounding of bodily experiences overwhelms Miss Lonelyhearts.

So strong is the subscribers' propensity toward bodily matters that even their practice of abstraction turns itself into something physical, as is clearly shown in a letter from a woman with two children deserted by her husband. This lengthy letter, written "in five pages [of] ghastly details" as Stanley Hyman puts it (21), has an uncanny postscript. Following the convention of adopting a symbolic signature, the writer names herself "Broad Shoulders" at the end, adding, "P. S. Dear Miss Lonelyhearts don't think I am broad shouldered but that is the way I feel about life and me I mean" (43). This postscript reveals both her authorial intent and her anxiety concerning the act of symbolization. While her pseudonym is meant to be taken symbolically ("Broad Shoulders" as a metaphor for the burden she carries), she fears that the physicality of the idiom may mislead her reader to take the term as referring to her actual build. Although the pseudonyms are supposedly the only place where the letter writers avoid dwelling on

their material conditions and practice the act of symbolization, Broad Shoulders's hasty postscript unwittingly betrays the letter writers' voracious appetite for bodily matters.

If the writings within the novel always become either purely abstract (Miss Lonelyhearts's columns) or being confined to the realm of the material (the subscribers' letters), and if Miss Lonelyhearts is acutely aware of this discrepancy, then his daydreaming represents his desperate attempt to merge these two contrasting impulses. The most extensively depicted hallucination of Miss Lonelyhearts shows his laborious effort to suture the abstract and the concrete. The dream, described as a tremendous saga, first takes place at "a pawnshop full of fur coats, diamond rings, watches, shotguns, fishing tackle, mandolins." He symbolizes "all these things" as "the paraphernalia of suffering," a recognition which infuses these second-hand objects with intangible emotion, thereby crystallizing the material and the conceptual into a meaningful fusion. He then embarks on a "doomed" battle with "the physical world" in which "the paraphernalia of suffering" challenges his quest for "order":

First he formed a phallus of old watches and rubber boots [. . .] after these a circle, triangle, square, swastika. But nothing proved definitive and he began to make a gigantic cross. When the cross became too large for the pawnshop, he moved it to the shore of the ocean. [. . .] His labors were enormous. He staggered from the last wave line to his work, loaded down with marine refuse—bottles, shells, chunks of cork, fish heads, pieces of net. (31)

Miss Lonelyhearts's effort to combat things by forming patterns with them ends up producing a symbol that is no longer purely abstract but clearly political: i.e. the "swastika." This failure propels him to create an object that always functions as his ultimate abstraction, a religious symbol, and the setting accordingly moves from the

pawnshop to the more symbolic seashore, a place of regeneration and salvation. At the same time, however, the “gigantic cross” found on the beach is not made of intangible concepts like “sin” or “guilt” but discarded objects like “bottles” and “chunks of cork.” Miss Lonelyhearts’s laborious construction of a Christian symbol out of “marine refuse” thus connotes his attempt to assemble senseless things into a meaningful object.

How does this dialectical relationship between meaningful objects and pointless things connect itself to another conflicting coupling of metaphors and similes in the novel? In order to consider these parallel dialectics, we must return to the earlier passage I quoted: “He searched the sky for a target. But the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine” (5). If the clear blue sky (as celestial a space as the blue ocean) is the procreator of such meaningful objects as “angels,” “the gray sky” is the generator of those things that have failed to become symbols: “a soiled eraser,” “a newspaper,” and “a kite with a broken spine.” In other words, while religion can create symbols that actualize the perfect union of the signifier and the referent (e.g. “olive-bearing doves” in a biblical term can mean nothing but a harbinger of peace), those *mere things* can imply the semiotic slippage between the word and the meaning.¹⁰ Moreover, since the novel’s religious discourse is always presented through metaphors—a trope insisting on the absolute union

¹⁰ In his ecocritical reading of the novel, Lee Rozelle views those discarded objects which the columnist finds in the park as “referential litter” that “does not connect” Miss Lonelyhearts “to either place or community” (104). Rozelle thus posits a rather negative reading of the objects as metaphors of Miss Lonelyhearts’s sense of displacement. However, as my analysis suggests, by paralleling discarded objects with biblical symbols, West seems to imply a positive potential in such “referential litter” as *things* irreducible to any fixed meaning.

of two given items—the objects in the religious context complete total metamorphosis into abstract entities. As a result, an object like “olive-bearing doves” in “the sky” gets stripped of materiality and becomes *meaning per se*.

Through its juxtaposition of biblical symbols, the above-cited passage implies that non-consecrated objects like “a kite with a broken spine” retain a certain degree of that which cannot be turned into conceptual meaning. And if those *mere things* are connected through simile, it follows that their connection is *not* rendered as absolute as that expressed through metaphor; the similarity between “a newspaper” and “a kite with a broken spine” is only partial and thus a certain degree of individuality within each, and/or of distinction between the two, is preserved. If symbols and metaphors in the novel strain to achieve a production of meaning—the complete union between the abstract and the concrete—things and similes always defer such holy communion through their insistence on incommensurability and excess, and on those things that cannot be turned into ready-made meanings.

* * *

West’s engagement with discarded objects may be seen to reflect a quintessentially modernist stance toward everyday commodities. As James Light demonstrates, West was indebted to the French surrealists’ modes of image-making (102-6). But while the surrealists designated the realm of the unconscious as the source of new imagery, West seems to consider his act of image-making as highly intense “labor,” as is seen in the way Miss Lonelyhearts’s dreamwork is expressed: “his labors were enormous.” For West, the tethering of two given things should be presented as excruciating “labor,” rather than the product of an aesthetically playful exploration into the unconscious

through automatic writing. Through this laborious effort, West shows his acute awareness of the frustrating aspect of things that suspends access to meaning.

We should note here that when West uses the term “labor,” he does so mainly to show the dialectic between symbolic objects and non-instrumental things. Apart from the columnist, Peter Doyle is the only character whose actions warrant the word “labor.” The character of Doyle, a crippled man who is one of Miss Lonelyhearts’s subscribers, is significant as the embodiment of what cannot be made symbolic. As soon as Miss Lonelyhearts comes across Doyle, the former senses in the latter something uncontainable: “he made many waste motions, like those of a partially destroyed insect” (44). The presence of excess in Doyle is doubly emphasized through a simile as well as his physical gestures that contain “many waste motions.” Furthermore, all parts of his face are depicted as somewhat out of place: “The cripple had a very strange face. His eyes failed to balance; his mouth was not under his nose [. . .]. He looked like one of those composite photographs used by screen magazines in guessing contests” (45). Doyle, in fact, is like a montage of Miss Lonelyhearts’s subscribers: a person suffering from his own physical deformity, malfunctioning marriage, economic distress, and most significantly, material embodiment or “thingness” itself. Doyle’s uncontainable quality becomes most manifest when he starts his labor of speaking:

When the cripple finally labored into speech, Miss Lonelyhearts was unable to understand him. He listened hard for a few minutes and realized that Doyle was making no attempt to be understood. He was giving birth to groups of words that lived inside of him as things, a jumble of the retorts he had meant to make when insulted and the private curses against fate that experience had taught him to swallow. (45-6)

Doyle's attempt to make "things" out of suffering, in a sense, resembles Miss Lonelyhearts's own laboring in his daydream: both try to create a bricolage of things out of the "paraphernalia of suffering." And like the sea—Miss Lonelyhearts's imaginary progenitor of symbols—Doyle is equipped with procreative ability, but unlike the sea, what he "gives birth to" are "words" that have turned into "things." If the sea transforms *things* into *meaningful objects*, Doyle turns *meaningful words* into *things*. And, while Miss Lonelyhearts labors with the "paraphernalia of suffering" to create one symbolic object, "a gigantic cross," Doyle labors to radicalize the senselessness of things by turning words into a "jumble" generated by his own suffering.

Both characters, therefore, are driven by their contrasting impulses: Miss Lonelyhearts wants to turn frustrating things into one meaningful symbol, while Doyle tries to transform his suffering into the bric-a-brac of senseless things. The chasm between the two grows wider as Miss Lonelyhearts becomes possessed by the Eucharistic desire to become one with God. The novel's final chapter, "Miss Lonelyhearts Has a Religious Experience," leads to the columnist's ultimate death through the accidental firing of the gun wrapped with a newspaper Doyle carries in order to revenge himself on Miss Lonelyhearts for sleeping with Mrs. Doyle, who successfully seduced the columnist. Miss Lonelyhearts, now believing that he is almost becoming one with God, is in the very process of the holy communion: "He was conscious of two rhythms that were slowly becoming one. When they became one, his identification with God was complete" (57). For him, Doyle appears as a godsend, a symbolic object in its purest form that helps to complete his conversion experience:

God had sent him so that Miss Lonelyhearts could perform a miracle and be certain of his conversion. It was a sign. He would embrace the cripple and the cripple would be made whole again, even as he, a spiritual cripple, had been made whole. (57)

Immersed in the Eucharistic communion with God, Miss Lonelyhearts can no longer view Doyle as a human subject but only as “a sign,” a religious symbol that allegedly contains God’s will. Miss Lonelyhearts’s wish to become spiritually complete by becoming one with the crippled Doyle is, in a sense, fulfilled by his accidental death, which involves Doyle as well. In respect to this bizarre ending, Marc Ratner emphasizes the significance of the gun that explodes by itself as emblematic of human corruption in the age of the machine:

[G]iven West’s view of the sordidness and futility of human existence, the most logical ending for Miss Lonelyhearts *is* to be destroyed by a cold, mechanical thing. At the end of Miss Lonelyhearts’ “mystic way” lies failure because of the pointlessness of loving in a world that is dead to love. (109, emphasis original)

While I basically agree with Ratner that Miss Lonelyhearts’s death is brought not by the human hand but by *the mere thing*, I do not think that the gun represents the loveless modern world. Rather, the gun problematizes the very concept of Miss Lonelyhearts’s way of loving, the all-embracing love based on the Eucharistic notion of becoming one with God through the metaphoric incorporation of objects. The gun can be seen as the culmination of Doyle’s ability to achieve a reversal of the Eucharist, namely, the power of incorporating suffering and transforming it into a meaningless thing. Doyle’s exploding gun thus reveals the alarming quality of *things*, the “thingness” that insists on a

distance from the human subject by rejecting its designated role as a container of meaning.

* * *

William Carlos Williams offered one of the most enthusiastic appreciations on *Miss Lonelyhearts* when he wrote about the discontinuation of the literary magazine *Contact*, for which he worked as editor in chief. Claiming that “*Contact* has produced N. West. Now it can die” (“A New American Writer” 48), Williams extolled West’s verbal ability to revivify an already clichéd theme: “the terrible moral impoverishment of our youth in the cities.” Williams continued:

But to do that he has discovered that the way to treat this theme is to use the dialect natural to such a condition. Since the newspapers are the principal corruptors of all that has value in language, it is with the use of this very journalistic “aspect” and everyday speech that language must be regenerated. (48)

According to Williams, the chief reason for the novel’s aesthetic success is precisely in the way its theme is presented. But I must add that style is not merely the technique here; the search for a writing style that can express feeling is in fact the novel’s central issue. While *Miss Lonelyhearts* draws on the abstracting power of religion, the subscribers are propelled to write about physical matters in everyday contexts. The novel’s ending signals the precedence of *things* over religious symbols, thereby revealing West’s apprehension that the swift and vast circulation of religious symbols through mass media turns once powerful religious language (as suggested by *Miss Lonelyhearts*’s childhood) into clichés, a set of words whose multivalency has become significantly enervated by their mass distribution.

As Williams pointed out, West “regenerated” the dominant verbal discourse of the era with slight but significant alteration. By coupling religious metaphors and symbols with their supposedly weaker versions—similes and everyday commodities—West attempted to redefine the vernacular of the 1930s. The novel strenuously differentiates religious tropes from similes and everyday commodities by suggesting that, while the former aims at the subject’s complete identification with the object, the latter gestures toward maintaining a certain distance between subject and object.

As Bill Brown argues, such a recognition of “thingness” is an essentially frustrating and hence “ethical” act (12). Quoting Adorno’s theoretical account of radical alterity, Brown claims that “accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such” (12). West himself maintained such ethical stance as he grappled with the issue of how to represent “the suffering people.” Rather than becoming one with “the people,” as Steinbeck and many other populists did, West suggested the impossibility of such a metaphoric union by highlighting the constitutive otherness inherent in *things* and *the people*, the otherness that interferes with the subject’s strong drive toward total identification with the object. By so doing, West expressed the almost unbearable pain that arises when one confronts the other.

Chapter 2

“Only the Flat Irons”: Counter-monuments in *The Sound and the Fury*

As a postwar southerner who did not actually experience the Civil War, William Faulkner had only second-hand access to that epic event, forming a certain kind of memory which Marianne Hirsch terms “postmemory,” the experiences of those who grow up “dominated by narratives that preceded their birth” (22). In a 1958 interview, Faulkner revealed how his own childhood memory was intertwined with the memories of the Civil War that aged veterans and female survivors occasionally conveyed via commemorative ceremonies and casual reminiscences:

I was five-six-seven years old around 1904-5-6 and 7, old enough to understand to listen. They [=the veterans] didn't talk so much about that war, I had got that from the maiden spinster aunts which had never surrendered. But I can remember the old men, and they would get out the old shabby grey uniforms and get out the old battle-flag on Decoration, Memorial Day. Yes, I remember any number of them. But it was the aunts, the women, that had never given up. (249)

By being constantly exposed to oral and visual witnessing of the Civil War, Faulkner found himself thoroughly embedded within the culture of the Lost Cause, an ideology prevalent in the New South that elevated Confederate soldiers to the status of self-sacrificing heroes who sought to protect the white paternalism and plantation economy of the antebellum South. As Charles Wilson argues, the Lost Cause movement was essentially a religious phenomenon, “a cult of the dead,” which celebrated the noble deaths of General Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and many nameless soldiers who died for the

holy cause: “Having lost what they considered to be a holy war, Southerners had to face suffering, doubt, guilt, a recognition of what seemed to be evil, and above all death. Through the ritualistic and organizational activities of their civil religion, Southerners tried to overcome their existential worries and to live with their tragic sense of life” (36). The campaign for the Lost Cause was a “civil religion,” a spiritual movement arising out of mass culture and spreading across various denominations, in which people made commemorative rituals into everyday routines, as Faulkner’s aforementioned episode suggests.

The heyday of the Lost Cause movement was around the turn of the twentieth century, coinciding with the formative years of Faulkner’s childhood. The movement was driven by evangelical fervor, aiming at shaping the southerners’ perception of their defeat and constructing a public memory that could help foster a regional pride. Monuments became the key apparatus in this manipulation of their past. Descendants of Confederate soldiers conducted fundraising campaigns to build monuments which became the tangible index of their ancestors’ heroic valor. At unveiling ceremonies, evangelicals utilized religious rhetoric to praise the war dead, as was typically shown in the invocation of a Methodist Bishop D. S. Doggett at the gathering of Confederate veterans in 1875:

Grant that the monument erected on this spot, to the honor of thy servant, may ever stand as a permanent memorial to thy praise, and a perpetual incentive to a high and holy consecration of thy service [. . .]. May it silently and effectually inculcate noble ideas and inspire lofty sentiments in all spectators for all time to come. Above all, may it teach the youth of the land the solemn lesson of thy word, that the foundation of true greatness is fidelity to thee. (Wilson 21)

As perpetual reminders of southern nobility, Confederate monuments were designed to fill the gap between postwar southerners and those who lived in the Old South by turning Confederate soldiers into Christian warriors. As Doggett claims, the monuments give the viewer direct access to divine grace and revelation, since they arouse transcendental feeling without recourse to words. By transforming Confederate monuments into embodiments of Christian benevolence, postwar southerners discovered a usable past in their defeat, a kind of past that came to be embraced by northerners as well. As the nation embarked on international warfare at the Spanish-American War and World War I, the heroic image of Confederate soldiers was favorably remembered by northerners, providing an opportunity for sectional reconciliation (Foster 145-159). Through the use of monuments, the Lost Cause movement established a positive view of the Confederacy, turning into an icon of heroic valor that the subsequent U. S. army would have to pay due respect.

Having lived in the postwar South and through the two major international conflicts that followed the Civil War, Faulkner employed Civil War monuments as important memory-work in his fiction. His interest in the monuments did not lie in depicting them faithfully but in problematizing the notion of monumentality per se. Faulkner's idiosyncrasy as a southern modernist writer can be explored through his peculiar use of monuments, especially in *The Sound and the Fury*. The text treats monuments in ways disruptive of the traditional concept of monumentality, which aims to glorify lost heroes in timeless statues, made of durable materials such as marble and bronze. With its highly fragmented style and complex narrative structure that reject cursory browsing, *The Sound and the Fury* established itself as a modernist novel par

excellence, but it never assumes a high-modernist position that seeks to dissociate itself from mass culture. On the contrary, the ubiquity of monumental objects in the story suggests that the mass-culture movement of the New South was foundational for Faulkner's narrative.

Of all the numerous studies of the novel, surprisingly few have attempted to probe the issue of monuments. In Richard King's *A Southern Renaissance*, monumentality functions as a key concept, but rather than analyzing the material monuments appearing in the narrative, King utilizes monumentality as a purely abstract term suggesting the overbearing shadow cast by the historical power of the ancestors. Cynthia Dobbs explicitly deals with monumentality in *The Sound and the Fury* through a reading of various black bodies in the novel as a kind of memory-work, framed by "certain reified, dehumanizing views" which mythologize black bodies and turn them into an outlet for racist nostalgia (3). Dobbs therefore views monumentality as a potentially debilitating concept for the marginalized, for it renders them as ahistorical embodiments cut off from the painful ramifications of their history.

As we shall see later in the chapter, the negative treatment of monumentality is not at all a gesture distinctive to our time; it was already a dynamic feature of Faulkner's contemporary art scene. The challenge for Faulkner was thus how to position himself both as a postwar southerner and a consummate modernist at the same time, and he seems to place monuments at the nexus of those two contrasting perspectives. While monuments of the Lost Cause were predicated on the vindication of the territorial claims of white planters, the same objects in *The Sound and the Fury* point to a sense of sitelessness, a feeling that resists conventional monumentalization. In other words, the

novel touches upon a certain kind of monumentalization that is directly at odds with the conventional public sculptures that postwar southerners enshrined.

In this chapter, I discuss how the process of monumentalization is at work in *The Sound and the Fury*, with a view to investigating Faulkner's subversive use of monuments. Rather than commemorating the holy deaths of Civil War heroes, the monuments in the novel signify the material traces of non-heroic people whose lives are incessantly driven toward radical self-effacement, including death. First, I discuss Faulkner's upbringing as it led him to conceive a unique kind of monumentality in his fiction. Second, I want to put Faulkner's treatment of monuments in the context of modernist art, in which the idea of monumentality was considered obsolete, a blind craving for the grandiose. By placing *The Sound and the Fury* in these two contexts, I aim to investigate Faulkner's response to the two milieus that he felt closest to—the postwar South and authentic modernist art—as this response shaped the quintessential modernist novel.

* * *

The story begins with a curious history of the Falkner/Faulkner family, which revolved around the (mis)location of monuments; that history led Faulkner to cultivate a keen awareness of both the allure and the problems inherent in the notion of monumentality. Asked to write a brief biography of his own in 1945, he gave a telling account of his great-grandfather, Colonel William Falkner, whom he described as “a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu” (*Selected Letters* 211). This ancestor was so prominent in his home environment, Faulkner goes on to claim, that “the county raised a marble effigy which still stands in Tippah County” (212). As the footnote

attached to this passage points out, Faulkner's account of the history of this marble semblance of his great-grandfather is rather misleading; it was in fact a self-commissioned monument placed within his cemetery plot, a purely private enterprise that had nothing to do with county planning or commemoration (213). Whether Faulkner intentionally revised the monument's history to enhance the nobility of his great-grandfather remains a mystery, but the episode does highlight a particular kind of mindset that engages itself in monument-building. Whether people erect monuments to celebrate the feats of others or their own, they usually do it to vindicate their own interpretation of the past. The two key figures who inspired Faulkner to incorporate monumental objects in his fictional writings, W. C. Falkner and Sallie Murry Falkner, his paternal grandmother, exemplify such monument-building as a form of self-vindication.

As I have noted, Faulkner specified the beginning of the twentieth century as the period when his initial encounter with Civil War memories as a cultural phenomenon took place. This was also a signal moment in the cultural history of the South, one when Confederate monuments began to crowd its landscape. The year 1907 in particular marked a telling event that made a lasting impact on Faulkner's novelistic imagination; it was the year when a Confederate monument was unveiled on the courthouse square of his hometown, Oxford. This monument would become a key landmark in his Yoknapatawpha Saga, most memorably featured in *The Sound and the Fury*.

For Faulkner, this monument carried not only public memories of the war but also ones very intimate for him, namely, the unfailing effort and commitment of his paternal grandmother to erect a monument in the square. As an ex-president of the Albert Sidney Johnston Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Sallie Murry engaged

herself in the conservation of Confederate history (Blotner 96). As Karen Cox argues, the UDC was the driving force of the Lost Cause movement, aiming at the resurrection of “an idyllic Old South” by erecting monuments in local southern towns. The monuments were generic in form, modeled on a white Confederate soldier, and purportedly served to “educate coming generations of white southerners” (1). Eager to build a kind of monument that would commemorate all the soldiers from Lafayette County, Sallie insisted on erecting a monument in the square of the county-seat town rather than placing it within the University of Mississippi campus, as the committee had planned.¹¹ Sallie’s wish was partially fulfilled: although the monument was erected on the university campus, another sculpture honoring common soldiers was placed in front of the courthouse (Figure 1). So when Faulkner, in mapping out the fictional town of Jefferson, decided to relocate the original statue from the university campus to the Jefferson town square, he was clearly carrying out his grandmother’s original wish.

Faulkner’s occasional references to the courthouse monument in his fiction can thus be considered a written form of commemoration of his grandmother. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the death of the Compsons’ grandmother is a focal point of the story, as Faulkner declares in the novel’s introduction:

[I]n *The Sound and the Fury* I had already put perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much: Caddy climbing the pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother’s funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the muddy seat of her drawers. (“Introduction” 227)

¹¹ On Sallie Murry and her campaign for the soldier monument, see Doyle, especially Chapter Ten.

Although this passage is often discussed in the context of Caddy's budding sexuality, what I want to emphasize here is Faulkner's staging of the funeral of the Compsons' grandmother at the center of the plot. Although her nickname "Damuddy" readily recalls Lelia Butler, Faulkner's maternal grandmother—who was actually called Damuddy by her grandson—it is very probable that some aspect of Sallie Murry went into the making of the Compsons' Damuddy, especially her involvement with the Confederate monument.

Sallie's death in 1906 was somewhat untimely, for the unveiling of the courthouse monument took place the following year. When Faulkner specifically referred to the years 1904-7 as his formative period for learning of the Confederacy, he may very well have had in mind Sallie's unyielding commitment to the place on which to erect the monument until the very end of her life. By envisioning Damuddy as a dead figure about to be buried, and by relocating the university monument "in its ordered place"—to quote from the novel's renowned closing remark—Faulkner thus paid tribute to Sallie Murry, whose passion for monuments was a broadly shared sentiment among white southerners.

If Sallie Murry represented postwar southern white women's preoccupation with the manipulation of their past through the monumentalization of their male compatriots in the form of marble figures, the novelist's great-grandfather W. C. Falkner embodied a more direct impulse for self-monumentalization, an option still available for those nineteenth-century southerners who did not live long enough to witness the real demise of the South that began around the century's turn. A legendary figure whose uniformed portrait was hung in the living room of Rowan Oak, Faulkner's house, W. C. Falkner had established himself in such various lines as landowning, creative writing, and the railroad business. But what ultimately defined him was his wartime identity as "Colonel" Falkner.

As an ambitious self-made man and a southern patriarch seemingly free of self-doubt, W. C. Faulkner commissioned a Carrara marble statue of himself and attempted to have it placed in the main square of Ripley, his hometown (Figure 2). The town was reluctant to accede to Faulkner's rather ostentatious plan; the statue ended up being placed in his own plot in the town's cemetery (Williamson 62). This monument is reincarnated as the statue of Colonel John Sartoris in *Flags in the Dust*, the first novel of the Yoknapatawpha series, and Faulkner intimates that it is evocative of the insolent personality of his ancestor: "He stood on a stone pedestal, in his frock coat and bareheaded, one leg slightly advanced and one hand resting lightly on the stone pylon beside him. His head was lifted a little in that gesture of haughty arrogance" (427). This language suggests Faulkner's own act of remembering his great-grandfather, replicating not only the model's physical appearance, but also the will to power crystallized in his deathbed act of self-monumentalization.

Although both W. C. Faulkner and Sallie Murry were involved in monument-building, we can see a signal difference between the two. While W. C. Faulkner wanted to place his marble image on the town's square to honor a personal success that he considered the pride of the entire community, Sallie Murry worked hard to place a Confederate soldier monument on Oxford's town square so as to reconfigure the shameful past of defeat into a symbol of the Lost Cause. The semiotic difference between the two—the former a mimetic embodiment of triumphant success, the latter an iconic transmutation of the once defeated into a self-abnegating hero—captures the conceptual shift in the desire for monumentality that took place at the century's turn. As James Young notes, monuments of the nineteenth century can be characterized as "heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons" that celebrated "national ideals and triumphs" (*Memory's*

Edge 93). W. C. Falkner's act of self-monumentalization exemplifies nineteenth-century optimism concerning monument-building, based upon the assumption that a successful individual should be commemorated as a community's treasure. Such straightforward optimism was no longer available to Sallie Murry: she lived in the Reconstruction South and experienced the significant rehabilitation that ensued after the South's defeat. As Charles Aiken points out, most Confederate monuments were erected between 1900 and 1917, about half a century after the war (124). Such a belated upsurge in the production of Confederate monuments reveals the intense degree of anxiety Southerners suffered and from which they sought to escape, as John Winberry succinctly argues: "At that time, the present and the future held, it seemed, empty promises and the Southern mind retreated into the past and a memorialization of the Southern cause" (116). White southerners' infatuation with the remote past, materialized in monuments for Confederate soldiers, reveals the crucial absence of any spiritual bulwark within their reach. Michael North claims that the cardinal rule for monuments is "that they should make reference to something" (25). Monuments in the New South exhibit a stunning referential anachronism; they highlight the signal loss of an objective correlative for faith among postwar southerners.

The referential obsolescence that figured in the monuments of the Lost Cause movement became an object of harsh attack by modernist artists and critics. Their skepticism could most notably be seen in Lewis Mumford's 1937 essay, tellingly titled "The Death of the Monument." In it, Mumford takes a quintessentially modern standpoint, claiming that contemporary people were "oriented toward life and change" rather than "toward death and fixity" (264). Amidst the cultural atmosphere that gave precedence to

change and progress, the concept of monumentality—what Mumford defined as “the notion of material survival by means of the monument”—went against a modern transient lifestyle that was not unlike the lifestyle of “the nomad” who “travelled light” (264). Hence the incompatibility of monuments and modernity: “The very notion of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument” (264). Modernist art, according to Mumford, should be art that “represents the deeper impulses of our civilization,” which are the impulses for transience and renovation (264). So long as monuments signified permanence and fixity, they never reached the state of modernist art, but merely remained outmoded obelisks whose hackneyed logic had no place in a social milieu that furiously pushed toward innovation and progression.

Similar apprehension was expressed by another modernist art critic, Sigfried Giedion, a Swiss architectural historian who castigated nineteenth-century monuments as embodiments of “pseudo-monumentality”: “There was a helpless undirected and, at the same time, routine use of shapes from bygone periods. They were used indiscriminately everywhere, for any kind of building. Because they had lost their inner significance, they had become devaluated, mere clichés without emotional justification” (550). For modernist artists, monuments appeared as clichés, petrified leftovers from their nineteenth-century predecessors that should be superseded.

Andreas Huyssen describes modernists’ repugnance toward the monumental as “anti-monumental,” suggesting the surprising persistence of this stance; it becomes, he argues, an aesthetic consensus reaching from “the modernisms of the earlier twentieth century all the way to the various postmodernisms of our own time” (195). Huyssen goes

on to list the various reasons why the monumental came under attack from both modernists and postmodernists:

The monumental is aesthetically suspect because it is tied to nineteenth-century bad taste, to kitsch, and to mass culture. It is politically suspect because it is seen as representative of nineteenth-century nationalisms and of twentieth-century totalitarianisms. It is socially suspect because it is the privileged mode of expression of mass movements and mass politics. It is ethically suspect because in its preference for bigness it indulges in the larger-than-human, in the attempt to overwhelm the individual spectator. It is psychoanalytically suspect because it is tied to narcissistic delusions of grandeur and to imaginary wholeness. (195)

What Huyssen seems above all to emphasize in this passage is the embeddedness of monuments within mass culture, especially of the populist kind, which seeks to use monuments to buttress dominant ideologies. Put in this context, the commemorative zeal of the Reconstruction South may appear to epitomize all the negative traits of the monumental that both modernists and postmodernists rejected. As mentioned above, the Lost Cause movement was a certain kind of civil religion, spread widely across various denominations, including Methodist and Baptist, and the Confederate soldier monuments were the very materialization of evangelical fervor through which various evangelicals enshrined the defeat of the Confederacy as the martyrdom of the South. No wonder that H. L. Mencken, in his vehement attack against “the Baptist and Methodist barbarism” which he considered the source of the cultural decay of the postwar South, included a public monument as one of the exemplary figures of “the Sahara of the Bozart”: “In all that gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate there is not a single picture gallery worth going into, [. . .] or a single public monument that is worth looking at, or a single workshop devoted to the making of beautiful things” (158-159). Because of their

association with mass religion, Confederate monuments appeared to Mencken as the sordid embodiments of the superstitious South, whose feigned grandiosity he and contemporary art critics granted no aesthetic value.

With respect to Faulkner, all the available biographical details point to the fact that he was in his apprenticeship one of the many ambitious young writers who tried to master various mannerisms and accrue the knowledge required to become a consummate modernist.¹² He must, then, have been well aware of the inherent problem that the various monuments in his native region posed, namely, postwar white southerners' penchant for concretizing their past in a highly nostalgic and manipulative manner. Responding both to the modernist aesthetic trend toward anti-monumentalism and his own postmemory as it was interwoven with the meaning of the Confederate monuments, Faulkner attempted to carve out, as it were, an alternative kind of monument in his definitively modernist fiction, *The Sound and the Fury*. The following section will look at closely how monuments function in the novel, and how Faulkner's treatment of them sheds light on those things and people whose marginalized positions in the South made them into the most unmonumental.

* * *

Although *The Sound and the Fury* is cluttered with monumental objects that supposedly commemorate lost ones, Faulkner makes clear that the most meaningful monuments for the Compson children utterly lack the luster of those Confederate monuments that dominated the New South. Contrary to the overtly white-supremacist tendency of the Lost Cause movement, Civil War commemoration in *The Sound and the*

¹² On Faulkner's self-fashioning strategies, see Watson, *William Faulkner*.

Fury most prominently emerges in the figure of a black ex-soldier. As Kirk Savage points out, the Civil War soldier monuments built in profusion at the beginning of the twentieth century were always modeled on white soldiers. Since the monuments were intended to arouse national pride rather than immortalize a “brotherhood” of race, erecting a black soldier monument was considered harmful for a nation which sought to repress the newly emergent voices of African Americans (188). In the case of *The Sound and the Fury*, however, the initial afterimage of the Civil War is not a white Confederate soldier monument, but a black veteran costumed in a Union uniform. A tricksterish figure who has a magical talent for discerning southern-born Harvard students, the black man named “Deacon” is explicitly linked to the commemorative act of the Civil War, the Decoration Day parade, in which he participates as a Union veteran. Since the Decoration Day parade is the ritualized form of visiting the gravesites of the Civil War dead and decorating them with flowers, Deacon is closely associated with Civil War monuments. More specifically, he becomes the living monument of a black soldier, as Quentin describes him: “He [=Deacon] hadn’t quite recovered from the parade, for he gave me a salute, a very superior-officerish kind” (97).

Many critics have considered Quentin’s search for Deacon as indicative of a racist nostalgia that seizes him ever so forcefully at the end of his life. For instance, Thadious Davis views Deacon as “a projection of Quentin’s cultural past,” since Deacon’s arresting eyes remind Quentin of those of Roskus, a black caretaker of the Compson family, whose eyes expressed the same sadness as Deacon’s (71). In addition, Davis cogently suggests the likeness of Quentin’s grandfather, “General” Compson, to Deacon as a G. A. R. reenactor whom Quentin compliments as fine-looking as “a general”

(71). Similar as they may appear, however, it is still important to note the fundamental differences between Colonel Falkner and Deacon; after all, Deacon is not a white ex-Confederate but a black ex-Union soldier, and he has never been a landowner, but works as a mere street cleaner.

The occupational difference between the two is crucial in understanding the significance of Deacon's role as a Civil War reenactor, for his main role in the parade is that, as a street cleaner, he has to follow the parade and clean up after the horses. Like the litter of the parade, Deacon's reenactment can be seen as an untoward relic of the past; the image of Deacon giving a military salute at the Decoration Day parade represents a memorial act that can only be momentarily embodied through reenactment, never fully materialized in durable stone. Bound up with the litter of the Decoration parade, framed by the text as the unrecorded image of a black soldier whose commemorative statue has never officially been sanctioned, Deacon represents the antithesis of monumentality. That is, what James Young terms the "counter-monument" (*Texture* 48), challenging the traditional notion of monumentality that postwar southerners embodied.

Deacon's counter-monumental reenactment is connected with the family legacy of the Compsons, a kind of heritage which Mr. Compson tries to bequeath to Quentin, as André Bleikasten succinctly puts it:

Through his father, he is heir to the Southern tradition, to its code of honor with all the aristocratic and puritanical standards it implies. When this pattern of values is passed on, however, it has already lost its authority, the more so in this case as the appointed transmitter of the Southern creed is an inveterate skeptic. (110)

What Mr. Compson passes on to his son is a renewed version of the Old South, the “refined and romanticized” image of the Confederacy envisioned by the Lost Cause movement. But as “an inveterate skeptic,” Mr. Compson refuses to adopt the redemptive theory that the movement proposes, namely, the belief that the Lost Tradition will eventually be recovered by God’s grace. And, whereas in the Lost Cause movement, monuments function as a token of ultimate redemption, what Mr. Compson confers to Quentin in the form of monument is loss itself, as is clearly seen in the way he presents General Compson’s watch to Quentin:

It was Grandfather’s and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father’s. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. (76)

This family heirloom, which once belonged to the Civil War hero, turns into a monument of all dead hope and desire through Mr. Compson’s words, which convey a sense of utter loss. Having turned the watch into a monument, Mr. Compson goes on to assign to it the exact opposite of those attributes associated with normative Confederate monuments. While they usually serve as mnemonic devices for remembering countless soldiers killed in the war, Compson’s watch registers forgetfulness and a momentary retreat from the battle against “time,” the Southern tradition. The watch therefore undoes itself, functioning against its own assigned role as a conveyor of past southern glory.

The watch becomes counter-monumental through Mr. Compson’s worldview, which duly influences his children; it is a sort of in-between vision that can neither be contained

within the self-aggrandizing celebration of the Old South that Colonel Falkner aimed at, nor within the nostalgic recourse to the past in the New South that Sallie Murry so fervently pursued. As a result, Quentin inevitably feels oppressed by the air of monumentality permeating his surroundings, as Bleikasten suggests: “To Quentin the Ancestor is a mute and massive transcendence, crushing him with all his invisible weight, fating him to helpless paralysis” (113). Although Bleikasten quite aptly employs monumental imagery—such as “a mute and massive transcendence”—he does not point to the important fact that such imagery is the very means through which the Compson family members perceive and indicate their own situation. Just as Mr. Compson turns the watch into “a mausoleum,” Quentin frequently utilizes monumental images as he tries to express the discrepancy between actual and ideal images of himself, a gesture which seems to be the novelist’s own projection. James Watson points out the profound extent to which Faulkner’s lack of actual experience in the First World War influenced the novelist’s treatments of military figures in his fiction. Watson suggests that, for Faulkner, “the men of [his] generation who had been in the army and killed men” remained “larger than life” (30). As is well known, Faulkner once made a false claim that he had participated in the Great War, a crucial fabrication which he never retracted throughout his life. According to Watson, this imposture remained such a mental burden for Faulkner that he projected his anguish onto Quentin, a character who never enlists as a soldier and intensely envies Caddy’s ex-lover Dalton Ames, a belligerent drifter who once—as Quentin stresses in his interior monologue—“*had been in the army had killed men*” (Watson 30).

I want to further argue that Faulkner's impulse to monumentalize soldiers is also transposed onto Quentin's peculiar way of associating Ames with sculptural materials:

Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Shirts. I thought all the time they were khaki, army issue khaki, until I saw they were of heavy Chinese silk or finest flannel because they made his face so brown his eyes so blue. Dalton Ames. It just missed gentility. Theatrical fixture. Just papier-mache, then touch. Oh. Asbestos. Not quite bronze. (92)

Quentin's obsessive repetitions of his rival's name modulate into "army issue khaki," suggesting his keen awareness of Dalton's war experience. Quentin then goes on to use sculptural metaphors to downplay Ames's career. Falling short of becoming a soldier monument, Ames, Quentin reckons, is "just papier-mache," "[n]ot quite bronze." Later when Quentin recalls the crucial moment as he tried to warn Ames against approaching Caddy, Quentin returns to the same sculptural metaphor, but in this case he straightforwardly connects Ames to the image of a bronze soldier: "he looked like he was made out of bronze his khaki shirt." The fragmentary style highlights Quentin's trepidation at directly facing Ames, an ex-soldier whose overwhelming presence smothers him to such a degree that Ames appears to him a larger-than-life statue "made out of bronze" armored with his uniform. Just as Faulkner projected colossal images onto the soldiers of both the Civil War and the Great War, Quentin monumentalizes Ames to suggest the latter's affinity to General Compson, a Confederate hero whose afterlife achieves monumentality in a postwar southern imagination that both Quentin and his father share.

Quentin and Mr. Compson's way of monumentalizing veterans can therefore be regarded as a typical gesture of the postwar southern craze for a heroic past, but when

such a monumentalizing impulse is directed toward themselves, they come to conceive a certain kind of counter-monumentality that goes against the nineteenth-century triumphalism that the Lost Cause movement embodied. This imagery figures in the way Quentin envisions his own death. As Quentin carries around “the flat irons” which he plans to use for drowning himself, he constantly imagines what will happen to his body after he jumps into the river:

And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come floating up. (80)

Quentin visualizes the total decomposition of his body as it commingles with the sand. What eventually remains is “only the flat-iron,” not his own body; God resurrects not a human being but a nonhuman, everyday commodity. This image occasionally comes into Quentin’s mind, each time with slight revisions:

That’s where the water would be, healing out to the sea and the peaceful grottoes. Tumbling peacefully they would, and when He said Rise only the flat irons. (112)

When you leave a leaf in water a long time after a while the tissue will be gone and the delicate fibers waving slow as the motion of sleep. [...] And maybe when He says Rise the eyes will come floating up too, out of the deep quiet and the sleep, to look on glory. And after a while the flat irons would come floating up. (116)

Quentin’s body dissolves like “a leaf in water,” a negligible object, the antithesis of the monumental. The visual element of this phantasmagoria is highlighted through Quentin’s

constant references to his own eyes, the disembodied vision witnessing his own body becoming the detritus of the river. But Quentin's eyes do not retain their omniscience, for in his daydream it is "only the flat irons" that ultimately remain. Quentin's obsessive recalling of his previous dialogue with Mr. Compson reveals that these recurrent images of flat irons and his decomposing body originate from his father's worldview, which does not fully subscribe to an anachronistic recourse to the past. Rather, Mr. Compson chooses to countenance the lack of an objective correlative within the New South, the unavailability of the self-reliant optimism that his antebellum predecessors embraced:

Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what would in what side that not for me died not.
(175)

Just as Mr. Compson envisions human beings as dolls made of sawdust, Quentin equates his own body with a leaf and grains of sand. Ultimately, Quentin inherits the penchant for figuration from his father, expressed most powerfully as shared inclination toward monumentalizing their ancestors and counter-monumentalizing themselves.

Quentin contrasts his self-image with that of Ames whom Quentin sees as a monumental bronze soldier. The material which Quentin conceives as appropriate for his own monument sharply differs from the one that he applies to Dalton Ames. If bronze and marble have traditionally functioned as suitable materials for monuments, flat iron is the least appropriate material. But it is precisely flat iron's unabashedly prosaic quality, its stout resistance to the magisterial that Quentin finds most appropriate to himself. Quentin's impulse for self-monumentalization might be the projection of Faulkner's great-

grandfather, but unlike Colonel Falkner who created his semblance of Carrara marble, Quentin chooses an inconspicuous industrial material for his monument, the flat irons whose obvious dullness signifies nothing but the unmonumental. Quentin grafts the antebellum southerners' self-aggrandization into a self-consciously diminishing vision of the postemancipation South, a view originating from Mr. Compson, which turns a human being into a figure made of detritus and dust, not of marble and bronze.

It is this countermonumental impulse that leads Quentin to meet Deacon, the only person with whom he feels eager to communicate. Quentin's final remark to Deacon—"I hope you'll always find as many friends as you've made" (100)—may be seen as a quintessentially white southern gesture of paternalistic condescension, but if we consider the fact that both are deeply tied to the act of commemoration, Quentin's message can be taken as the expression of his sense of allegiance to Deacon. If Quentin's imagining of his own flat-iron monument deviates from the traditional form of commemorative statuary, Deacon's reenactment of the Union soldier at the Decoration Day parade is engaged to an alternative kind of commemorative activity, fully embodying the process of monumentalizing what could not be fixed in stone, namely, the black soldiers of the Civil War. If Quentin counts himself as one of the "dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps"—an aphorism which he recalls at the last moment of his life—Deacon's occupation as a street sweeper who cleans up the litter of the Decoration Day parade complements Quentin's self-monumentalizing project. That is to say, if Quentin's recurrent daydreaming about the afterimage of his suicide is essentially counter-monumental in its anti-heroic, trash-oriented quality, Deacon as a street cleaner seems to be the most appropriate figure to look after Quentin's death, the belated death of a

postwar southerner who fails to be memorialized in marble or bronze. It also envisions an alternative kind of reunion that sharply differs from the actual historical reunion that the Lost Cause movement sought to achieve. Contrary to the reunion envisioned by the public memory of the Civil War shared by the white veterans, Quentin and Deacon engage themselves in a historically unsanctioned reunion between the black Yankee who cannot be monumentalized and the white southerner who fails to participate in the war. Quentin's suicide and Deacon's reenactment can therefore be regarded as challenges to the Civil War commemorative practices rampant in turn-of-the-century southern culture.

* * *

It has often been suggested that a monument is a link between past and present. As Michael North puts it, "the monument is a perfect embodiment of [the] mediation between future and past" (38). Faulkner explores this temporal aspect of monuments by rendering monument-building an intergenerational enterprise, involving both parents and their children. Donald Kartiganer claims that the act of inheritance in Faulkner's fiction is largely a "male, white, 'aristocratic'" engagement, allowing no space for female protagonists to experience such "pressures of inheritance" (*Quentin* 399-400), and his observation seems correct if the pressures of inheritance are limited to the traditions of southern chivalry. But the most important thing Quentin inherits from Mr. Compson is the counter-monumental impulse directed toward self-effacement. The impulse to monumentalize in the most self-diminutive style becomes a kind of a family legacy, and it can be seen in the mother-daughter relationship as well. In the only scene in which Caddy appears in the narrative present (as opposed to in someone's reminiscences), she

makes a desperate plea to Jason, asking him to use her money for her daughter, Miss

Quentin:

“Just promise that she’ll—that she—You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I cant, they wont let [. . .] if sometimes she needs things—If I send checks for her to you, other ones besides those, you’ll give them to her? You wont tell? You’ll see that she has things like other girls?” (209-210)

Caddy sends checks to Jason to equip her daughter with the “little things,” things that make Miss Quentin just like “other girls,” who are untroubled by their familial background. “Little things” may refer to perfume (like the one Caddy wore in her youth), accessories, or some other items meant for young women, and Caddy’s emphasis on their littleness suggests that they do not have to be conspicuous; rather, those objects should be as inconspicuous as possible, so that her daughter, arrayed with “little things,” would look like a typical southern belle with a normal upbringing. Such little things will later become the material trace of Miss Quentin as she elopes with a nameless stranger, taking away all the money Jason hoarded. As Jason and other family members rush into Miss Quentin’s room, what they discover is nothing but the “little things”:

It was not a girl’s room. It was not anybody’s room, and the faint scent of cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation house. [. . .] She [=Mrs. Compson] went to the bureau and began to turn over the scattered objects there—scent bottles, a box of powder, a chewed pencil, a pair of scissors with one broken blade lying upon a darned scarf dusted with powder and stained with rouge. (283-283)

Scattered with little “feminine objects,” Miss Quentin’s deserted room shows the occupant’s desperate attempt to create a room of her own, an attempt which ends up turning “little things” into a series of broken objects, such as “a broken blade” and “a darned scarf.” Associated as they are with the image of death, Miss Quentin’s trashy feminine objects can be seen as a certain kind of monument. Contrary to the traditional funereal monument intended to leave an indelible trace of a particular person, Miss Quentin’s discarded little things become the material emanation of anonymity and transience. Rather than signifying the rootedness of a particular individual in a specific place, they embody a sense of displacement and sitelessness which she inherits from her mother by means of the “little things.”

Just as Quentin’s suicide becomes a certain kind of self-monumentalization that goes utterly against conventional ideas of monumentality, Miss Quentin’s little things embody counter-monumentality, reaching the state of modernist art with the pronounced transience that Mumford designates as the definitive characteristic of modernity. And, just as Quentin puts into practice his father’s teachings by willfully imagining himself in the image of a most unmonumental monument, Miss Quentin fills her room with the sorts of trivial items that her mother presumably wanted her to possess, turning them into her own monument through elopement, the same kind of self-effacing act as Quentin’s suicide.

Both Quentin and Miss Quentin erect counter-monuments made of trash to commemorate their sense of dislodgement, and such a counter-monumental impulse drives the entire section of Benjy’s narrative. Virtually all of his actions are related to some kind of commemorative practice: his habitual errands to the cemetery via the

Confederate soldier monument in the town's square, and his constant craving for Caddy's slippers, for instance. Because of his mental and physical impairment, Benjy has long been considered "an emblem of subhumanity" (Broughton 189), "merely a filter" (Polk 144), and simply a character who "cannot create" (Kartiganer, *Meaning* 329). However, Benjy also engages in monument-building, an explicit act of creation which can be seen in his assiduous maintenance of what Dilsey calls "Benjy's graveyard," which he decorates with jimson weeds. Benjy's graveyard is a most primitive kind of monument, a small mound with two blue bottles in which he puts these flowers. Benjy recycles the discarded bottles and decorates the monument with the most common and readily available flowers, jimson weed. The monument consists entirely of found objects, far removed from the marble Confederate soldier monument that W. C. Falkner built to commemorate his own glory. Benjy's monument is aligned with Quentin's flat irons and Miss Quentin's broken feminine objects, making a triad of counter-monuments which materialize the intergenerational act of self-effacement.

The Sound and the Fury reveals Faulkner's exploration into the possibility of the monument, which he reframes as an object of modernist experimentation. As a postwar southerner brought up during the era of the Lost Cause movement, Faulkner could not but cultivate a keen awareness of the ever-proliferating Confederate soldier monuments to which his grandmother had become devoted. He incorporated his family's passion for monuments into *The Sound and the Fury*, expressing and inverting it through the Compson family's counter-monumental impulse, sharply at odds with the traditional nineteenth-century enshrinement of the past. Unlike marble and bronze monuments which signify permanence and rootedness, the Compson monuments are made up of

discarded objects, signifying transience and displacement. In this way Faulkner developed a radical form of monumentality which aspires to commemorate what is otherwise remembered as unspeakable, unusable as a past.

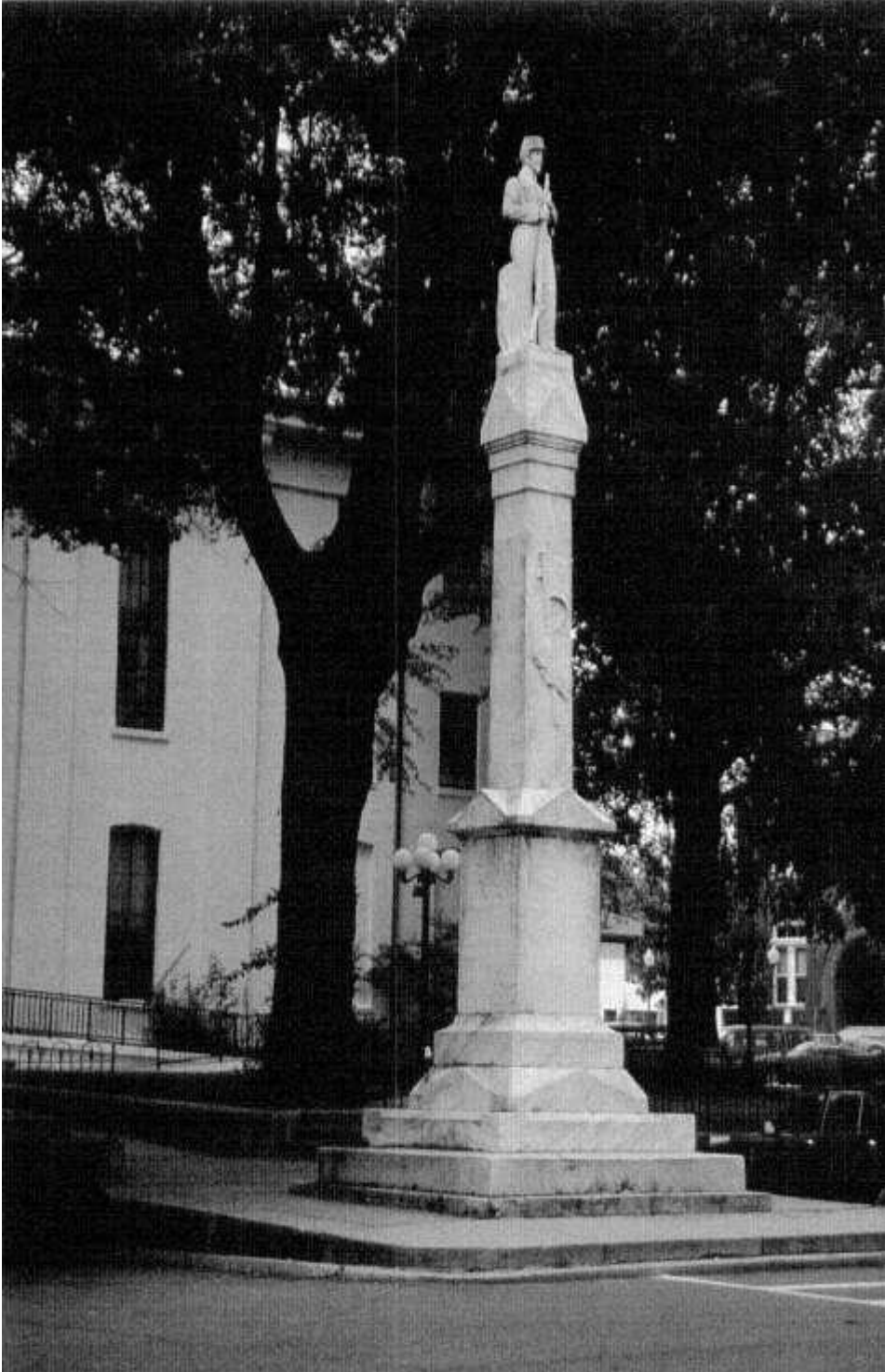


Figure 1. The Confederate Monument, Courthouse Square, Oxford, Mississippi, 1907



Figure 2. The Monument of W. C. Falkner, Ripley Cemetery, Mississippi, 1889

Chapter 3

Damned Facts: Materiality and the Animation of Facts in *An American Tragedy*

In 1909, when working as the editor of a short-lived literary journal *Bohemian Magazine*, Theodore Dreiser urged H. L. Mencken to revise an essay that Mencken had sent to the journal. Mencken's draft appeared, in Dreiser's view, too facile in its wholehearted endorsement of the classic binary of modernity, that between science and religion. Mencken claimed that, while science is predicated on a willful act of "fighting [one's] own way in the world," religion often ends up in an act of prayer, a complete renunciation of human will by throwing oneself on God's grace. For Mencken, prayer signified a retreat from reality, which caused in people's minds a mere sense of "abasement, of incapacity" (38). To this Dreiser responded as follows:

[I]sn't seeking knowledge (scientific) a form of prayer. Aren't scientists & philosophers at bottom truly reverential and don't they wish (pray) ardently for more knowledge. [...] [T]he truth is men are not less religious—they are religious in a different way—and that's a fact. (*Dreiser-Mencken Letters* 37)

The letter clearly reveals two seemingly contrasting aspects of Dreiser's personality—namely, his acute appreciation of the coming new age, founded on scientific principle, and his persistent faith in the lasting power of a certain kind of spirituality.

To be sure, Dreiser was keenly persuaded of the ineffectuality of institutional religion, which seemed incapable of properly responding to the actuality shared by a number of impoverished people whose growing anxiety was the product of rapid modernization. As Dreiser famously noted in *Tragic America*:

The Church itself, as much as anything, has made the spiritual life unfashionable, and has degraded it. Against the sole hope and inspiration of Christ, it has given way to commercial standards of corporations and just when people need a simple aesthetic and mental haven to escape from corporate speed and complexity. (155).

While sharing Mencken's distaste for organized religion, then, Dreiser was insistent on emphasizing the dire need for "the spiritual life" which should stand against the powerful corporate capitalism to which the Church had seemingly succumbed.

It is this lack of a persistent faith in spirituality that Mencken, a fierce proponent of literary naturalism, considered to be Dreiser's crucial weakness. In his long preface to Dreiser's writings, Mencken pointed out Dreiser's constant vacillation between two contrasting identities: as a "thoughtful [...] sound artist," and as "the Indiana peasant, snuffing absurdly over imbecile sentimentalities, giving a grave ear to quackeries" (92).

However obsessive does Mencken's attitudes appear with the dialectics of the modern, namely, science/spirituality, city/country, and art/everyday, the observation he makes about the novelist's "lingering superstition," and his expressed fascination with a certain kind of spirituality are worth our attention. For the works of Dreiser, in my view, have too long been approached from the angle of such secular matters as cultures of commodity, leisure, and finance. The flourishing of the culturalist approach since the 1980s has encouraged critics of Dreiser to place too much emphasis on the ways in which

his novels showcase the cacophony of a commercialized America in the modern age. Considering that so many of the influential critics who paved the ways to approaching literary texts not as closed, immanent aesthetic objects, but as ones embedded in historically specific occasions focused on Dreiser's works, one may conclude that his works are most suitable for secular-culturalist interpretations. As the editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser* make clear in their introductory essay,

Dreiser was not the first novelist to tap into consumerist civilization and its discontents, but his exploration of them may have been the deepest. His concern with material culture was so far ahead of its time that today's practitioners of American studies are only starting to catch up with him. In effect, Dreiser was performing his own cultural studies long before the practice had a name. His book stand together as a gigantic textbook of modern America life, shedding light on everything from fin-de-siècle urbanization to contemporary advertising. (Cassuto and Eby 4)

What is noticeable in the passage is the editors' assumption that Dreiser's deep engagement with material culture resided squarely in the secular realm. To be sure, Dreiser showed his deftness in describing secular phenomena such as "urbanization" and "advertising," most famously in *Sister Carrie*, but the editors seem to be much too circumscribed by the secular mode of reading, the mode that has become quite normative in contemporary American literary criticism.

Thus the question arises: is it pertinent to read Dreiser's interest in material culture solely in the context of secular culture? Couldn't it be more productive to view Dreiser's investment in things in a wider scope, a vision that would not only capture Dreiser's treatment of commodity culture but also his lifelong interest in spirituality? How should we deal with the biographical fact that Dreiser had long-standing

companionship with his contemporary writer Charles Fort, who was an idiosyncratic collector of newspaper articles which reported various anomalous happenings that were inexplicable by the normative science of the day?

Indeed, when we consider that almost all of Dreiser's novels include religious elements, it is quite amazing how consistently his critics have failed to recognize this aspect in his writings. In *Sister Carrie*, for example, Dreiser introduces an eccentric evangelical who helps the impoverished Hurstwood, and in his next novel, *Jennie Gerhardt*, the German father of the heroine is presented as a Catholic fanatic who disowns Jennie because of her untimely pregnancy. Likewise, in *The Stoic*, the third piece of "The Trilogy of Desire," the Indian yoga guru induces a certain epiphany in Bernice, the last mistress of Frank Cowperwood, and *The Bulwark*, Dreiser's final novel, features the lives of a pious Quaker family torn between the strict Quaker doctrines and the lax atmosphere of secular American culture.

Among the rare critics who have paid attention to the significance of the religious aspect in Dreiser's works are Ellen Moers, F. O. Matthiessen, and Paul Giles. However, their focus is primarily on *The Bulwark*, the most overtly religious of all Dreiser's works, and they are hence unable to give due consideration to the more important earlier works, among which the most notable is *An American Tragedy*. In fact, the critics' tendency to elide Dreiser's spiritual aspects seems most incongruous in their treatments of *An American Tragedy*, for not only is the life story of protagonist Clyde Griffith visibly bound up in his excessively religious upbringing but the very structure of the novel itself is framed by a religious element: the opening and final scenes of the novel both involve street preaching conducted by Clyde's parents.

One of the reasons for the conspicuous omission of a spiritual approach in Dreiser studies can be ascribed to the devotion Dreiser showed toward the theory of evolution that was dominant in the contemporary science. An ardent reader of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley, Dreiser was fascinated by the notion that human behaviors are governed by what could be regarded as a kind of chemic element which has nothing to do with God's will. In the famous opening scene of *The Financier*, in which the young Cowperwood watches a lobster eating a squid, we see Dreiser employing the idea of "the survival of the fittest," a concept that denies the intervention of God in the process of animal evolution. And it is this aspect of Dreiser—the "scientific" side, so to speak—that has rendered him a key figure in the field of literary naturalism.

As we will see in more detail in this chapter, naturalism can primarily be viewed as a product of modernity in its strong allegiance to scientific observation devoid of any supernatural elements. It marked a sharp departure from romanticism, which was characterized by its affinity with a sense of the sublime caused by a certain kind of transcendental experience. As Robert Penn Warren famously argued, *An American Tragedy* successfully established itself as an epitome of American literary naturalism mainly because of its uncompromising execution of the naturalistic vision:

His [= Clyde's] "tragedy" is that of namelessness, and this is one aspect of its being an American tragedy, the story of the individual without identity, whose responsible self has been absorbed by the great machine of modern secularized society, and reduced to a cog, a cipher, an abstraction. (25)

The mechanistic imagery that Penn Warren employs in this passage exemplifies a typical approach to *An American Tragedy*: that the society presented in the novel is thoroughly

“secularized,” and has become “the great machine” that turns a human being into a reified object. Thus, the materialism that Penn Warren identifies in the novel squarely follows the set formulae of naturalism: the enervation of human agency under the dominating force of modernity, described through an objective third-person narration that enumerates a massive amount of details in order to express the material reality that oftentimes overwhelms Dreiser’s protagonists.

In this chapter I intend to refute these predominantly secular readings of *An American Tragedy* by excavating the elements long excluded from previous studies, namely, the elements of the supernatural that can be associated with the author’s constant engagement with a certain kind of spirituality. My reading explores those moments in which the novel deviates from the normative procedures of literary naturalism as was set out by Emile Zola in his essay “The Experimental Novel.” To be sure, *An American Tragedy*’s settings appear quintessentially modern—ranging from a gorgeous hotel (the site where Clyde learns urban sophistication), a large shirt factory monitored by the Taylor system, and the powerful mass media that fabricates various tales about Clyde and circulates them as established “facts,” to the courtroom and state prison that embodies the secularized modern disciplinary apparatus. What is remarkable about *An American Tragedy*, however, is that some of those sites seem to be at once mundanely secular and uncannily spiritual. By uncovering the spiritual aspect of the “things” that are deemed secular, Dreiser seems to critique the problematic assumptions of organized religion, thereby suggesting a certain form of spirituality viable in modernity.

Unlike the widely held image of *An American Tragedy* as a representative work of American naturalism, then, my reading will attend to the key element of the novel that

deviates from one of the most important fundamentals of literary naturalism: writing from the standpoint of scientific objectivity. In order to probe this topic, I will pay close attention to the importance of in *An American Tragedy* (and in Dreiser's novels more generally), presenting it as a work infused with the kinds of "facts" that tend to circulate through mass media and judicial procedures. I consider such "facts" to be a linchpin of Dreiser's claim that a latent spirituality exists within secular objects. In other words, I want to argue that Dreiser tried to recontextualize the notion of "facts" from the realm of science to the realm of uncanny spirituality. By so doing, I will highlight Dreiser's movement beyond the boundary of the secular, science-based standpoint of literary naturalism.

To do this, I will first touch upon Emile Zola's seminal essay "The Experimental Novel," in which he promoted the idea of the centrality of "facts" in literary naturalism. I will then examine Dreiser's own idiosyncratic conceptualization of "facts" through a reading of *An American Tragedy*. In the course of my analysis, I will deal with the hitherto neglected relationship between Dreiser and Charles Fort, who exerted profound influence on Dreiser in the formation of his notion of the supernatural phenomena. My final goal is to show the ways in which Dreiser sought to provide a viable form of spirituality by displacing "facts" from the realm of reason and objectivity.

* * *

Naturalism can be defined as a quintessentially modern literary movement that emerged out of a major ideological shift from religion to science at the end of the nineteenth century. Emile Zola's "The Experimental Novel" (1880) functioned as a literary manifesto that provoked a new kind of approach to fictional writing based on the

scientific model. Zola insisted that a novelist should keep an eye on various phenomena of a given society until she or he can gather enough data to figure out the ways in which environmental and hereditary determinants shape human behaviors. What Zola viewed as the ultimate strength of science was its adherence to materiality, something which romantic literature overlooked in favor of the “abstract” and “metaphysical” qualities of human existence. Naturalist literature considered human beings as embedded in the world of materiality, which had exorcised the supernatural. Zola thus concludes:

In short, everything is summed up in this great fact: the experimental method in letters, as in the sciences, is in the way to explain the natural phenomena, both individual and social, of which metaphysics, until now, has given only irrational and supernatural explanations. (54)

Zola’s closing remark is a harsh attack on metaphysics and its literary derivative, romanticism, mainly for their “irrational” and “supernatural” manner of perception. We should also note the very style Zola employs when he concludes the essay. When Zola insists on the precedence of “the experimental method in letters” over “metaphysics,” he seems to be making sure that such precedence be established as the irrefutable “fact.” Zola uses a stylistic device in order to render a personal statement into a “fact,” attaching a preliminary statement (“everything is summed up in this great fact”) before making his point. In so doing, he highlights his complete departure from the tradition of romantic literature which he criticized as lacking in reason and objectivity.

“Facts,” therefore, function as the basis for Zola’s theory of literary naturalism. The central role of “facts” becomes most clear when Zola sets out the procedures of writing naturalistic fiction, as follows:

[T]he whole operation consists in taking facts in nature, then in studying the mechanism of these facts, acting upon them, by the modification of circumstances and surroundings, without deviating from the laws of nature. Finally, you possess knowledge of the man, scientific knowledge of him, in both his individual and social relations. [...] [Therefore] the naturalistic novelists observe and experiment [...] to analyze facts, and to master them. (13)

What Zola emphasizes throughout this passage is the embeddedness of “facts” within “the laws of nature.” As objects of scientific experiments, “facts” strictly belong to the realm of reason. By closely attending to “facts,” novelists can avoid taking a facile leap into the realm of the supernatural, an act which Zola considered to be bad habit of the romantics.

At first glance, such a concept—that “facts” are essential components of the physical world worthy of scientific scrutiny—can also be traced in Dreiser’s writings. In fact, Shelly Fishkin’s influential reading of *An American Tragedy* in *From Facts to Fiction* squarely situates Dreiser’s treatment of “facts” within the framework presented by Zola. As the title of her book suggests, Fishkin’s main project revolves around the ways in which modern American writers transformed “facts” into “fiction,” or, more specifically, transformed facts found in newspaper articles into creative writings. Paying close attention to Dreiser’s engagements as a newspaper journalist and a magazine editor, Fishkin delineates how the author incorporated into his fiction the actual “facts” provided by newspaper articles.

To a certain extent, Fishkin’s decision to feature *An American Tragedy* in her chapter on Dreiser is quite appropriate, since the novel is based on an actual murder that happened in 1902, the so-called “Gillette Case.” The incident was firstly recognized as a mere accidental drowning of a young woman, but later turned out an intentional murder

committed by a young man named Chester Gillette. Sensational in its gradual unfolding, this incident drew nationwide attention resulting from the intense media coverage, of which Dreiser obviously took careful note. As Donald Pizer's meticulous research shows, Dreiser carefully scrap-booked a number of articles on the case in order to use them as his future resources for what turned out to be his bestselling novel, *An American Tragedy* (Pizer 105). Fishkin insists that this method for preparing the novel testifies to Dreiser's faith in the infallibility of "facts," a faith highly evocative of Zola:

[I]n a book like *An American Tragedy*, implicit in the writer's project is a sense of how important it is to replace misleading romantic illusions with new metaphors, images, analogies—in short, new visions—rooted not in fantasy, but in fact. (Fishkin 108)

By regarding "fact" as an antonym of "fantasy," Fishkin locates "fact" at the very core of what Zola considered to be the main concern of literary naturalism, namely, "replac[ing] misleading romantic illusions" promoted by those erratic predecessors of naturalism.

It is true that newspaper articles not only function as inspiration for the composition of *An American Tragedy*, but also figure as significant material objects in the story. However, Fishkin's view of "facts" in Dreiser's novel seems to reinscribe the rigid binary of modernity that Dreiser himself questioned in his correspondence with Mencken, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. If, as in Mencken's bitter criticism, Dreiser had a split self that swayed between the scientific and the supernatural, there remains a possibility that Dreiser used "facts" in a highly ambiguous way, turning them into a kind of in-between entity that is at once fantastic and realistic, spiritual and material.

In order to fully capture Dreiser's remarkable use of "facts" in his fiction, we may be better turning our eyes to the relationship Dreiser had with the aforementioned Charles Fort. It is my contention that Fort's highly idiosyncratic conception of "facts" was foundational in Dreiser's understanding of both the scientific and supernatural, an understanding demonstrated most vividly in *An American Tragedy*. Although Fort's influence on Dreiser has rarely been discussed in Dreiser studies, one exception is Louis Zanine's monograph *Mechanism and Mysticism*. By carefully tracing the trajectory of Dreiser's philosophical framework as it appears in his novels, Zanine suggests that Dreiser underwent a major shift in his perception of the world, from one founded on a mechanistic vision of human behavior to one predicated on mystical insights into the realm of the supernatural.

However, while Zanine offers invaluable resources helping us to explicate Dreiser's ambivalent worldview, a topic that most critics have chosen to avoid, his readings of the novelist's major works remain rather too schematic. Zanine divides Dreiser's career into two phases: the earlier Dreiser as a hardcore evolutionary thinker who wrote *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, and the later Dreiser as an esoteric mystic who wrote *Notes on Life* and *The Bulwark*. Zanine states that "absorption in the supernatural [...] is almost totally absent in the stark materialism of his first six novels." Praising *An American Tragedy* as the "finest expression" of "the mechanistic point of view that Dreiser embraced in the 1920s" (103), Zanine goes on to present a typical reading of the novel that is almost identical to that of Robert Penn Warren, cited earlier:

In this novel, Dreiser combined his conception of the individual as a seeking, hungering mechanism of desire with an indictment of those aspects of American

society that encouraged greed, the lust for power, and social and economic inequality. (103)

Zanine thus reads the novel predominantly in secular terms, neglecting another significant aspect of Dreiser that Zanine's intuitions, namely, Dreiser's "superstitious side" which was decidedly cultivated through his contact with Charles Fort. Since Dreiser's relationship with Fort became most intimate in the 1910s, especially in 1919, the time when Dreiser was about to write *An American Tragedy*, it is very likely that Dreiser's worldview in the novel was strongly influenced by Fort's rather eccentric philosophy on the unknowable. And so, in order to explore this hidden aspect of Dreiser, I will focus on the very idiosyncratic understanding of facts that Fort developed in his unconventional writings.

* * *

Let us start with a brief biographical sketch of the friendship Dreiser enjoyed with Fort for over thirty years. Their first meeting took place in 1905, when Dreiser was working as the editor of a pulp magazine called *The Popular Magazine*. Taking an interest in Fort's short stories, published in other magazines, Dreiser decided to ask him for contributions. As a young, unknown writer living in obscurity in New York, Fort gladly obliged and sent several stories to the magazine, but soon became weary of writing fiction. He began to produce a very unique kind of writing that can at best be described as an assortment of supernatural phenomena based on various newspaper and magazine articles, as well as the private letters of people who had undergone alleged occult experiences.

Aside from his earlier fictional prose, Fort published four books, all more-or-less following a scrap-book format, each accompanied by Fort's wry comments on academic science, which he believed failed to take account of the supernatural. For instance, he took up an article that reported some "luminous objects" seen at a mountain in North Carolina. According to Fort, "a geologist" was sent from "the United States Geological Survey":

One imagines [. . .] the superiority of this geologist from Washington. He heard stories from the natives. He contrasted his own sound principles with the irresponsible gab of denizens, and went right to the investigation, scientifically. He went out on a road, and saw lights, and made his report. 47% of the lights that he saw were automobile headlights; 33% of them were locomotive headlights; 10% were lights in houses, and 10 % were bush fires. Tot that up, and see that efficiency can't go further. [. . .] Scientists, in matters of our data, have been like somebody in Europe, before the year 1492, hearing stories of lands to the west, going out on the ocean for an hour or so, in a row-boat, and then saying, whether exactly in these words, or not: "Oh, hell! there ain't no America." (624-625).

Fort suggested that the kind of "data" that he handled was somewhat uncontainable in contemporary science. Fort therefore made a subversive use of the word "data"—a term that conventionally has a scientific connotation—as a set of information that are *unusable* for science.

Expressed in a highly fragmented prose that at times borders on the unreadable, Fort's idiosyncratic stance toward science and the supernatural was largely poorly received. Nevertheless, Dreiser was persistent in his efforts to promote Fort's works. In 1919, Dreiser helped Fort to publish the *Book of the Damned*, the most well-known of Fort's works, and sent it to H. G. Wells, only to receive a very disappointing response:

I'm having Fort's Book of the Damned sent back to you. Fort seems to be one of the most damnable bores who ever cut scraps from out-of-the-way newspapers & thought they were facts. And he writes like a drunkard. (Letters 531)

Angered by Wells's repudiation, Dreiser tried to vindicate Fort in such a manner as to reveal his own faith in the extrasensory perception that comes out of the harsh reality of modern living:

I only know that I respond in various ways with the five that I have, but around and beyond me, lie nothing but mysteries which, instruments or no instruments, I have not the slightest ability to solve—nor have I found others who have. And since I have gone through life so far without any particularly valuable solution of anything that has occurred, and know really that behind me in the depths of time have passed billions and billions of people, creatures as confused and mentally defeated as myself, I am ready to at least meditate upon, if not accept, such items of strangeness as are suggested by Fort in his curious explorations among, as you say, “items of newspapers.” (Letters 535)

Although their responses to Fort's work could not have been further apart, both Dreiser and Wells seem to have agreed on one thing—that Fort had found his inspiration from a distinctly modern medium, newspapers. And, whereas Wells seems to have employed a “scientific” method of treating only “facts” (as opposed to anomalous phenomena which he denounces as “scraps”) as worthy of analysis, Dreiser suggests that “such items of strangeness” that could be found in mass-circulation newspapers require more serious attention, for they give a glimpse into a certain kind of transcendental presence, a presence arising out of the felt experience of everyday life. Fort thus imbues “facts” with the supernatural, a gesture which, as Wells pointedly suggests, potentially destabilizes the status of facts as the basis of academic science.

Book of Damned can be read as the apocrypha of scientific investigations, attempting to salvage those “data” excluded from modern science, as the opening of the book defiantly claims:

A procession of the damned.
By the damned, I mean the excluded.
We shall have a procession of data that Science has excluded.
Battalions of the accursed, captained by pallid data that I have exhumed, will march.
You’ll read them—or they’ll march. Some of them lived and some of them fiery and some of them rotten. (3)

By collecting “data” that “Science” had excluded, Fort explored a proscribed territory in which various occurrences that people might encounter contain a supernatural element, an element which established science utterly disregarded (e.g. various falling objects from the sky, such as stones, fish, and blocks of ice, witnessed and reported in newspaper articles and personal letters). Fort thus pointed out that dogmatism was the shared trait of organized religion and academic science, both of which belonged to a system of belief based on the logic of exclusion: “Religion is belief in a supreme being. Science is belief in a supreme generalization. Essentially they are the same” (*Wild Talents*, 999).

Fort’s confrontational attitude toward “Science” as a “belief in a supreme generalization” led him to conceive a peculiar use of “data” and “facts.” Although all of his major works are composed from an array of “damned facts,” these facts never stack up as a neatly organized database of occult phenomena. Utterly lacking in tight structuring and coherent indexing, Fort’s works reject any “system of belief” enshrined by academic science. Fort’s facts cannot thus be subsumed under any grand theory,

achieving a certain kind of materiality that refuses abstraction, as Jim Steinmeyer aptly observes:

Instead of assembling his data to support a theory, he treated these oddities like his characters [. . .] —releasing them in front of his audience and then stepping back to watch them perform; whispering suggestions in the reader’s ear, playing the master of ceremonies with an occasional wry comment or observation. (163)

It is by employing this technique of animation that Fort contrived to highlight the singularity of “facts.” As he claims in the opening passage, his data are never the passive object of reading; rather, they “march” forcefully into the reader’s eyes, thrusting their uncontainable thingness that resists abstraction.

Fort’s notion of “facts” as resistant to theory chimes with Lorraine Daston’s formulation that they contain robust thingness. In her historicist analysis of the production of “scientific facts,” Daston makes a clear distinction between “facts” and “evidence,” as follows:

On their own, facts are notoriously inert—“angular,” “stubborn,” or even “nasty” in their resistance to interpretation and inference. They are robust in their existence and opaque in their meaning. Only when enlisted in the service of a claim or a conjecture do they become evidence, or facts with significance. Evidence might be described as facts hammered into signposts, which point beyond themselves and their sheer, brute thingness to states of affairs to which we have no direct access. (93)

While evidence can potentially serve as a tool for imagining a certain kind of hypothetical notions or situations, “facts” reject such an instrumentalist use by insisting on their own “sheer, brute thingness.” By foregrounding the substantial thingness of “facts,” Fort revivifies those “damned facts” in such a way as to problematize the very

dogmatism shared by both institutional religion and academic science. And it is this remarkable use of “facts”—“facts” not as the mere substructure for any grand theory, but as the animated entity that mediates between everyday life and the supernatural—that Dreiser also employs in *An American Tragedy*. In the following section, I discuss Dreiser’s “facts” in order to demonstrate that his conception of “facts” is more akin to that of Fort than to formulations traditionally associated with the novel, specifically Zola’s naturalistic conception of scientific facts.

* * *

In *An American Tragedy*, readers are constantly exposed to a dialectical relationship between the “facts” of science and those of the supernatural. The centrality of “facts” becomes most manifest in Book Three, the last part of the novel, in which the criminality of Clyde is thoroughly investigated by legal institutions. The “facts” here function to reveal the truth of his case, since they supposedly offer an objective explanation of Clyde’s misguided conduct, which leads to Roberta’s death. This attitude toward “facts” is most extensively espoused by Nicholson, a former lawyer and now a death-row inmate, who encourages Clyde to make an appeal for retrial:

Nicholson had begun to advise him [. . .] one important point in connection with his own case—on appeal—or in the event of any second trial, i.e. —that the admission of Roberta’s letters as evidence, as they stood at least, be desperately fought on the ground that the emotional force of them was detrimental in the case of any jury anywhere, to a calm unbiased consideration of the material facts presented by them—and that instead of the letters being admitted as they stood they should be digested for the facts alone and that digest—and that only offered to the jury. (815)

Nicholson, commenting on the case from the standpoint of a professional lawyer, insists that Clyde’s trial was incorrectly executed, since the prosecutor read aloud Roberta’s

letters to Clyde verbatim. As Roberta's letters were written during the time when Roberta was becoming increasingly dubious of Clyde's fidelity, they have a highly emotional quality that makes it difficult for listeners to make an impartial judgment on the case. Nicholson thus suggests that "material facts" should be derived from the letters and presented to the juries.

The same point is made by another lawyer who, in preparation for Clyde's trial, decries the fact that Roberta's letters will make a crucial impact at court, calling the letters "the toughest things we're going to have to face," for "[t]hey're likely to make up any jury cry if they're read right" (638). His prediction turns out to be correct: as the prosecutor reads the letters aloud, "the moist eyes and the handkerchiefs and the coughs in the audience and among the jurors attested their import" (694). "Their import" is, of course, expressed as Roberta's tearful plea, and it is this intense emotionalism that makes Roberta's letters seem inappropriate to the professional lawyers. In other words, what the court—the site of modernity, supposedly controlled by reason—should count as a reliable resource for investigation are "the material facts," not the letters that are filled with personal emotions.

While *An American Tragedy* presents the letters as a kind of writing that triggers strong emotional responses, it also includes another kind of textual material, which superficially seems to operate in a distinctly different mode to the emotive letters. This is the newspaper article on the accidental drowning which Clyde comes across at a time when he is becoming increasingly entrapped in the double affair between Roberta and Sondra. Here, I quote the article side by side with Roberta's letter:

Oh, Clyde, you can't realize what all this means to me, I feel as though I shall never see my home again after I leave here this time. And mamma, poor dear mamma, how I do love her and how sorry I am to have deceived her so. She is never cross and she always helps me so much. Sometimes I think if I could tell her, but I can't. She has had trouble enough, and I couldn't break her heart like that. (696)

The man is recalled as being tall, dark, about thirty-five years of age, and wore a light green suit and straw hat with a white and blue band. The girl appears to be not more than twenty-five, five feet five inches tall, and weighs 130 pounds. She wore her hair, which was long and dark brown, in braids about her forehead. On her left middle finger is a small gold ring with an amethyst setting. The police of Pittsfield and other cities in this vicinity have been notified, but as yet no word as to her identity has been received. (457)

Whereas Roberta's letter is punctuated by agonized emotion, the article employs a dry, descriptive mode that refers to the accident based solely on facts, devoid of any personal inferences. Indeed, the newspaper article is nothing but the accumulation of material facts, a kind of description that Nicholson would consider as most appropriate for legal proceedings.

However, as the story unfolds, this article is gradually transformed from a mere chain of "facts"—the kind that Zola regarded as the essential component of naturalist fiction—into something uncanny, closer to the one that Fort called "the damned facts." When Clyde first encounters the article, he takes little notice of it, thinking that the accident is "commonplace enough in the usual grist of summer accidents" (457), but the article comes to possess him as his romantic entanglement veers toward disaster. After his depressing meeting with Roberta, Clyde's mind keeps hovering over those facts described in the article: "in spite of himself [=Clyde] drift[ed] back to the thought that the item in the paper had inspired—and yet fighting it—trying to shut it out entirely." The more Clyde tries to "shut out" the contents of the article, the more threatening it becomes

for him—so much so that the narrative, usually written in the third-person, eventually takes up the voice of Clyde himself: “Why must he think of that other lake in Massachusetts! That boat! The body of that girl found—and not that of the man who accompanied her! How terrible, really!” (477). This passage stylistically shows Clyde’s emotional tension by rapidly shifting from a complete sentence into fragmentary phrases. The simple itemization of facts is punctuated by occasional exclamations, which highlights the uncanny quality of material facts—the same kind of animation effect that Fort sought to produce in order to allow facts to exert their brutal power over Clyde.

The overwhelming presence of the article becomes most manifest when Clyde realizes he can no longer prevaricate with Roberta:

But now once more in Lycurgus and back in his room after just explaining to Roberta, as he had, he once more encountered on his writing desk, the identical paper containing the item concerning the tragedy at Pass Lake. And in spite of himself, his eye once more followed nervously and yet unwaveringly to the last word all the suggestive and provocative details. (479)

This scene can be considered as a classic case of the return of the repressed. The article, which first appeared to be a “commonplace” report of a daily accident, now seems to Clyde to be full of “suggestive and provocative details,” details that arouse an intense emotional response. The article undergoes a qualitative transformation, from the most mundane kind of writing consisting solely of material facts into a text full of haunting details that is no less affective than Roberta’s letters. Dreiser thus shows that a seemingly mundane description may effect an uncanny provocativeness that can influence, and potentially control, the human psyche.

Dreiser ascribes more radical power to material facts by providing them with an ability to generate a sort of phantasmagoria in Clyde's mind, a vision that borders on the realm of the supernatural. What should be recalled at this point is the fact that, even while the novel tells in exhaustive detail the ways that Clyde prepares to murder Roberta, it does not specify exactly at what moment Clyde actually decides to take such a definitive step. In other words, the story goes on without describing the crucial moment of heroic decision—the sort of moment we occasionally encounter in realist fiction, most memorably in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, when Huck defiantly claims that he will “go to hell” to save Jim.

The absence of such an epiphanic moment in *An American Tragedy* suggests that Dreiser offers an alternative way to induce his protagonist to take action, and he does so by intensifying the provocative power of the same newspaper article discussed above. Clyde's preparation to commit murder is featured in Book Two, Chapter 45, which begins with a meditation on the chaotic condition of a human mind when faced with an extreme predicament—moments when the mind is befuddled “to the extent that for the time being, at least, unreason and disorder and mistaken or erroneous counsel would appear to hold against all else” (482). What this passage captures is the monstrous birth of the “erroneous counsel” that is the newspaper article, which has been internalized in Clyde's psyche, transformed from mere matter into a creature-like being:

And yet again at moments the solution suggested by the item in The Times-Union again thrusting itself forward, psychogenetically born of his own turbulent, eager and disappointed seeking. And hence persisting. (482)

The article is persisting, self-birthing, becoming a progenitor of the “erroneous counsel,” a phantasmagoric creature which ultimately transforms itself into a character that belongs to the realm of fantasy, the efrīt in Aladdin’s lamp:

Indeed, it was now as though from the depth of some lower or higher world never before guessed or plumbed by him . . . a region otherwhere than in life or death and peopled by creatures otherwise than himself . . . there had now suddenly appeared, as the genie at the accidental rubbing of Aladdin’s lamp—as the efrīt emerging as smoke from the mystic jar in the net of the fisherman[.] (482-483)

Just as Aladdin summons the genie by rubbing the old, discarded lamp, Clyde “accidentally” calls forth the efrīt by recalling the newspaper article, which originally seemed so innocuous. The passage thus captures the transformative moment when objects transmute: from the mundane, negligible scraps (the old lamp and the platitudinous article) into objects with magical power. Rather than staging a moment of heroic decision by the main protagonist, then, Dreiser chooses to animate the material facts, assigning them the commanding force of the supernatural. Dreiser’s conception of facts thus manifestly counters the one theorized by Zola, and comes very close to the one formulated by Fort. While Zola saw facts as entities that strictly resides in the realm of reason, Dreiser viewed those seemingly disinterested facts as imbued with the supernatural. Just as Fort discovered rich veins of the supernatural within the most neglected newspaper articles, Dreiser featured a newspaper article as a product of material facts that becomes fully alive, generating a supernatural entity that overpowers a human being.

* * *

In “I Found the Real American Tragedy,” an essay written as a sequel to *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser explicitly stated his qualms about the treatment of facts in legal procedures:

I was absolutely convinced that the ordinary procedures of any court [...] in America or elsewhere were not fitted to deal with it. For the law itself in regard to any crime of this kind reads that only the facts of the crime, not the deeper psychologic and psychiatric background, are to be considered. Sympathy is out. (“I Find the Real American Tragedy” 40)

Dreiser’s critique of legal proceedings directly conflicts with the one presented by Nicholson cited in the previous section. Whereas his fictional characters engaged in legal professions are preoccupied with “material facts,” Dreiser feels that their conception of facts is utterly severed from the actual context of the crime they examine, thereby rendering facts impervious to the felt experience of everyday lives.

What Dreiser posits as a way to recontextualize facts within the reality of modern life is to suggest how they can be related to certain kinds of supernatural phenomena, born out of a particular human psychology placed in an extreme situation. Instead of featuring a tragic hero endowed with a firm will, Dreiser sought to animate facts to show how the seemingly most disinterested “material facts” can be a producers of affects that triggers magical experience.

The reason why Dreiser was so much impressed with Fort’s works is that they show how institutionalized science has suppressed the spiritual side of facts by thoroughly secularizing them. What sets Dreiser apart from the dominant school of literary naturalism is his attempt to suture the material and the supernatural by revealing the phantasmagoric quality of facts that haunts the most mundane kind of writing, such as

newspaper articles. By so doing, Dreiser suggests the persistence of spirituality in the material culture of modernity.

Chapter 4

Beauty is Trash, Trash Beauty: The Enchanting Heaps in *The Great Gatsby*

When *The Great Gatsby* made its first appearance in 1925, the publisher provided a jacket copy that, in retrospect, appears too vague to serve as an effective blurb: “It is a magical, living book, blended of irony, romance, and mysticism” (qtd. in Bruccoli, *New Essays* 3). Although the leading Fitzgerald scholar Matthew Bruccoli regards the copy as indicative of the publisher’s uncertainty about the nature of its product (3), the blurb’s emphasis on the “magical” quality of the book does conform with Fitzgerald’s own explanatory comment on the novel, written in a letter to his friend: “That’s the whole burden of this novel—the loss of those illusions that give such color to the world that you don’t care whether things are true or false as long as they partake of the magical glory” (*A Life in Letters* 102).

The professed intent of the author regarding his most ambitious work *Gatsby*—taking hold of the elusive power of illusions along with their sense of “magical glory”—is more or less applicable to many of his other works as well. This task, which Fitzgerald suggested was his “burden,” was by no means an easy one. Faced with the overwhelming power of hard reality, the sparkle of illusions will sooner or later be extinguished, giving way to a far more somber mood of disenchantment. Although initially enraptured by his wondrous encounter with all the promises of utopian hopes, each of Fitzgerald’s protagonists is destined to dwindle into a sad state of disillusionment.

It is not sufficient simply to argue, however, that all of Fitzgerald's works are just about loss and futility, leading his readers into some kind of nihilistic void. What Fitzgerald was most intent on, in my view, was achieving some alternative worldview from which he could take hold of the "magical glory" of elusive illusions, while not losing sight of the overwhelming power of reality.

The reality of the *Gatsby*'s time, namely the 1920s, consisted of a cluster of new social phenomena of which Fitzgerald was part and parcel: the rise of the "New Women," claiming not only political rights but sexual freedom, and who were soon labeled by the rapidly growing mass media as "flappers" or even "vampires"; an increasing number of low-paid immigrant workers, crowding the slum districts of the metropolitan areas; the unprecedented expansion of business corporations run on the basis of a highly monitored production system; and the frantic interest in profit-raising among the general American public that accompanied their voracious desire to consume any new commodities. All these factors, combined with the sense of void in the aftermath of World War I, engendered in the entire nation a sense of inanity or alienation, a sense that life was to a large extent socially controlled. It was in such an atmosphere that Fitzgerald tried to push forward his project, namely, to reinstate the sense of "magical glory" or "wonder" amidst what one might regard as the litters of modernity.

Indeed, the gain and loss of "magical glory" is a recurring theme in many of Fitzgerald's works. And it is notable that its exploration depended not just on Fitzgerald's use of a popularized form of romantic love plot, but also on the rise and fall of religious faith on the part of his protagonists. In his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald chronicles a young dilettante's pursuit of a holy grail (embodied as a beautiful and rather

flirtatious woman, Rosalind) and his subsequent failure to attain it. Shattered by his lover's marriage and his own loss of financial security, Amory Blaine feels as if he has been placed in a world with "all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (307). He tries to find solace in the Catholic Church, which once seemed "the only assimilative, traditionary bulwark against the decay of morals," only to conclude that "the Church" exercises only "empty ritual," and that there is "no God in his heart" (306, 307). Amory's crucial loss of faith in institutional religion is encapsulated in his bitter realization that "It's all a poor substitution at best" (307). The novel's closing remark prefigures subsequent protagonists' sense of loss vis-à-vis a social world that lacks any accepted moral codes: "He stretched out his arms to the crystalline, radiant sky. 'I know myself,' he cried, 'but that is all.'" (308). While Amory's physical gesture, set against "the crystalline, radiant sky," is unabashedly romantic, his utterance does not show any sign of expanding the notion of selfhood glorified by nineteenth-century romanticism. Rather, Amory's remark delimits the self through an acute sense of disillusionment brought forth by the coming of an age devoid of any ethical and religious "bulwark."

For many readers, Amory's outstretched arms at the novel's end are surely reminiscent of the celebrated last passage in *The Great Gatsby*:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further. . . . And one fine morning—
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.
(144)

Notably, however, the general tone of this latter conclusion significantly differs from that of Fitzgerald's debut work. The nominative shift from the singular ("Gatsby") to the

collective (“we”) clearly carries a positive vibe, signaling a Whitmanesque expansion of selfhood. More significantly, Gatsby’s faith never wavers: unlike Amory, whose very stance at the end of the novel embodies disillusionment, Gatsby remains a devoted believer till the end. Their contrasting attitudes toward faith seem to derive from the difference in their religious orientations: while Amory fails to believe in the Catholic Church—the embodiment of institutionalized religion—Gatsby manages to keep his faith by believing in a non-consecrated object, “the green light.” In other words, by celebrating Gatsby as a believer of an object unauthorized by the church, Fitzgerald seems to be making a radical attempt to find an alternative way of believing that he could not find in religious institutions.

The main bulk of *Gatsby* criticisms so far has strangely neglected the positive tone of this last scene: commentators have almost unanimously claimed that Fitzgerald’s outlook in the text is tainted with disillusionment in the face of modernity. Both secular and religious readings of the text agree that objects appearing in the novel have a beguiling allure that ultimately leads those who follow them into nothingness. From a secular standpoint, the novel is hopelessly inundated with what Marx believed to be the source of modernity’s corruption, namely, objects-as-commodities. Beginning with Malcolm Cowley’s Marxist reading of *Gatsby*, a number of materialist critiques have related every aspect of the novel to the capitalist system of exchange. For instance, Ross Posnock regards Gatsby as a character “transformed into a commodity that Nick sells the reader” (211), and Meredith Goldsmith considers Gatsby’s smile “a reproducible commodity [. . .] that extends his social power” (450). Even death becomes commodified

through the circulation of objects of grief (Schiff 104).¹³ Consequently, critics have tended to suggest that the novel offers nothing but an unrelievedly bleak vision of modernity:

In its totality *The Great Gatsby* sketches the evolution of America from “fresh green breast of the new world” to “valley of ashes,” from continent with a spirit “commensurate to man’s capacity for wonder” to place of nightmare, exhaustion, and death. (Callahan 12)

This assertion fairly represents the general tendency of *Gatsby* analyses, which elide any positive elements in the novel’s ending. The “valley of ashes” is a nightmarish embodiment of capitalist exploitation in which “man’s capacity for wonder” is lost for good.

Similarly, critics who shed light on the religious aspect of the novel have mainly focused on Fitzgerald’s Catholic sensibility, insisting on that he was invested in expressing the *failure* of transubstantiation.¹⁴ Paul Giles notes that Gatsby’s obsession with the green light and many other things surrounding Daisy (including her voice)

¹³See also Richard Godden’s *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer*. Godden’s otherwise breathtaking reading of *Gatsby* becomes slightly reductive when the discussion includes an overtly Marxist passage, as follows: “Rather, Gatsby loves Daisy because she is his point of access to a dominant class. [...] [H]is love ties him to a woman formed to display merchandise, who consequently has repressed her body and cashed in her voice” (83).

¹⁴ Along with Giles, see also Joan Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*; Giles Gunn, “F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* and the Imagination of Wonder”; Benita Moore, *Escape into a Labyrinth: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Catholic Sensibility, and the American Way*. For a stimulating analysis that tries to connect religion to commodity culture, see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature*. Fessenden argues that Fitzgerald’s frequent references to luxurious commodities in his fiction work to support the novelist’s self-refashioning of his Irish Catholic origin into a WASP identity: “so keen was Fitzgerald to distance himself from the Irish Catholic provincialism of his own upbringing that he had even his army uniforms made by Brooks Brothers” (183).

shows “his attempts to transubstantiate Daisy and defy the limitations of linear history by mingling her worldly existence with a timeless essence” (180). Giles concludes that Gatsby’s Catholic-inflected endeavor ultimately leaves us with “a sense of the vacancy surrounding the icons” that haunts the end of the novel (184). While I agree with Giles’s comment on the novel’s temporal nonlinearity (a trait which becomes most marked in the last line, “borne back ceaselessly into the past”), his interpretation of the tone of the novel seems to ignore the complexity of Nick’s narrative voice, which contains both a tenacious faith in innocence as well as a deep-seated awareness of the difficulty in holding such a belief in modern America. Indeed, Giles’s argument seems more cogent in the context of *This Side of Paradise*, in which Amory’s growing sense of the failure of iconicity is clearly indicated as a source of disillusionment.

The overall problem of both secular and religious readings of *Gatsby* is that they tend to assign negative meanings to the materiality inscribed in the text: while the secular readings reduce various objects to mere commodities in the capitalist marketplace, the religious approach inevitably reads those objects as a series of failed transubstantiations. Neither of them gives any satisfactory account of the forward-looking tone that Fitzgerald seems to painstakingly emphasize. If the positive atmosphere of the last passage of *Gatsby* is partially made possible by the nonlinearity of the narrative vision—a vision that enables the coexistence of past and present—it follows that the novel does not merely discredit things past as useless trash. Rather, what appears as useless trash achieves a certain kind of transcendental force that Fitzgerald thought was crucially lacking in institutional religions, including Catholicism. I argue that the novel’s remarkable power derives from the ways in which Fitzgerald transformed rubbish—

things that have neither commodity value nor idolizable quality—into objects of intense worship.

As a writer highly susceptible to the ubiquity of commodities in the culture of the twenties, Fitzgerald seems to probe an alternative ontology of objects that might pertinently be called fetish. According to William Pietz, the fetish is “essentially a material, terrestrial entity” that sharply diverges from the Catholic idol in its rootedness in physicality. The subordinate status of fetish to Catholic idol originates in the colonial encounter between Europeans and Africans, when fetish became the concept that explained the Africans’ misguided worship of “trifles and trinkets”—things that had absolutely no value in European culture.¹⁵ Thus, the divinity of the fetish exists in *its being trash* both from the Christian and secular-materialist viewpoints. To be sure, the fetish functioned as a critical linchpin in the two most broadly influential theories of modernity—Marx’s critique of commodity culture and Freud’s castration complex. My analysis of *Gatsby* departs from these foundational readings, however, in treating the fetish not as that which stands for something else, as it does in the case of Marx (commodity) and Freud (phallus).¹⁶ Rather, I’m interested in the incorrigible quality of the fetish, which eliminates any possibility of its becoming an analogue for anything other than itself.

While it has become almost a critical commonplace to see *Gatsby* as inextricably linked with the meteoric rise of the consumer culture in the twenties, my textual analysis

¹⁵ See also Patricia Spyer, ed, *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*; Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things*.

¹⁶ For a very useful overview of fetishism, see Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*; Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, especially Introduction.

attempts to shed a different light on the status of commodity—that it not only shaped consumer culture, but also defied it through its ineradicable materiality as rubbish. As the ultimate embodiment of the thingness of materiality, rubbish becomes an aesthetic object of wonder, provoking something akin to genuine faith. Unlike the nineteenth-century romantics, who had discovered wonder and beauty within nature, Fitzgerald brought those concepts into the least picturesque site of modernity, the landscape of urban trash. By so doing, Fitzgerald attempted to relocate the act of believing from the Church to the secular world of modernity, a world he termed “Godless.”

In the following sections, I discuss the ways in which Fitzgerald challenged the notion of disillusionment—a mental epidemic in modernity—through his idiosyncratic rendition of material spirituality, by featuring various kinds of trashy heaps that evoke an aesthetic sense of wonder. Before going into the actual reading of the text, I elaborate on how the discourse of disillusionment was widely shared in the twenties, by focusing on two of the most influential cultural theories of the twenties—by H. Richard Niebuhr and G. K. Chesterton—and clarify what I regard to have been the main predicament that Fitzgerald had to face, namely, the disillusioned temperament generated by the fraught relationships between religion and materialism, civilization and primitivism, beauty and modernity.¹⁷ I also examine a number of Fitzgerald’s short stories that contain medievalist settings in order to demonstrate his lifelong concern with Catholicism, and

¹⁷ For the Catholic responses to the issue of disillusionment at the time, see William Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment 1920-1940*. Halsey argues that American Catholics defended against the tide of disillusionment through recourse to the ideas of a higher order that Scholastic and neo-Thomistic philosophy embraced. Halsey devotes a chapter to Fitzgerald’s lingering fascination with Catholicism. Although very thoughtfully conceived, Halsey’s reading does not fully account for Fitzgerald’s investment in alternative types of religious interest that are not necessarily based on Catholic premises of balance and order.

suggest that his investment in medievalism ultimately resulted in a kind of alternative spiritualism without institutional affiliations. Finally, my textual analysis of *Gatsby* demonstrates how such spiritualism emerges in the form of a definitively modern (by)product of commodity culture: heaps of trash. By turning heaps into fetishes, Fitzgerald sought to recover the rapidly fading affects—wonder, enchantment, and religious ecstasy—within the world of disillusionment.

* * *

In 1925, the same year Fitzgerald wrote *Gatsby*, H. Richard Niebuhr, a leading theologian of the time, published an article, “Back to Benedict?” to comment on what he saw to be the sense of “disillusionment” that seemed to plague the entire nation. He observed that “a new resurgence of the old pessimism” got under way, as Christianity had been “painfully disillusioned of its dream of the automatic progress of the world toward the kingdom of God” (860). The glorious road to heaven was hampered by the rise of secularization, which Niebuhr defined as “the divorce between Christian ethics and the ethics of business and industry” (860). For Niebuhr, such “earthly callings” devoid of “Christian content” only aggravated “the over-indulgence [...] of the instincts of acquisition,” thereby generating the vicious circle of capitalism in which “a man cannot own a square foot of property or accept a salary without coming dangerously near to compromise with the whole evil and selfish system which issues in class and race exploitation” (861).

Niebuhr’s grim diagnosis of the ills of the secular modern world echoes Max Weber’s well-known thesis in his 1917 lecture *Science as a Vocation*, in which he defined the coming of Western modernity as the “disenchantment of the world” (5).

According to Weber, the secular principles of “rationalization and intellectualization” had exterminated the “mysterious incalculable forces”—the governing forces of premodern societies—and broken away from the realm of transcendence: “One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did savages, for whom such mysterious powers existed” (6). Weber and Niebuhr were alike in their claim that secularization had exorcised the possibility of transcendental power in the public realm, albeit with different focuses: while Weber focused on the secularity of the social system, Niebuhr attended most closely to the excessively materialistic cultural atmosphere that defined the American twenties, a “luxurious and self-indulgent age,” as he termed it.

Niebuhr further developed his own thesis of disillusionment in search of a possible strategy for regaining faith in a lecture titled “Theology in a Time of Disillusionment.” In it he defined “disillusionment” as the “most striking attribute” of “modern Western civilization,” one that set it apart from nineteenth-century optimism based on a “faith in human goodness and rationality” (102). Although Niebuhr admitted that “Henry Brooks Adam’s disillusionment was a rare occurrence in the later nineteenth century,” he insisted that in the twentieth century this sentiment might be deemed “the significant experience which mirrored the experiences of thousands” (104). Niebuhr was wary of the possibility that modernity’s ever-expanding control, enforced through secular strategies (bureaucratization and scientific instrumentalism, for instance) could spread a sense of powerlessness in the face of the absence of “a meaningful advance toward the coming of the rule of love and peace and joy” (106). Niebuhr considered that the appearance of Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*—a novel published in the same

year as *Gatsby*—was the best proof of the extent to which America was plagued by disillusionment. What he considered to be the defining characteristics of modern America—the unequal distribution of wealth, and the essentially secular upheavals of middle class morality and science—promulgated “perplexity,” causing the loss of “the revelation of almost tangible certainties” (109).

What Niebuhr offered as an alternative to the prevailing mode of cynicism was not to “curse the whole sorry scheme of things” but to face modernity’s “perplexity” itself. By so doing, one could look at the “mysteries” with “wonder”:

[T]he theology of a time that confronts mysteries, because it has lost dogmas, and which sees the world once more in a strange and unfamiliar guise as the realm of irrational as well as rational manifestation of reality feels a new kinship for the awe and the tremor of primitive man facing wonder at the boundaries of his intelligence. (112)

Niebuhr made a telling analogy between modern subjectivities and those of the primitive to suggest their common lack of authorized principles. The disillusioned modern subjectivities might regain their faith by recalling the way primitive people had viewed their surroundings, in a mode of perception Niebuhr termed “the apprehension of divine qualities in the world of natural and aesthetic objects” (112). In other words, the recovery of faith was no longer possible within institutionalized religion but via what he called “mana”: a certain kind of material substance imbued with a transcendental quality that could inspire “awe and mystery” (111). Just like Weber, Niebuhr detected an affinity between modern and primitive culture, but, unlike Weber, he did not regard the return to the primitive as a symptom of degeneration. Rather, to “face wonder” promised a renewal

of the possibility of transcendence no longer available in the excessive formality of religion in his time.

While Niebuhr attempted to recover transcendence by countering disillusionment with the very antithesis of modernity—wonderment and mana—G. K. Chesterton insisted that magicality was the vile constituent of modernity itself. Chesterton, an English writer whose proto-surrealistic novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* makes a cameo appearance in Fitzgerald’s first novel, as Amory’s favorite book, was an outspoken defendant of democracy and Catholicism (38). His commitment to democracy naturally led him to focus on America and its subsequent transformation from Jeffersonian democracy to the market-driven capitalism of the twenties, a turn most trenchantly treated in his 1922 travelogue, *What I Saw in America*. The book presents the radical proposition that democracy seems to decline in proportion to the extent to which a nation turns its back on religion in favor of science.¹⁸ For Chesterton, democracy was essentially Catholic in that the ideal of citizenship and equality could only be realized through the founding of “brotherhood” under God the Father. Modernity turned the Americans into “Pagan[s]” who cultivated an excessively antidemocratic sense of beauty by indulging themselves in a “laxity in dress or manners” (Why Catholic, 23). This “Pagan” quality was particularly entrenched in New York, a city of magic which Chesterton viewed with both fascination and distaste:

I disagree with the aesthetic condemnation of the modern city with its skyscrapers and sky-signs. I mean that which laments the loss of beauty and its sacrifice to utility. It seems to me the very reverse of the truth. As a matter of art for art’s sake, they

¹⁸ On Chesterton’s views on democracy and Catholicism, see Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought*, especially Chapter 2.

seem to me rather artistic. [...] Indeed I am in a mood of so much sympathy with fairy nights of this pantomime city, that I should be almost sorry to see social sanity and a sense of proportion return to extinguish them (58).¹⁹

From a purely “artistic” viewpoint, skyscrapers and sky-signs might represent beauty, but from the standpoint of a social critic, their conspicuous presence signifies the rise of business corporations announcing the victory of antidemocracy. Chesterton bitterly concluded that the beauty of New York, arising out of capitalistic exploitation was indeed nothing but a heap of trash:

[W]hen I say that the Republic of the Age of Reason is now a ruin, I should rather say that at its best it is a ruin. At its worst it has collapsed into a death-trap or is rotting like a dunghill. What is the real Republic of our day as distinct from the ideal Republic of our fathers, but a heap of corrupt capitalism crawling with worms; with those parasites, the professional politicians? (172)

In Chesterton’s bleak vision of New York, beauty has irrevocably fallen into a state of waste. Chesterton thus maintained a disillusioned persona in order to unveil the illusionary nature of the metropolis and to confront the outcome of corrupt capitalism that produced only rubbish, “a heap” and “a dunghill.”

Chesterton shared Niebuhr’s assumption that nationwide secularization was the source of excessive materialism and robust social stratification; each believed these developments went against their own understandings of equality under Christianity. However, while Niebuhr saw the potential in fetish worship as an alternative form of transcendence that could not be wholly contained in Christian theology, Chesterton

¹⁹ William Leach offers an insightful analysis of the way in which Chesterton viewed the glittering cityscape of New York in *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 346-347.

viewed this “Pagan” quality as to be an impediment to a democratic ideal. The magical atmosphere of urban life, as exemplified in advertisements and skyscrapers, was more delusional than imaginative.

Chesterton’s disillusionment thus sharply puts into question Niebuhr’s recourse to primitivism: how can a pristine sense of “wonder” be recuperated in a society that keeps manufacturing delusional images of affluence in the wasteland of democracy? As we shall see in the next section, the same issue is at stake in Fitzgerald’s fiction, in which primitive religion figures as a sustainable form of faith.

Significantly, Fitzgerald often placed primitive settings side by side with those of the medieval, and while his main protagonists usually embrace the grandeur of medievalism without any significant reservation, their attitudes toward primitivism remains rather ambivalent, containing both sympathy and estrangement. Although readings of Fitzgerald have mostly focused on the author’s proclivity for promoting medievalism,²⁰ arguing that Fitzgerald’s longing for premodern culture signals his disillusionment with contemporary society, I suggest that his investment in primitivism is ultimately all the more telling, for it shows the centrality of recovering faith in Fitzgerald’s writings.

* * *

²⁰ The most comprehensive analysis of the issue is by Kim Moreland, *The Medievalist Impulse in American Literature: Twain, Adams, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway*, especially Chapter 4. Moreland focuses on Fitzgerald’s devotion to the courtly love tradition and his conviction that such kind of love is impossible to sustain in modern America, a conviction which turned into disillusionment. See also T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, especially Chapter 5, for the widespread vogue of Catholic art in the U.S. at the century’s turn.

Fitzgerald's treatment of "primitive people" underwent a signal transformation from negative to positive as his career matured. As seen in his 1922 short story, "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," Fitzgerald's earlier works tend to view primitivism as indicative of anomie caused by modernization.²¹ The story is a slapstick fairy tale of a dazzling romance experienced by a boy named John, a fictional version of the teenage Fitzgerald. Prior to the scene of John's arrival at the diamond mountain, Fitzgerald describes a deserted village called "Fish" and its inhabitants' fascination with "the Transcontinental Express from Chicago" that takes John to his millionaire schoolmate's residence on the mountain (185). The village of Fish is depicted as "minute, dismal, and forgotten," and its inhabitants "a race apart [. . .] like some species developed by an early whim of nature, which on second thought had abandoned them to struggle and extermination" (185). As the living remnants of a superseded primitive culture, the villagers are incapable of establishing any organized religions, including Christianity. But this does not keep them from having faith. Indeed, just looking at the transcontinental express with "anemic wonder" has become "a sort of cult" that has "no altar, no priest, no sacrifice" (185). This reference to Catholic rituals serves to highlight the peculiar mindset of "the cult" that worships a non-ecclesiastical object, the express train.²² The equation of

²¹ Other earlier works of Fitzgerald that problematize the excessive ritualism of Catholicism are "The Ordeal," "Benediction," and "Absolution." The fact that "Absolution" (a story of a young boy who cannot believe in the act of confession) was originally part of *Gatsby* suggests the novel's latent impulse to move beyond the realm of Catholic formality. On Fitzgerald's fraught relationship with Catholicism, see Halsey, especially Chapter 7.

²² In *Freud, Religion, and the Roaring Twenties: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Secularization in Three Novelists: Anderson, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald*, Henry Idema III quite reasonably argues that the scene shows the secularizing process of religion in the

the villagers' wonderous primitivism with an icon of modernity (the train) is counterposed with John's fascination with the medieval setting in which Percy, his schoolmate, lives. John is "enchanted by the wonders of the chateau and the valley," and also by a girl of unreal beauty. Unlike the villager's "anemic wonder," John's wonder is at first pristine and vivid in its quality, but at the story's end, a sense of disillusionment takes hold of him: "There are only diamonds in the whole world, diamonds and perhaps the shabby gift of disillusion. Well, I have that last and I will make the usual nothing of it" (216). The eventual transformation of the medievalist idyll into "the shabby gift of disillusion" indicates that the distinction between the savage and the civilized ultimately collapses through their common lack of vivacious surprise and wonder. Just as Chesterton blurred the binary between the barbarians and the moderns by turning them both into "Pagan," the early Fitzgerald's writings tend to treat primitivism as a metaphor for the enervation of modern subjectivity.

Later in his life, however, Fitzgerald sought to explore a more positive aspect of primitivism, one that offered a certain kind of religious asylum for those dispossessed of institutional faith. The so-called "Philippe stories" best illustrate Fitzgerald's leaning toward primitive religion. Written at the last stage of his life, the Philippe stories recycle the familiar motifs of medievalism and primitivism, but their approach significantly differs from that of his earlier works. Set in France in the Dark Ages (A. D. 872), the Philippe stories feature one knight's heroic endeavor to establish a feudal hierarchy in the face of various foreign threats and conspiracies. While the earlier episodes draw a clear

age of the machine (204). However, such a reading does not fully explain the reason why Fitzgerald designated those "savage" villagers as worshippers of the machine.

line between the civilized Philippe and the “barbaric” natives, the two groups become increasingly intertwined as the series progresses. In the first installment of the series, “In the Darkest Hour,” Philippe is depicted as the very embodiment of pious chivalry. His conquests of the natives are repeatedly sanctified by institutional Christianity, as is shown in his proud declaration, “I’ll do nothing without the approval of the Church” (519). When he finally obtains the rulership of the region, he is taken up “in a sudden fervor,” kneels down, and thanks God “for His goodness.”

At this point, he is a man of honor impervious to the seductions of women. But in the third and the last stories, “The Kingdom in the Dark” and “Gods of Darkness,” Philippe’s stance toward the natives shifts, moving from outward hostility to equivocal complicity, a change effected by Griselda who is a former mistress of the French king. In “The Kingdom in the Dark,” Philippe chooses to make a false oath upon when interrogated by the king about the whereabouts of Griselda. The impatient king calls for a raid on Philippe’s castle, and the ever-defiant Philippe becomes a Christian renegade as he chooses to be avenged on the king: “I took a false oath this morning, and maybe Almighty Providence doesn’t believe me any more. But some day, by God, I’ll build a fort of stone that all the kings of Christendom can’t burn or knock down!” (68).

Philippe’s decision to break away from Christian institutions (the Church and the anointed king) is described more radically in the final episode, “Gods of Darkness.” As the title suggests, the episode focuses on the cult worship that spreads among the plebeians in Philippe’s region. The cult is defined as a folk religion that existed prior to Christianity, “a pagan worship [. . .] left over from the days before [the establishment of] the Holy Word” (85). At first, Philippe decides to persecute the cult, but upon learning of

Griselda's intense devotion to the cult, he chooses to "use this cult—and maybe burn in hell forever after." Significantly, the story ends with Griselda's mocking suggestion that he build a totemic beast of half lion, half pig as a symbol of the cult (91). Griselda's joke shows her self-awareness of belonging to the religious minority, and the way she materializes her faith into the totem shows Fitzgerald's propensity toward material spirituality that is essentially hostile to Christian institutions. As Peter Hays aptly notes, Fitzgerald carefully revised the last story to emphasize a positive aspect of the cult: that it is potentially empowering for women (300). Philippe's complicitous relationship with the cult reveals Fitzgerald's own fascination with a mode of faith that undermines civilization. While many critics regard Fitzgerald's attraction to medievalism as a symptom of his Catholic inclination, the Philippe stories—the only works of Fitzgerald that directly deals with medieval culture—shows his interest in *totem* rather than *idol*. By focusing on the formative period of Catholic feudalism, Fitzgerald exposes the oppressive nature of institutional religion, while featuring the positive potentiality of folk religion, which worships such a nonconsecrated object as a totem.

Just as Niebuhr conceived "mana" as the source of regaining wonder in the age of disillusionment, Fitzgerald regarded totem as a symbol of potent faith that idol fails to transmit. Indeed, idols in Fitzgerald's works tend to perpetuate a sense of disillusionment, as we see toward the end of his first novel in which Amory feels as if surrounded by the hallowed Gods. If the singularity of *Gatsby* resides in its significant move from disillusionment to faith, Fitzgerald accomplished it by attributing a certain kind of transcendental power to objects that should more appropriately be called fetishes rather than idols. But what kinds of objects of wonder did Fitzgerald discover amidst the "heap"

and “dunghill” of capitalist exploitation that Chesterton so abhorred? Like Chesterton, Fitzgerald was obsessed with the image of overwhelming heaps of refuse in modern America, but the ways in which he magnified their presence in *Gatsby* did not merely suggest the vile aspect of modernity, but also indicated a viable form of faith in the age of disillusionment.²³

* * *

As a number of his writings indicate, Fitzgerald frequently employed imageries of rubbish to express dissatisfaction with his own short stories, thereby distinguishing them from his book-length novels, including *Gatsby*. In *The Beautiful and Damned*, one promising writer says with self-deprecation that he “write[s] trash” after his debut (150). Obviously, this remark refers to Fitzgerald’s own notorious party life, which forced him to produce a series of short stories to make a living. A similar comment appears in one of his letters, written just prior to the completion of *Gatsby*: “I’ve done about 10 pieces of horrible junk in the last year tho [sic] I can never republish or bear to look at—cheap and without the spontaneity of my first work. But the novel [*Gatsby*] Im [sic] sure of” (101). In another letter, Fitzgerald used the same negative images of trash to express the success of his creative imagination in writing *Gatsby*: “So in my new novel I’m thrown directly on purely creative work—not trashy imaginings as in my stories but the sustained imagination of a sincere and yet radiant world” (67). For Fitzgerald, “*the novel*” was the

²³ My reading of *Gatsby* may align itself with the ongoing revisionist approaches to the issue of primitivism in modernist art. Unlike the earlier interpretations which attacked modernists’ treatments of primitivism as a malignant form of cultural appropriation (see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*), more recent works like Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, eds, *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism* present more nuanced analyses of the reciprocity of modernism and primitive cultures.

place where his creativity (what he termed as “*the* sustained imagination”) had integrity, whereas his short stories remained mere repositories of “trashy imaginings.” However, it is my belief that *Gatsby* is a novel studded with “trashy imaginings,” and that the accumulation of “trashy imaginings” which various protagonists envision paradoxically constitutes “the sustained imagination” of the novel.

Exerting a regenerative power at pivotal moments of the text, trashy imaginings emerge as masses of immaterial objects called heaps. The novel’s most prominent instance of trashy heaps is “a valley of ashes,” the socially degraded area of New York where Wilson and Myrtle live. Nick calls this wasteland “ashheaps” (we should recall the fact that one of the candidates for the novel’s title was “Among Ash-Heaps and Millionaires”), and he describes the valley as a territory protected by some divine but monitory power:

This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (21)

In this inverted version of the Edenic idyll, the divine agent who executes the power of creation turns out to be yet another figure of trash: the discarded advertisement of T. J. Eckleburg.²⁴ In Fitzgerald’s version of the dunghill of modern civilization, to adopt

²⁴ Various critics argue about the pastoral elements in *Gatsby* and equate them with the sense of disillusionment that Fitzgerald supposedly suffered. In their analyses, Fitzgerald’s parodic use of fairytale motifs functions as proof of his pessimistic vision of modernity, a world in which the American dream has become as otherworldly as a fairy tale. See Peter Hays, “*Gatsby*, Myth, Fairy Tale, and Legend”, and also Laura Barrett, “From Wonderland to Wasteland: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the New American Fairy Tale.”

Chesterton's phrase, dead matters becomes the source of animation. While the dominant secular and religious discourses view ashes as dead matter (the secular as the end point of commodity circulation, the religious as a dead body), Fitzgerald endows ashes with the power of creation, just as he does with Eckleburg, which seems to lead an afterlife far more meaningful than its original function as an advertisement. The ashheaps and Eckleburg thus signal an idiosyncratic logic of animation within the novel that is precisely the opposite of Chesterton's bleak view of modern America. In *Gatsby*, those worthless objects within the culture of consumption ultimately turn out to be the most productive.

As is clearly shown in Tom Buchanan's obsession with racialist pseudo-science, the rationalistic vision registered in the novel perceives trashy heaps negatively—heaps that includes not only masses of discarded objects but also discarded human beings, the emergent social group that becomes a threat to the dominant class with its reproductive capabilities. Influenced by a book called "The Rise of the Colored Empires," Tom fears that "the white race [. . .] will be utterly submerged" by the population increase of the formerly-colonized nations in Asia and Africa. White-supremacist hegemony is violently shaken by those "colored" people, and as a result, "[c]ivilization's going to pieces" (14). By imagining the consequence of such foreign threats as a victory of racially inferior masses, Tom envisions a similar landscape of ashheaps: just as the valley of ashes is the sum total of discarded objects, "the colored empires" appear to Tom as the heaps of racial abjection. Considering the fact that Tom rationalizes his racist view with science—he insists that the book is "all scientific stuff" (14)—heaps in the novel emerge not merely

as the debris of consumer culture but also as a projection, or symptom, of the racial logic promulgated through scientific rationalism.²⁵

While a proponent of science like Tom is traumatized by the imaginary heaps of racial litters, those who openly scorn such scientific racism—Daisy and Nick—view refuse heaps as things that recover a lost sense of pristine wonder. Indeed, both Daisy and Nick form a similar conception of what counts as “beautiful,” an adjective that surfaces when they face rubbish heaps. In the case of Daisy, we should note that her personality is modeled on a classic example of the American flirt, Henry James’s Daisy Miller,²⁶ a heroine constantly accused by James’s narrator/protagonist Winterbourne of being “a little American flirt”:

Winterbourne felt a superior indignation at his own lovely fellow-countrywoman’s not knowing the difference between a spurious gentleman and a real one. [. . .] Would a nice girl—even allowing for her being a little American flirt—make a rendezvous with a presumably low-lived foreigner? (89-90)

Not unlike Tom, with his xenophobic obsession, Winterbourne becomes exasperated by Daisy’s outright flirtation with a man whom he considers a social, and racial, inferior. Winterbourne decides that Daisy is not “a nice girl” but “a little flirt,” for she seems to be obsessed with accumulating romantic relationships without paying much attention to the social status of her dating partners.

²⁵ Tom’s anxiety might be seen as an expression of the collective fantasy widely shared among the dominant class, most famously pronounced by Theodore Roosevelt’s address on “race suicide.” See, Bederman, Chapter 5.

²⁶ In a very different vein, Bryan Washington presents a comparative analysis of *Gatsby* and *Daisy Miller* in *The Politics of Exile: Ideology in Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Baldwin*, especially in Chapter 2.

This quantity-over-quality attitude toward men can also clearly be seen in Fitzgerald's Daisy. In her premarital days at Louisville, Daisy had been notorious for dating soldiers indiscriminately until she met Gatsby. Soon after Gatsby's departure from the town, Daisy resumed her flirtatious ways, since the long-distance relationship with Gatsby caused great strain. As Jordan Baker describes it, the men Daisy hung around with at that time were obviously sexually less attractive than those she used to date: they are "flat-footed, short-sighted young men in town, who couldn't get into the army at all" (60). Daisy is thus the mirror image of her partner, Tom, in that both have a tendency to become obsessed with accumulation; however, they assume contrasting attitudes toward it. While Tom is horrified by his racialized fears of quantity over quality (i.e. the racially inferior overtaking the superior), Daisy positively craves a sexualized version of the same thing (i.e. she doesn't care whether a man is attractive; at least, not as long as she has a number of other male suitors).

Given this logic, it is not surprising that the scene in which Daisy achieves the utmost emotional height in the novel involves a description of the formation of a heap consisting of Gatsby's shirts. While critics have emphasized the sacramental aspect of Gatsby's heaping shirts, I want to suggest that the transcendental element of the scene is not predicated on Catholic conceptions of sacred objects but on the transformative quality of a heap that turns valuable commodities into a disorderly mass. Before Nick describes Gatsby tossing them into a heap, Gatsby explains that they are the latest imports from England. As if to demonstrate their high market-value, the shirts are stored in a cabinet with almost geometrical precision, "piled like bricks in a dozen high" (73). However,

these expensive garments undergo a qualitative transformation as Gatsby throws them onto his bed one by one, creating a heap:

He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.

“They’re such beautiful shirts,” she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. “It makes me sad because I’ve never seen such—such beautiful shirts before.” (74)

Struck with the beauty of the shirts, Daisy bursts into tears of admiration, a curious reaction considering the fact that, with her wealthy upbringing, the sight of gorgeous shirts must have appeared almost too familiar. However, instead of being underwhelmed by Gatsby’s naive display of sartorial wealth, Daisy is immensely moved by it, precisely because his act captures the moment in which the “pile” of brick-like shirts transforms itself into “the soft rich heap.” The comparison of the neatly arranged shirts to a brick-like pile characterizes them as somewhat stiff and rigid: so compartmentalized and homogenized that they exemplify neatly packaged, mass-produced commodities. In contrast, the heap of shirts created as Gatsby throws them is described as soft, malleable, disorderly, and colorful, as is clearly seen from the series of patterns and colors introduced in the passage. It is this transformative process—the square-shaped folded shirts turning into a “many colored disarray”—that elicits Daisy’s feverish response. And no one is better suited to appreciate the beauty of the heap than Daisy, an exquisite case of the American flirt who esteems variety over uniformity. And the sadness that follows her enthusiastic appreciation of the beautiful shirt-heap may derive from the fact that, as a

married woman, Daisy can no longer enjoy the life of a flirt as much as she could in her youth. Gatsby's act of transforming a pile into a heap thus allows Daisy to re-experience vicariously the pleasure of the past, and the very sensuous way she reacts to the heap takes her into the realm of beauty.

If Daisy's flirtatious aesthetics appreciates the sensuousness of the heap, Nick's aesthetic judgment considers heaps to be objects full of wonder. What appears beautiful for Nick is the sight of New York seen from the Queensboro Bridge, "the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money" (54). Just as Daisy senses beauty in the shirt-heap that is born out of Gatsby's illegally earned money, Nick is arrested by the sight of the city, believing that it visualizes the vain desires of a metropolis in the shape of "white heaps and sugar lumps." After imaginatively materializing the corrupt nature of capitalism into heaps, Nick goes on to aestheticize them: "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (54). The city-as-heaps is beautiful since it is always "seen for the first time," never failing to evoke wonder within the viewer's mind.

If Daisy's aesthetic temperament derives from her abundantly flirtatious inclination, Nick's aestheticizing vision also reflects his characteristic approach toward people. Faithfully following his father's advice, Nick tends to "reserve all judgment," a habit that has made himself "the victim of not a few veteran bores" (5). As a result of his constant exposure to "the intimate revelations of young men," Nick was "unjustly accused of being a politician" during his college years (5). His relentless engagements with "not a few veteran bores" thus bring him unwittingly close to Daisy's promiscuous

attitude toward men: Nick is a politician as much as Daisy is a flirt. Although he never hesitates to pronounce his repugnance toward the bores, he is also irresistibly attracted to them. At Myrtle's party, Nick tries to separate himself from the rest of the attendants, whom he considers to be a bunch of drunkards, but the harder he attempts to maintain his distance, the more he is allured by the bric-a-brac of human affairs:

Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (85)

It is when his urge to escape from the skewed situation reaches its climax (his mind hovering outside Myrtle's apartment) that Nick comes fully to appreciate "the variety of life." What lies underneath Nick's contradictory economy of affects—what repulses him most turns out to be most enchanting—is a sense of wonder, as embodied in his imaginary figure of a streetwalker "looking up and wondering."

In his useful theorization of wonder, Phillip Fisher notes that the English word "wonder" preserves the connection between intellectual curiosity ("I wonder if. . .") and a sensuous pleasure of amazement at an object. Encompassing both realms of intellect and corporeality, wonder becomes an affect deeply responsive to the aesthetic qualities of things, as Fisher suggests: "wonder [is a feeling] taken in the aesthetic sense of admiration, delight in the qualities of a thing" (11). By assigning an intellectual curiosity

to the imaginary onlooker with whom he identifies (“wondering”), Nick can feel the aesthetic sense of wonder (he is “enchanted”).²⁷

Nick’s susceptibility to the heap of repulsive bores culminates in his only compliment to Gatsby, a man Nick introduces at the novel’s outset as a character “who represent[s] everything” to which Nick gives his “unaffected scorn” (5):

“They’re a rotten crowd,” I shouted across the lawn. “You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.”

I’ve always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end.

By lumping together all those people surrounding Gatsby and regarding them with intense contempt, Nick’s compliment rhetorically generates a heap made of corrupt people. He then goes on to say that Gatsby is *worth* the heap itself, a curious compliment because, literally speaking, it is dubious whether one would feel grateful of being compared to a human-heap (“the whole damn bunch put together”). However, for Nick and Daisy, what is worthy of compliment is actually those worthless objects amassed in a heap. It is when an object becomes “rotten” or loses its object-as-commodity status that an alternative form of collective beauty appears in the shape of heaps.

²⁷ Other insightful theories on wonder include Caroline Walker Bynum, “Wonder”; Lorraine Daston and Susan Parks, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*. The ending of the latter book includes a telling remark on wonder, a claim that it became a repressed emotion after the Enlightenment swept away all the elements of magic: “One cannot imagine a diarist of the social and literary stature of Samuel Pepys—Leonard Woolf, say, or Edmund Wilson—faithfully recording monsters he read about or saw. To be a member of a modern elite is to regard wonder and wonders with studied indifference; enlightenment is still in part defined as the anti-marvelous. But deep inside, beneath tasteful and respectable exteriors, we still crave wonders” (368).

Nick's conception of beauty connotes a certain kind of religiosity that Gatsby firmly embraces, and, with its association with pejorative adjectives, this sacred beauty that Nick describes is strongly evocative of heaps: "He [Gatsby] was a son of God [. . .] and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (78). Beauty is defined as something of great magnitude ("vast"), crude in its taste ("vulgar"), and trashy in its quality ("meretricious"). In short, the heap is the materialization of beauty itself, and Gatsby's contiguous relationship to various kinds of heaps places him under God's reign.

The transcendental element of heaps presents itself most forcefully in the Valley of Ashes, where George Wilson, the shadowy double of Gatsby, identifies himself as God's missionary. After his wife's untimely death, Wilson experiences a moment of conversion as he witnesses the discarded advertisement of T. J. Eckleburg:

Wilson's glazed eyes turned out to the ashheaps, where small gray clouds took on fantastic shapes and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind.

"I spoke to her [Myrtle]," he muttered, after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. [...]"

Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.

Convinced that Myrtle's death was not an accident but a murder, Wilson vows vengeance, his eyes intently fixed on what he considers to be the very embodiment of God himself. This radical transformation of Wilson—from the inane, almost nonhuman figure leading a kind of non-existence, to a fully determined subject—has long been neglected by critics. For instance, Greg Forster regards Wilson as the most oppressed subaltern throughout the story, claiming that he is "deprived of any vitality whatever [. . .] lacking both the

immaterial animation (spirit) that distinguishes human from nonhuman *and* the more physical, animal vitality (iron in the blood)” (147, emphasis original). To be sure, Wilson’s feeble-mindedness often makes him look like a lifeless creature; as Tom’s slighting remark goes, “He’s so dumb he doesn’t know he’s alive” (23). Not only his personality but also his physical appearance are rendered alarmingly akin to inanimate objects; he mingles “with the cement color of walls,” and with a crumbling dust: “A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity” (23). At the story’s beginning, Wilson therefore confirms Forter’s assumption that his nonhuman existence figuratively suggests his lack of vitality. However, what is absent from this reading is the fact that his proximity to nonhuman objects ultimately becomes the source of his empowerment. As his radical moment of conversion shows, Wilson achieves his utmost vitality when he willfully identifies himself with trash: ashheaps and the discarded advertisement. Wilson’s animation is effected by his full immersion into rubbish, not by extrication from it. Indeed, Wilson becomes such an obsessive bearer of trash that he eventually turns Gatsby into trash, as is seen in the way Nick discovers Gatsby’s floating body in the pool with “the cluster of [dead] leaves” (129).

It should be stressed that Wilson’s conversion experience in no way turns him into a pious churchgoer. Just before his conversion takes place, his neighbor, Michaelis tries in vain to coax him into attending the church for spiritual salvation:

“Have you got a church you go to sometimes, George? Maybe even if you haven’t been there for a long time? Maybe I could call up the church and get a priest to come over and he could talk to you, see?”

“Don’t belong to any.”

“You ought to have a church, George, for times like this. You must have gone to

church once. Didn't you get married in the church? Listen, George, listen to me. Didn't you get married in a church?"
"That was a long time ago." (125)

Having long been alienated from Christian establishments, Wilson never finds "a church" a site for regeneration. So when he calls T. J. Eckleburg "God," he apparently has no mind to conceptualize his savior as part of any religious sects. Eckleburg thus embodies a certain kind of transcendental entity that resides outside religious formalities:

"God sees everything," repeated Wilson.
"That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him. Something made him turn away from the window and look back into the room. But Wilson stood there a long time, his face close to the window pane, nodding into the twilight.

While their dialogue may indicate a clear epistemological discrepancy between the zealot and the realist, Michaelis's subsequent reaction to the advertisement shows that both of them are actually witnessing the same thing. Finding himself caught up in a gothic situation, Michaelis senses the presence of "something" that he cannot bear to watch. The mere advertisement turns into "something," becoming a fearful entity which does not belong to any institutional religions. This unnamable "something" is at once divine, and quite literally, the scum of the earth.

* * *

The fact that only Gatsby and Wilson in the novel—the two most strongly associated with heaps—turn out to be outlandishly fanatical believers of "God" suggests Fitzgerald's idiosyncratic formulation of spirituality, which is predicated on useless objects. As my reading of the Philippe stories suggests, Fitzgerald's ineradicable disbelief

in the formalities of the Catholic Church led him to the form of belief that Niebuhr proposed, namely, to find a recourse in older forms of religion that worship those unconsecrated objects of divinity we call the fetishes.

In *Gatsby*, the ubiquitous presence of heaps and the transcendental power of T. J. Eckleburg clearly suggest Fitzgerald's fetishistic impulse. Stripped of any exchange- or use-value, heaps and Eckleburg reject reification and insist on their untranscended materiality. The recalcitrant nature of trash can, in turn, become a source of its divinity, as Tomoko Masuzawa succinctly puts it:

[F]etishism as a category is repeatedly and consistently characterized as inchoate, erratic, and unprincipled. In effect, fetishism is said to be no more than an incidental assortment of "the worship of odds and ends of rubbish," a misguided adoration of objects that are intrinsically worthless, such as "stones, shells, bones, and such like things"—in other words, "casual objects which, for some reason or other, *or it may be for no reason at all*, were considered endowed with exceptional powers." (248, emphasis original)

Fetish emerges out of the erratic attribution of divine power to rubbish. Just as Wilson misrecognizes the discarded advertisement as God, Gatsby's intense love for Daisy is precariously founded on his unruly imagination, which finally vanishes as he meets her after the marriage: "the colossal vitality of [Gatsby's] illusion [. . .] had gone beyond her, beyond everything" (76). Once the object of "colossal significance," the green light of the East Egg has suddenly lost its symbolic status, "his count of enchanted objects [has] diminished by one" (74). Like Amory in *This Side of Paradise*, Gatsby cannot sustain a sense of enchantment through idolization.

But as we have seen, enchanted objects do persist throughout the story, not in the form of a feminine idol but embodied as those trashy objects that stand outside both the

capitalist marketplace and religious institutions. Following Weber, if disenchantment is the definitive temperament of modernity, those heaps in *Gatsby* manifest themselves as re-enchanting objects within the rationalized secular world. As Michael Saler points out, enchantment is the nemesis of rationality, and thus condemned as “residual, subordinate ‘other’ to the modernity’s rational, secular, and progressive tenets” (695). As an affect déclassé, Saler continues, enchantment aligns itself to those other subordinates of modernity, namely “wonder and surprise” (695).²⁸ Here, we should recall that Gatsby’s initial reaction to discovering his own love for Daisy is that of surprise: “He knew that Daisy was extraordinary, but he didn’t realize just how extraordinary a ‘nice’ girl could be. [. . .] ‘I can’t describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport’” (119). What lies at the core of Gatsby’s love for Daisy is an indescribable “surprise,” the “extraordinary” quality of Daisy that he finds himself marveling at.

Although Gatsby’s love for Daisy ultimately fails, the nature of his love is reincarnated into various kinds of heaps that trigger feelings of enchantment and wonder. Indeed, the positive tone that permeates the novel’s ending emanates from such a regenerated sense of wonder through the accretion of trash. Nick’s final meditation on Gatsby’s wonder culminates in the hallucinatory vision of the New World made up of a heap:

²⁸ On the intersectionality of enchantment, wonder, and magic in modernity, see: Peter Pels, *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*; Gustavo Benavides, “Magic, Religion, Materiality”; Mark Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment*; Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*; Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*; Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*.

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (143)

If Gatsby's tragedy exists in his failure to find within Daisy "something commensurate to his capacity for wonder," Nick, at least vicariously, recuperates this wonderful "something" by exerting his visionary imagination of turning things into a heap. Just as New York becomes wondrous when it turns into "heaps and sugar-lumps" in Nick's eyes, "the inessential houses" dissolve into marvelous objects as they lose their contours and re-surface as "the old island." This visual transformation follows exactly the same process of Gatsby's shirt-heap, in which the brick-like shirts lose their folds and melt into "many colored disarray." And, just as Daisy cannot help bursting into tears upon discovering the beauty of the shirt-heap, Nick is "compelled into an aesthetic contemplation" that "the old island" provokes. Heap thus becomes generative of a certain kind of aestheticism that modernity abolished, namely, the aestheticism of wonder and enchantment.

Fitzgerald's aestheticism can be regarded as what Terry Eagleton terms "a discourse of the body" (13). According to Eagleton, while rational thinking aims at constructing abstract universal laws, aesthetics closely attends to concrete particulars that we perceive in our lived, embodied, everyday experiences:

The aesthetic, then, is simply the name given to that hybrid form of cognition which can clarify the raw stuff of perception and historical practice, disclosing the inner

structure of the concrete. Reason as such pursues its lofty ends far removed from such lowly particulars. (16)

The realm of beauty associates itself with the kind of materiality that resists abstraction, which explains the reason why heaps in *Gatsby* become objects of “aesthetic contemplation.”

In an important sense, Eagleton’s formulation of aesthetics as rooted in “lowly particulars” echoes Tony Tanner’s well-known discussion about the centrality of wonder in American literature in *The Reign of Wonder*. Through a series of insightful readings of various American writers, ranging from Emerson to Fitzgerald and Walker Percy, Tanner argues that American writers tend to oscillate between “the unbiased notation of concrete particulars” and “the haste towards generalizations” (338). According to Tanner, the chief achievement of the best works of American literature exists in their ability to suture those two conflicting impulses by discovering wonder within seemingly insignificant everyday objects, including rubbish: “The scrap from the garbage can—the pebble by your foot: it is yet another expression of the recurring American resolution to start with the nearest and next, the potluck of the day, the small proximate particular” (354).²⁹ Tanner’s insight is useful in thinking about the centrality of heaps and wonder in Fitzgerald’s fetishizing vision, a vision which confers an accumulation of discarded objects with divinity without resorting to facile idolization. In other words, it is to recognize beauty in a dunghill, to

²⁹ Tanner goes on to praise Fitzgerald’s treatment of *Gatsby* for “never [falling] into cynical disillusion,” but his insistence that Fitzgerald “explore[d] the *limits* of wonder” seems to align itself with those criticisms that somewhat circumscribe Fitzgerald’s scope of wonder (360, emphasis original). Rather, as I have suggested, Fitzgerald’s ingenuity exists in his attempt to regain wonder even after the disappearance of idols.

transform a heap into mana, thereby avoiding blindness from the devastating aspect of modernity.

* * *

In Budd Schulberg's *The Disillusioned*, a thinly-veiled autobiographical fiction published in 1950 that recounts his bizarre encounter with Fitzgerald in the thirties (named Manley Halliday in the novel), Fitzgerald (i.e. "Manley") is described as a man surrounded with heaps of trash, unable to clean his room without the help of his lover, Ann:

Manley was sprawled on the couch in the other room, surrounded by familiar debris, the evening papers (along with yesterday's as well), magazines, half-read mail, library books. [. . .]

At least once a week Ann devoted an hour to restoring some kind of order to this accumulation. But she accused him of preferring the disarray. Although his habits inevitably produced the clutter, it really disturbed him, as a tangible expression of his being at loose end. He was simply unable to extricate himself. He had never learned where to put things. (81)

As the novel's title tellingly suggests, Fitzgerald is depicted as an autumnal writer deeply caught in a sense of disillusionment, an affect that is materialized as heaps of trash.

Although Schulberg's fictional rendition of Fitzgerald does vividly capture the novelist's defeatist mindset, which grew more pronounced after the economic crash, *The Disillusioned* neglects the more complex stance that Fitzgerald held toward the accumulation of trash. Rather than resorting to the typically modern imagining of heaps of trash as a metaphor of disillusionment, Fitzgerald saw their potentiality for rejecting the projection of human desire (rejecting being relegated to commodity, that is), and linking them to the affect that modernity disowned: wonder. Fitzgerald thus challenged

the progressivist assumption that trash is an unusable materiality, and that is an irrational temperament of primitive subjectivity. By making heaps into fetishes, Fitzgerald sought to reinvigorate both spirituality and the materiality of things, both of which were, as Niebuhr points out, rapidly fading from the world of scientific rationalism.

As fetish, heaps retain the unexchangeable quality of things, a quality to which, according to Eagleton, our body is most responsive. As is seen in Daisy's rapturous interaction with Gatsby's shirt-heaps, heaps become aesthetic objects that provoke sensuous delight. The penultimate line of the novel clearly points to such jouissance: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's not matter—" (144). According to the textual history of *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's intention to emphasize the sensuousness of believing was so strong that, when his editor advised him to replace the word "orgastic" into something less sexual, Fitzgerald refused, insisting that "it expresses exactly the intended ecstasy" (qtd. in Bruccoli, *The Great Gatsby* liv).

By featuring the ecstatic joy of believing at the novel's end, Fitzgerald avoided offering the sort of unabashedly disillusioned vision of modernity that G. K. Chesterton did. The novel is certainly inundated with commodities, but its investment in materiality is not the kind of materialism that both Niebuhr and Chesterton lamented. It is the materiality of things that achieves divine power because of its abject status in commodity circulation. What Fitzgerald excavated from ashheaps was thus a potentially sustainable form of religiosity at a time when traditional religion had lost its substance. The fact that both Fitzgerald and Niebuhr brought up permutations of fetish—totem and mana—as alternatives to Christian worship shows their shared interest in a certain kind of

materiality that is at once rubbish and spiritual. Standing at the periphery of value systems, Jonathan Culler notes, rubbish has “no use-value, nor any value in an economic system of exchange” (5). It is the non-significative quality of rubbish that Fitzgerald features in *Gatsby*, an aspect that obtains transcendence by rejecting any attributions of utility whatsoever. The elusive green light may vanish at some point in history, when modernity relegates enchantment to the realm of superstition, but Fitzgerald recuperates it by aestheticizing trashy accumulations of objects, and calling them heaps.

Coda: A Nameless Religious Experience and Material Things

In 1922, amidst the heated campaign against evolutionism led by William Jennings Bryan, John Dewey expressed concerns about the general reticence regarding the campaign on the part of intellectuals. Dewey argued that, rather than assuming an attitude of “mingled amusement and irritation” (303), intellectuals should have seriously interrogated the significance of Bryan’s overwhelming popularity within mainstream society. He considered the phenomenon indicative of the profound degree to which evangelicalism was a part of American modernity.

According to Dewey, evangelical Christianity formed the moral basis of “the masses,” those “middle-class” people who made up the dominant social group after the end of the frontier which was announced in 1890. They were the chief supporters of Bryan’s campaign against science “in favor of obscurantism and intolerance”:

What we call the middle classes are for the most part the church-going classes, those who have come under the influence of evangelical Christianity. These persons form the backbone of philanthropic social interest, of social reform through political action, of pacifism, of popular education. They embody and express the spirit of kindly goodwill toward classes which are at an economic disadvantage and toward other nations, especially when the latter show any disposition toward a republican form of government. (303)

While acknowledging the wide range of contributions made by middle-class reformist zeal, Dewey ends this passage by pointing to the limit of their social engagements. He considers Bryan “a symptom and symbol of the forces which are most powerful in

holding down the intellectual level of American life” (304). For Dewey, what was symptomatic about Bryan was that his vehement attack on contemporary science derived from the fear of radical thinking, a subversive mode of inquiry which might potentially destabilize the orderliness of “a precariously attained civilization”:

He [=Bryan] does not represent the frontier democracy of Jackson’s day. But he represents it toned down and cultivated as it exists in fairly prosperous villages and small towns that have inherited the fear of whatever threatens the security and order of a precariously attained civilization, along with pioneer impulses to neighborliness and decency. Attachment to stability and homogeneity of thought and belief seem essential in the midst of practical heterogeneity, rush, and unsettlement. We are not Puritans in our intellectual heritage, but we are evangelical because of our fear of ourselves and of our latent frontier disorderliness. (304)

Dewey defined evangelicalism as a fearful reaction against heterogeneity, which threatened institutional boundaries that American modernity sought to establish. As the subject of the last sentence—“we”—suggests, the fear seemed to him thoroughly pervasive among those living in the 1920s, including not only “the masses” but also intellectuals like himself.

Dewey did not so much seek to criticize babbittry; rather, he tried to problematize the intellectuals’ lack of self-awareness, their inadvertent self-distancing from a sense of anxiety which was symptomatically shown in Bryan’s evangelical social reform movement. Unless they faced the unsavory fact that evangelicalism was constitutive of their own academic milieu, the intellectuals’ democratic aspirations would turn out as delusional as Bryan’s populist tactics:

We have been so taught to respect the beliefs of our neighbors that few will respect the beliefs of a neighbor when they depart from forms which have become

associated with aspiration for a decent neighborly life. This is the illiberalism which is deep-rooted in our liberalism. No account of the decay of the idealism of the progressive movement in politics or of the failure to develop an intelligent and enduring idealism out of the emotional fervor of the war, is adequate unless it reckons with this fixed limit to thought. (305)

Coming to terms with radical otherness is contingent upon accepting evangelicalism as a defining characteristic of modern Americans. Rather than assuming a detached attitude to religious fervor, intellectuals should actively engage with middle-class people's desperate craving for faith, which formed an exclusionary system that authenticated a certain mode of belief and repressed others modes.³⁰

My dissertation has aimed to respond to Dewey's call for a serious inquiry into a certain kind of faith that people in the early twentieth century experienced in an everyday context. I have offered a type of analysis that literary critics have long been reluctant to undertake, in the face of cultural attitudes they have typically preferred not to deal with. Gauri Viswanathan argues that the reason why literary studies tends to shun topics of religion is that literature assumed its role as a successor to religion in conveying "the values and direction once supplied by a religious ethos" (466):

While the subject [of religion] has engaged historians, sociologists, and religious scholars for a long time, yielding a vast and proliferating body of work [. . .] the

³⁰ Dewey's critique of "a decent neighborly life" finds resonance in Judith Butler's call for "cohabitation." Drawing a distinction from neighborliness, Butler defines "cohabitation" as a way to accept "the nonchosen character" of our coming into being: "we not only live with those we never chose, and to whom we may feel no social sense of belonging, but we are also obliged to preserve those lives and the plurality of which they form a part" (Butler 84). It is important to note that both Dewey and Butler stress the essential heterogeneity of human communities by way of critiquing organized religion. Butler suggests that Protestant Christianity was the essential component of secularization in modern America, a dominant ideology that formed a public sphere and ostracizing other forms of religion into private realms.

field of literary studies has not witnessed a corresponding breadth of scholarship. This may be partly due to literature's self-definition as a secular vehicle for ideas whose possible religious origins were subsequently effaced as religious sensibility became absorbed into aesthetic form and imagery, especially in modernist writing. (466)

While I wholeheartedly agree with Viswanathan's claim that literary criticism has not yet fully investigated religious issues, as its neighboring fields have done, I do not think modernist writing merely incorporated religious sensibility into secular aesthetic experimentations. To be sure, modernist writers—such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dreiser, West and Faulkner—showed skepticism toward organized religion, but they never considered religion to be anterior to, or supplanted by, literary aesthetics. That, in other words, is an attitude grafted onto their works by later critics.

What I have traced throughout my dissertation are the very ways in which modernist writers posited as their central project a viable form of spirituality no longer available in mainstream Christianity. Initially, when I came up with this topic, my interest revolved around modernist representations of organized religion. I was struck by modernist writers' tendency to include evangelical figures in their novels, and I thought (or so it seemed at a glance) this was merely to lampoon those figures as embodiments of the corrupt nature of modern Christianity. But as I continued to work on my chosen materials, I realized that modernist writers did not end their novels with a merely dismal view of religion. Rather, they depicted a conflicting relationship between formal religion and everyday spirituality, a dialectical coupling often anchored to another dichotomy: between religious language and the nonsemantic materiality of objects. Modernist verbal experimentations can be considered a reaction against the massive proliferations of clichés caused by mass media's incessant emissions and circulations of words. As my

readings of *A Farewell to Arms* and *Miss Lonelyhearts* suggest, modernist writers seem to consider religious language a telling victim of mass media, an explicit instance of a decided enervation of the expressive power of language. What they discovered to be a potential source of transcendence in its stead was the materiality of things, the nonsemantic aspect of matters resistant to facile signification so frequently observed in mass media.

In the course of writing my dissertation, my point had shifted away from characterological functions of evangelical figures to the materiality of objects in modernist fiction. As I noted at length at the end of my first chapter, Williams offered a very provocative reading of the novel, by pointing out the significant role mass media played in turning certain verbal expressions (especially religious phrases) into mere cliché. Williams also suggested that West sought to uncover the materiality of words precisely through writing a novel about a newspaper man, *Miss Lonelyhearts*. In completing my chapter, I was struck with the fact that this suggestion was offered by none other than Williams himself, the modernist figure who was emphatically concerned with the thingness of objects, and probed, both in his poetry and prose, the way to express physical reality. It is a kind of reality in which, according to J. Hillis Miller—followed more recently by Bill Brown—“there is neither subject nor object, but a single realm in which all things are both subjective and objective at once” (Miller 7). What is intriguing about the interpenetration of subject and object in Williams’s writings—as in his extraordinary fusion of poetry and prose in *Spring and All*—is that he considered this phenomena as “a sort of nameless religious experience.” In a letter to Marianne Moore, Williams recounts that “something which occurred once when I was about twenty, a

sudden resignation to existence, a despair—if you wish to call it that, but a despair which made everything a unit and at the same time a part of myself. I suppose it might be called a nameless religious experience. I resigned, I gave up” (Miller 7). Yet in his account, the despair he experienced in his youth has a transformative quality. Unlike Mencken, who, as I note above in Chapter 3, claimed that the act of prayer debilitates human will since it signifies a complete renunciation of self, Williams believed that the renunciation of self brings about a new kind of unity with the other, and this new interaction between subject and object is what he considered an alternative spiritual experience.

Williams’s nameless religious experience, it seems to me, resonates with what I have discussed in my reading of Fitzgerald and also in Upton Sinclair’s *Jungle*, that is to say, re-enchantment through disillusionment, a utopian moment that comes only after one experiences dissolution of self. In addition, Williams’s resignation of his self seems resonant with the idea of trash I have discussed throughout my dissertation. That is to say, when things are discarded and become trash, that situation comes to form a new kind of connection between things and people, a relationship that is not based on the instrumentalist human/product binary, but a more reciprocal interpenetration of things and people, which revivifies not only the thingness of objects but also the personhood of people who have been reduced, under the sway of modernity, to the state of mute objects. Finally, the aspiration of my project, in my dissertation and beyond, is to reveal and explore a hitherto underanalyzed concern of American modernist fiction by highlighting the presence spiritual manifestation of objects inscribed in the texts. By probing into the cultural and material aspects of religion in the age of modernity, I seek most broadly to contribute to the expansion of our notions of the matter of American modernist literature:

its concern with materiality and material things, and its ways of making meaning in and for a rapidly changing world.

Bibliography

- Aiken, Charles. *William Faulkner and the Southern Landscape*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.
- Allen, Joan. *Candles and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: New York UP, 1978.
- Apter, Emily and William Pietz, eds, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Barkan, Elazar, and Ronald Bush, eds. *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.
- Barnard, Rita. *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathanael West, and Mass Culture in the 1930*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Barrett, Laura. "From Wonderland to Wasteland: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the New American Fairy Tale." *Papers on Language and Literature* 42.1 (Spring 2006): 150- 179.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.
- Benavides, Gustavo. "Magic, Religion, Materiality" *Historical Reflections/ Reflexions Historiques* 23.3 (1997): 301-330.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Bleikasten, André. *Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976.
- Blotner, Joseph. *Faulkner: A Biography*. Volume One. Random House, 1974.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

- Bramen, Carrie. *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Brinkley, Alan. *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression*. New York: Knopf, 1982.
- Broughton, Panthea Reid. *William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974.
- Brown, Bill. "The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory)." *PMLA* 120. 3 (2005): 734-750.
- . *A Sense of Things: The Object of Matter in American Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.
- . "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001): 1-22.
- Bruccoli, Matthew J. Introduction. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991. ix-iv.
- . Introduction. *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985. 1-14.
- Butler, Judith. "Is Judaism Zionism?" *Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. Mendieta, Eduardo, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, eds. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. "Wonder." *American Historical Review* 102.1 (1997): 1-26.
- Callahan, John F. *The Illusions of a Nation: Myth and History in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1972.
- Cassuto, Leonard, and Clare Virginia Eby. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser*. Cassuto and Eby, eds. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004. 1-12.
- Chesterton, G. K. *What I Saw in America*. 1922. London: Anthem, 2009.
- . "Why I Am a Catholic." 1926. N. p., *The American Chesterton Society*. Web. 14 Mar. 2010.
- Chiappe, Dan, and John M. Kennedy. "Are Metaphors Elliptical Similes?" *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 29.4 (2000): 371-98.
- Cox, Karen. *Dixies Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2003.
- Crunden, Robert. *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1984.

- Cowley, Malcolm. *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation*. New York: Viking, 1956.
- Culler, Jonathan. "Junk and Rubbish: A Semiotic Approach." *Diacritics* 15.3 (Autumn 1985): 2-12.
- Daniel, Carter. "West's Revisions of *Miss Lonelyhearts*." Martin, *Nathanael West: A Collection* 52-65.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Susan Parks. *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*. New York: Zone Books, 1998.
- Daston, Lorraine. "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe." *Critical Inquiry* 18.1 (Autumn 1991): 99-124.
- Davis, Thadious. *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso. 1997.
- Derrick, Scott. "'What a Beating Feels Like': Authorship, Dissolution, Masculinity in Sinclair's *The Jungle*." *Studies in American Fiction* 23:1 (Spring 1995): 85-100.
- Dewey, John. "The American Intellectual Frontier." *The New Republic* 30:388 (May 10, 1922): 303-305.
- Dobbs, Cynthia. "'Ruin or Landmark'? Black Bodies as Lieux de Memoire in *The Sound and the Fury*." *The Faulkner Journal* 20 (Fall 2004): 35-51.
- Doyle, Don. *Faulkner's County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha*. U of North Carolina P, 2001.
- Dreiser, Theodore. *An American Tragedy*. 1925. New York: Signet, 2000.
- . *The Financier*. 1912. New York: Penguin, 2008.
- . "I Find the Real American Tragedy." 1935. *Resources for American Literary Study* 2 (Spring 1972): 5-74.
- . *Tragic America*. New York: Liveright. 1931.
- During, Simon. *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2004.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

- Edwards, Elizabeth and Janice Hart. *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Elias, Robert. *Letters of Theodore Dreiser: A Selection. Volume 2*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1959.
- Elkins, James. *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Faulkner, William. *Faulkner in the University*. Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1995.
- . *Flags in the Dust*. 1929. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- . "An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*." Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Norton 225-228.
- . *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*. Joseph Blotner, ed. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- . *The Sound and the Fury*. 1929. Second Edition. David Minter, ed. New York: Norton, 1994.
- . *The Sound and the Fury*. 1929. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Fessenden, Tracy. *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Fisher, Philip. *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Beautiful and Damned*. 1922. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- . "The Count of Darkness." *Redbook Magazine*, June 1935.
- . "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." 1922. *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. New York: Scribner, 1989. 182-216.
- . "Gods of Darkness." *Redbook Magazine*, November 1941.
- . *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- . "In the Darkest Hour." 1934. *The Price Was High*. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979. 512-529.
- . "The Kingdom in the Dark." *Redbook Magazine*, August 1935.

- . *A Life in Letters*. Ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Scribner, 1994.
- . *This Side of Paradise*. 1920. New York: Pocket Books, 1995.
- Fort, Charles. "The Book of the Damned." 1919. *The Book of the Damned: The Collected Works of Charles Fort*. New York: Tarcher, 2008. 1-310.
- . "Wild Talents." 1932. *The Book of the Damned: The Collected Works of Charles Fort*. New York: Tarcher, 2008. 841-1062.
- Forster, Greg. "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14.2 (2005): 135-70.
- Foster, Gaines. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South*. New York: Oxford, 1985.
- Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.
- Giedion, Sigfried. "The Need for a New Monument." *New Architecture and City Planning*. Ed. Paul Zucker. New Port: Books for Libraries Press, 1944.
- Giles, Paul. *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Godden, Richard. *Fictions of Capital: The American Novel from James to Mailer*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.
- Goldsmith, Meredith. "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.3 (2003): 443-68.
- Gribben, Crawford. *Writing the Rapture: Prophecy Fiction in Evangelical America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Gunn, Giles. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* and the Imagination of Wonder." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 41.2 (1973): 171-183.
- Halsey, William. *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment 1920-1940*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1980.
- Hays, Peter. "Gatsby, Myth, Fairy Tale, and Legend." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 40 (1977): 213-22.
- . "Philippe, 'Count of Darkness,' and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Feminist?" *New Essays on Fitzgerald's Neglected Stories*. Jackson Bryer, ed. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996. 291-304.

- Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. 1929. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Herbst, Josephine. "Nathanael West." Martin, *Nathanael West: A Collection* 13-30.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Hobson, Fred. *Serpent in Eden: H. L. Mencken and the South*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1974.
- Hungerford, Amy. *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion Since 1960*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.
- Huysen, Andreas. "Monumental Seduction." *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crew et al. Hanover: Dartmouth College.
- Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "Nathanael West." *Modern Critical Views: Nathanael West*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986. 11-40.
- Idema III, Henry. *Freud, Religion, and the Roaring Twenties: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Secularization in Three Novelists: Anderson, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald*. Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990.
- Jackson, Gregory. *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009.
- James, Henry. *Daisy Miller*. 1878. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*. 1902. New York: Touchstone, 1997.
- Johnson, Barbara. *Persons and Things*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2010.
- Kartiganer, Donald. "The Meaning of Form in *The Sound and the Fury*." Falkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Norton 324-343.
- . "Quentin Compson and Faulkner's Drama of the Generations." Arthur Kinney, ed. *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982.
- King, Richard H. *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980. 1990.
- Landy, Joshua, and Michael Saler, eds. *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.

- Larson, Edward J. *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Lawrence Buell, "Religion on the American Mind." *American Literary History* 19.1 (2007): 32-55.
- Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.
- Lewis, R. W. B. *Trials of the Word*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1965.
- Light, James. *Nathanael West: An Interpretive Study*. 2nd ed. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1971.
- Loren Glass, "#\$%^&*!?: Modernism and Dirty Words." *Modernism/Modernity* 14.2 (April 2007): 209-223.
- Martin, Jay. *Nathanael West: The Art of His Life*. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1970.
- , ed. *Nathanael West: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
- Matthiessen, F. O. *Theodore Dreiser*. New York: William Sloane, 1951.
- McCarragher, Eugene. *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.
- Mencken, H. L. *A Book of Prefaces*. New York: Knopf, 1918.
- . "The Sahara of the Bozart." 1920. *The American Scene: A Reader*. Huntington Cairns, ed. New York: Knopf. 1977. 157-168.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Introduction." *William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*. J. Hillis Miller, ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. 1966. 1-14.
- Moers, Ellen. *Two Dreisers: The Man and the Novelist*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1970.
- Moore, Benita. *Escape into a Labyrinth: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Catholic Sensibility, and the American Way*. New York: Garland, 1988.
- Moreland, Kim. *The Medievalist Impulse in American Literature: Twain, Adams, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1996.

- Mulvey, Laura. *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.
- Mumford, Lewis. "The Death of the Monument." *Circle*. 1937. 263-270.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. "Back to Benedict?" *The Christian Century* July 2 (1925): 860-861.
- . "Theology in a Time of Disillusionment." 1931. *Theology, History, and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings*. William Stacy Johnson, ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 1996. 102-116.
- North, Michael. *The Final Sculpture: Public Monuments and Modern Poets*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Pels, Peter. *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Pizer, Donald. *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1976.
- Polk, Noel. "Trying Not to Say: A Primer on the Language of *The Sound and the Fury*." *New Essays on The Sound and the Fury*. Noel Polk, ed. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993. 139-175.
- Posnock, Ross. "'A New World, Material without Being Real': Fitzgerald's Critique of Capitalism in *The Great Gatsby*." *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*. Scott Donaldson, ed. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984. 201-13.
- Promey, Sally. "The 'Return' of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art." *The Art Bulletin* 85.3 (September 2003): 581-603.
- Ratner, Marc. "'Anywhere Out of This World': Baudelaire and Nathanael West." Martin, *Nathanael West: A Collection* 102-9.
- Riggio, Thomas P, ed. *Dreiser-Mencken Letters. Volume 2*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1986.
- Rozelle, Lee. "Ecocritical City: Modernist Reactions to Urban Environments in *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Paterson*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 48.1 (2002): 100-15.
- Saler, Michael. "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review." *American Historical Review* 111.3 (June 2006): 692-716.
- Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-century America*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.
- Schiff, Jonathan. *Ashes to Ashes: Mourning and Social Difference in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Fiction*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2001.

- Schneider, Mark. *Culture and Enchantment*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993.
- Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006.
- Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. 1906. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- . *The Profits of Religion*. Fifth Edition. 1926. Charleston: Biblio Bazaar, 2007.
- Spyer, Patricia, ed. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Stein, Jordan and Justine Murison. "Introduction: Religion and Method." *Early American Literature* 45.1 (2010): 1-29.
- Steinmeyer, Jim. *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural*. New York: Tarcher, 2008.
- Strychacz, Thomas. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Szalay, Michael. *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000.
- Tanner, Tony. *The Reign of Wonder*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1965.
- Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.
- Veitch, Jonathan. *American Surrealism: Nathanael West and the Politics of Representation in the 1930s*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997.
- Viswanathan, Gauri. "Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy." *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008): 466-478.
- Wald, Pricilla. *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.
- Warren, Robert Penn. "Homage to Theodore Dreiser." *Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy*. Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Chelsea House, 1988. 22-37.
- Washington, Bryan. *The Politics of Exile: Ideology in Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Baldwin*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1995.
- Watson, James. "Faulkner and Theater of War." *Faulkner and War*. Noel Polk, ed. Oxford: U of Mississippi P, 2004. 20-35.
- . *William Faulkner: Self-presentation and Performance*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2000.

- West, Nathanael. "A Letter to Edmund Wilson." 1939. *Nathanael West: Novels and Other Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1997. 792-4.
- . "Miss Lonelyhearts." 1933. *Miss Lonelyhearts and the Day of the Locust*. New York: New Directions, 1969. 1-58.
- . "Miss Lonelyhearts and the Lamb." *Contact* 1.1 (1932): 80-5.
- . "Some Notes on Miss L." 1932. *Nathanael West: Novels and Other Writings*. 401-2.
- Williamson, Joel. *William Faulkner and Southern History*. New York, Oxford UP, 1995.
- Williams, William Carlos. "A New American Writer." Martin, *Nathanael West: A Collection* 48-9.
- . "Sordid? Good God!" *Contempo* 3.3 (1933): 5-8.
- Wilson, Charles. *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1895-1920*. Second Edition. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.
- Winberry, John. "'Lest We Forget': The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape." *Southeastern Geographer* 23.2 (November 1983): 107-121.
- Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Young, James. *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.
- . *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.
- Zanine, Louis. *Mechanism and Mysticism: The Influence of Science on the Thought and Work of Theodore Dreiser*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.
- Zola, Emile. "The Experimental Novel." 1880. *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*. Trans. Sherman, Belle. New York: Cassell Publishing, 1893. 1-56.