

**TAKE THE LAW INTO YOUR OWN HANDS:  
MODERNIST AND DETECTIVE FICTION  
IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *INTRUDER  
IN THE DUST* AND *LIGHT IN AUGUST***

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William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August* are not conventionally associated with genres of crime and detection. Nevertheless they include multiple homicides, false accusations, ethnic conflicts, feeble enforcement of the law, and a nearly total failure to carry out impartial justice within a narrative setting. Just as an ongoing controversy swirls around the topic of whether justice is meted out on the basis of equity, so unbridgeable racial disparities have adversely impacted the legal proceedings in court. In order to examine the complex interconnections between race and law, this paper reflects a modernist approach to Faulkner's works by revealing the entangled relationships between modernism and crime writing.<sup>1</sup> There is hardly any need to insist on the well-established intertwining of detective fiction and modernism. This essay will rather focus upon parsing out their literary commonalities and differences, with great attention also to investigating myths about the administration of justice in Faulkner's fictional world and to unveiling the ambiguity, which characterizes the judicial process, and which is generally shown in sharper focus on Faulkner's refreshing stance toward modernism.<sup>2</sup> This in turn will encourage an integrative perspective, which certainly expands beyond the narrow focus on "a binary opposition between 'order' and 'disorder,'" between black and white (Klages 2005: 3). In so doing, we first might be able to crack the shell of the mysterious world full of murder and quickly figure out "whodunit(s)", and then simply pause, before we envision the

modernist version of an easy-to-crack “whodunit” and succumb to the lure of the recent popularity of the aphorism: “let the punishment fit the crime” in ethics and law, and to profoundly ruminate on the fact that Faulkner’s stories have a flair for making a happy ending on a sardonic note, it is pretty clear that, upon reviewing arbitrary arrest, torture, and discriminatory enforcement of the law, we should perhaps mull over the theoretical and practical limitations of modernism, whose binary construction is not as solidly grounded as we have presumed.

It should come to no surprise that at the end of *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August* there can be undercurrents, churning beneath a fulfilling sense of closure, which often do not get talked about, while the conventional detective genre tries to keep its literary mission alive and growing by restoring social order and promoting independent justice in a changing world. Certainly, the emphasis placed upon assuring the reader of a happy closure by putting things back to normal has become one of the defining features of modernism. However, Faulkner, though sometimes classified as a modernist, may not have had any intention of echoing the moral preaching, maintaining an ironic tone essential to crime literature, or of fostering greater social harmony in a fictional universe. Faulkner, to be sure, had a higher calling than becoming a mainstay writer for classic crime fiction. Hence, ideals of compensatory justice displace those of retribution as a justification of punishment. In consequence, Faulkner’s fiction has a shocking effect in its sharp and muted irony, so either within or outside the parameters of the law, there are vivid depictions of the roles, played by race, gender, religion, and social class, as determinant factors at various stages of the criminal justice process. On the one hand, Faulkner’s unconventionality does not stop here with unsolved homicides, incomplete detection, weak enforcement of the law, and dysfunctional systems of justice, for he seemed to cater to “the expectations of the reader” by cracking murder cases and by restoring the social fabric of a community (Tani 1984: 40). Nevertheless, to the general public, modernism, detective fiction, and two of Faulkner’s novels, on the other hand, probably appear to be a literary amalgam with unplumbed depths, by virtue of the fact that even some widely read and respected crime novelists have done their best to bolster their fiction by claiming alliance with modernists exclusively in order to raise their literary standing amid harsh criticism and degrading remarks.<sup>3</sup> This literary tendency to exalt integration into a mainstream trend makes me wonder if Faulkner went with the flow, and how he managed to curb any desperate tendencies to kick his writing up a notch, yet at the same time to carve a new path (i.e. writing detective fiction) in a “convenient territory” (i.e. a “coherent alternative to the arrogant certainty of modernism”), while the dogma that “modernists were many connoisseurs of irony”, has evolved into a vigorous worldview defense, which best accommodates the needs of the modernist culture, and which is often “found buried underneath

the highly satirical surface” by bridging the seemingly irreconcilable opposites (Hensen 2011: 2; Bell 1999: 5; Björnsson 2009: 14).

The wonder lingers on; nonetheless, perhaps more insight into the interlocking themes of *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August* reinforces my argument when no “triumph of justice” at the end, virtually dripping with irony, has set out to give readers a mystical blend of emotions, so they can never settle down in superficial peace (Tani 1984: 44). After a hypothesis gets built around the aforementioned candid observation, we wind up with the conclusion that somehow Faulkner also chose to endorse “the conventional (archivally prescribed) ending” by reinforcing “its attempt to resolve the plot in an ideologically satisfying way”, so his fiction is able to “reach a satisfying point of closure” (Spanos 1987: 20). There can be no doubt, these two novels are steeped in stereotypes and rely heavily on racial conflict to carry the plots along, although Faulkner, on some level, unveiled alternative sanctions in the criminal justice system by dissolving the use of polarization, the concise distinction between crime and justice. For instance, in a critical essay, “Faulkner, Trauma, and the Uses of Crime Fiction”, Greg Forter asks us not only to decipher “the enigma of Joe’s racial identity”, but also to re-identify suspects in the alleged murder of Joanna. As Forter points out, “nothing in the novel is murkier than the ‘fact’ of Joe Christmas’s black blood. Everything turns on it, yet nothing proves it” (2007: 381-382). As opposed to a painstaking effort to unravel the mystery surrounding Joanna’s death, “the murder scene taunts us with the threat of solution at the mere mid-point of the novel”, so “We *cannot* know who killed Joanna for the simple reason that Faulkner does not tell us” (Forter 2007: 381). All of this boils down to the fact that Faulkner, who probably had a hard time counteracting the dominance of modernism in crime writing, ultimately “appropriated the conventions of detective fiction in order to explore” the hazards of binary thinking (Thompson 1993: 175). As a result of raising the issues with respect to the diametrical opposites for discussion, and by easy extension, confronting as well as critiquing the pervasiveness of binary thinking, Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August* share “a generic formula”, which “ultimately enforce[s]—rather than” erasing the line, ending the “conventional social-racial (and sectional) divisions” (Forter 2007: 377).

In order to review evidence of the association between modernism and detective fiction, this research paper gives rise to a fresh perspective that “in the same sense the popular detective thriller is modernist fiction’s sister-genre” (McHale 1987: 59).<sup>4</sup> The search for a newer, surer way of interpreting Brian McHale’s remarks opens the debate with a convincing comparison, which reinforces ties between modernism and detective fiction: “The detective story is epistemological in that it obviously focuses on such questions as the interpretation of evidence, the methods

of finding things out, and so on. The struggle to interpret the world is also a central theme of many modernist texts” (Horsley 2005: 2). Nonetheless, the literary ties between modernism and detective fiction seem to dissolve, on a certain level, in Faulkner’s alternative narrative world, for he might ponder over the true usefulness of “epistemological doubt —uncertainty about how we know, and what we can know” (Horsley 2005: 3). Consequently, perhaps satirical skepticism might be an idea worth exploring. This essay highlights the shift in the understanding of the encounters between modernism and detective fiction, regardless of the fact that the change has long seemed to be in eclipse but is still in the process of unfolding. That is to say: when police homicide investigations falter, then the journey for justice, on many levels, creates a culture of critique, for example combating institutional racism and “challenging the sheer arrogance of modernist epistemology”, while readers hope to discover “whodunit(s)” through “the corrosive effect of implicit bias on the presumption of innocence and the beyond a reasonable doubt standard” (Carson 2003: 16; Smith 2015: 884).

As we conclude with a look at a kind of Faulknerian cyclical and meandering quality of the narrative, certain core values of modernism, within the variety and deviation, remain constant in Faulkner’s novels, so he was able to continue his presentation of dystopian social stability with a close look at the theory and practice of modernism. Thus it is that Faulkner’s writing ultimately brings a surprising twist, which aims to help individual readers move forward with “a sense of an ending”, even though his novels convey a great deal of bitter sarcasm directed at racial inequality and legal loopholes, due to which murder cases are almost stymied, or the crippled court system nearly punishes an innocent scapegoat and permits the defendant to remain at large for a long time (Spanos 1987: 20). For one reason or another, to many eager to seek justice, the exclusive right to use violence can justify completely unethical and unlawful behavior in virtue of its being for the greater good, such as promising the quick dispensation of justice, contributing to the betterment of society, and thereby making the world a better place. Notwithstanding, a series of interlocking coincidences, misplaced public anger, and fragmented information from private investigations all have a say in how the judicial system should administer justice. As a result, “The murder-mystery is solved, however, not through epistemological processes of weighing evidence and making deductions, but through the imaginative projection of what *could* —and, the text insists, *must*— have happened”, as we witness that in reality, racial hatred, which constitutes a massive threat to judicial independence, yields “stronger associations between black and ‘guilty’ and white and ‘not guilty’ as opposed to black and ‘not guilty’ and white and ‘guilty’” (McHale 1987: 10; Smith 2015: 884).

*Intruder in the Dust* can be juxtaposed with *Light in August* for a comparison of further thorny legal issues on an elevated “whodunit” level. As stated in McHale’s book, modernist novels showcase a set of epistemological features, involving “the multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives, the focalization of all the evidence through a single ‘center of consciousness,’ virtuoso variants on interior monologue” (1987: 9). Adding McHale’s interpretation, in whatever fashion, to the hidden ground rules, which have long governed traditional crime writing, we learn that “sift[ing] through the evidence of witnesses of different degrees of reliability in order to reconstruct and solve a ‘crime’” runs deep in classical detective fiction (1987: 9). In fact, part of Faulkner’s success lies with his multiple plotlines, multipersonal narration, and the technique of the “stream of consciousness”, used to describe the state of mind of Hightower, which is often meditative in nature. While it seems highly likely that the disruption in the flow of a narrative may be experienced as jarring and puzzling, Faulkner held open the possibility of a writing strategy shift, namely “transfer[ring] the epistemological difficulties of its characters to its readers” (McHale 1987: 9). Indeed, an obsessional preoccupation with the fine line which exists between crime and punishment as well as guilt and innocence, is woven not only into our consciousness, but also into the fabric of the classic, conventional detective fiction formula of conflict-crisis-resolution, consequently “dislocated chronology, withheld or indirectly-presented information”, every possible red-herring, and dangling plot threads should not pull our attention away from the otherwise “very same problems of accessibility, reliability, and limitation of knowledge that [also] plague” fictional characters in Faulkner’s works (McHale 1987: 9-10). In the aggregate, regardless of the fact that there is always a logical modernist tinge to Faulkner’s fiction, which accurately portrays a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, black and white, a general air of disillusionment simultaneously prevails. The fact that much about Faulkner’s writing is so reasonably clear and easily traceable that it appears to ease concerns about social disorder, after addressing central types of violence waged against blacks, even though an array of variables, which are considered to give rise to rushed investigations, controversies in law enforcement, irrepressible public outrage and botched execution attempts, has somehow disturbed the rational, teleological narrative, significantly hampered forensic investigations, and potentially raised questions about law-enforcement accountability.

In addition, the heart of this paper calls into question the potential function of the criminal justice system, which has been a race-based institution, directly targeting African-Americans, or which frequently casts blacks as the primary killers of whites. Even worse, whenever ethnic tension arises, certain court rulings have been the staple of mainstream moral judgments, despite considerable progress in the matter of racial equity and integration over the past several decades. In this manner, if one

expands the purview of the law, the passion for the truth, the passion for justice illuminates various attempts made by modernists to halt the decline and reduce the level of social unrest. Simply stated, modernism has realized “an attempt to restore a sense of order to human experience under the often chaotic conditions of twentieth-century existence” based on Daniel Joseph Singal’s precise interpretation, or in layman’s terms, has made a strenuous effort to de-clutter the cluttered world (1987: 8). With an emphasis on putting things back in order, not only modernism, but also detective fiction seems to fit this description. One can see that as opposed to postmodern thinking, its “refusal to achieve closure”, modernists and crime writers have done their best to bring this about, even though a bumpy road to racial reconciliation lies ahead of them (Singal 1987: 22).

The path towards closure, the central theme of modernism and detective fiction, on some level, involves an appropriate measurement of performance in law enforcement settings, as we find expressed with pathos and satire in *Intruder in the Dust*. In judicial and deliberative contexts, equality and fairness can be seen as a farce when Lucas Beauchamp’s extrajudicial search, which might seem a ‘minimalist’ approach in modernist terms, sets out the ‘maximalist’ challenge to public bigotry and ineffectual law enforcement (Levenson 1999: 3). As noted above, one should recall that the full compass of his unauthorized investigation and its striking result “startle and disturb the public” (Levenson 1999: 3). That Lucas makes a small gesture not only for himself, but also on behalf of the marginalized black in general accidentally carries out modernist goals of “stimulating the ‘useful anger’ of the public”, especially after the townsfolk learn of Crawford’s suicide in jail (Levenson 1999: 2). Against the sweeping and distorted accusation, only the concrete outcome of scientific investigations is persuasive enough to wake up a group of baffled and self-righteous people, in this story, represented by the prejudiced townspeople. And this stress placed upon the town-wide animosity, which totally raises Lucas’s awareness of his own social footing, falls under the logically narrow scope of an individual, when he turns into a private eye with “a mixture of deep popular knowledge and close observation” to get the unauthorized investigation started (Knight 2004: 73). Very likely, the gap between ‘minimal’ means and ‘maximalist’ ends is bridged by Lucas’s and his team’s “deep, sometimes even dour, seriousness”, akin to “the earnestness of their [modernist] resolve”, in order to “carry on through private hardship” (Levenson 1999: 5).

In addition to solving Vinson’s homicide, the outcome of Lucas’s extrajudicial search not only teaches the lynch mob a lesson, but also delivers a slap in the face to majority-white law enforcement. In quick succession, too, the value of Lucas’s ‘minimalist’ approach, in one way, is associated with “continued blurring of once-

distinct racial and ethnic divisions”, after “the maxim, innocent until proven guilty, has had a good run in the twentieth century”, which leans heavily on a core faith: all human beings are “created equal regardless of what sexuality or race” (Perez 2009: 17; Pennington 2001: 50; and Shoo 2011: 1). And then, Faulkner’s stories, in another way, hold the public evermore firmly in the grip of the long-term aftermath of a double-murder case, of the days following the loss of white privilege, and perhaps of the slow, reluctant steps toward racial harmony, because “it took an uncommon intelligence to solve crimes” and more importantly to sustain a triumph over racist opposition (Panek 2006: 59). Essentially calm and indifferent as he is, Lucas nevertheless oozes growing confidence in the material evidence, which virtually counteracts unsubstantiated allegations and accelerates the collapse of white supremacy.<sup>5</sup> For one thing, continuing threads of modernist minimalism in the detective fiction genre run through Faulkner’s novels as a set of small gestures, which creates a powerful ripple effect, along with providing a larger potential stage for maximalism. Faulkner’s accounts of “values, norms” and “evaluation of a whole culture or society”, enlarge “the social base of the novel outward from a highly localized murder (or similar mystery)” to judicial fickleness and the perversity of human nature, since “mysteries more closely reflect human society than other forms of popular literature” (Thompson 1993: 175; Erisman 1980: 1). Quite clearly, the number of attacks against the traditional binary system, including black and white, innocent and guilty, has disturbed the entrenched modernist practice and has stimulated extensive controversy on this. That being the case, the dichotomous partitions and irresolution dictate the structure of Faulkner’s fiction and give it its characteristic mode of expression, although he tantalized his readers by proposing no practical solutions to the dichotomy paradox.

While there exists no easy way to resolve the deeply ingrained dichotomy, Faulkner incorporated into *Intruder in the Dust* with “the insistence on death as the major crime” (Knight 2004: 67) one prominent feature of crime fiction, the admissibility of evidence in a court of law. It is certainly worthy of our attention that *Intruder in the Dust*, in many respects, encapsulates thematic metamorphoses of crime writing in the novel, unfolding its progression from a literary foil to a towering literary work and from a dearth of scientific evidence to the increased interest in the area of forensics in a whole new way of rendering authenticity. From this standpoint, Crawford’s timber theft is the “trigger incident”, which sparks the homicides of Vinson and of Jake Montgomery, fires up on a deliberate attempt to evade justice, and foments regional violence. Nevertheless, Faulkner’s full-scale attack on racial prejudice and social injustice definitely overrides local criticism and punishment for stealing wood. Similarly, since the start of the nineteenth century, American crime fiction, urgently needing to attract a wide readership and generate

substantial interest, in particular targeting male readers, has made steady progress toward the goal of creating an “extended plot” (Knight 2004: 67). Once we understand the literary formula, the more tension a writer creates, the more compelling the plot will be structured because “a more serious crime than jewel theft and mysterious murder allow[s] the involvement of more characters and so fill[s] more space” (Knight 2004: 67).<sup>6</sup> Taking up the new literary practice and imbuing it with conventional or formula plots, Faulkner elaborated, with varying degrees of legality and complexity, on the concept of “identity-conscious[ness]”, such as Lucas’s unyielding racial idiosyncrasy, the Gowrie’s monopoly power, and white racial dominance, instead of shedding light on the “bloodless and money-linked crime” and making it the center of attention (Knight 2004: 68). Just as Faulkner followed scientific breakthroughs in crime fiction and kindled a great deal of racial controversy, so we dwell on his vivid portrayal of legal complexities and a debilitated police force. Largely as a result of these two distinctive characteristics, Faulkner’s vastly dynamic modernity not only “leaves an indelible mark on the most basic assumption of detective fiction”, but has also won genuine respect for the challenge, which Faulkner’s fictional honesty poses (Stumme 2014: 36).

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Faulkner enforced uniqueness of another skill when he introduces a mutually reinforcing cycle of acts of subtle anti-racism and pursuit of social justice is frequently found in *Intruder in the Dust*. This novel, on the one hand, recites the “FBI” formula, which stresses team-oriented scientific crime-solving techniques, and which bears a great resemblance to the specific features of the popular CSI television series. On the other hand, Faulkner complicated the story to make the crime-related issue secondary to a satirical look at the legal system, in addition to its focus on an interracial friendship. In the aggregate, justice could not be served, if it were not for a white boy’s underlying emotional debts, which are owed to a Negro, and which the boy has just begun to pay off in a nonverbal display of emotion. In particular, when we situate human callousness (“crime is nobody else’s business”) in a broader context of moral ambivalence and ethnic antagonism, it is definitely not a teenager’s responsibility to wrangle a black man free of a legal system which seems racially tilted in favor of the Caucasian race (Panek 2006: 113).<sup>7</sup> To begin with, Chick finds himself entangled in an awkward interethnic relationship as his debt to Lucas has remained outstanding for years ever since the prompt rescue. Being unable to minimize the awkwardness of the situation, Chick fails to deliver practical and logical solutions, for he cannot call it even, and nor can he let it run its course. On a more sophisticated level, it is not until Lucas, who is wrongfully accused of taking another life, decides to undertake a full-scale investigation into the homicide with Chick’s assistance, that Chick establishes some sort of low key payback plans.<sup>8</sup> The possibility of ongoing retroactive

obligation, compounded by its consistent effect on Chick’s mind, ironically is achieved, when Chick regains his lost pride and self-esteem in claiming Lucas’s innocence. At this delicate juncture, a brief overview of the interracial entanglement unveils an augmented reality that through the fact-finding process, the socially immobilized and physically stuck Lucas and the physically unrestrained Chick, has facilitated a tacit understanding in the context of cross-racial dialogues. With certain momentum, which they can maintain, Chick and Lucas edge a baby step closer to racial integration at the personal level. However, Faulkner’s work throws a fresh spotlight on judicial processes that attempt but which cannot fully resolve social conflicts, but it somehow intensifies racial polarization at the community level. As a result, this novel reaches its maximal twist when a white boy tries to repay a huge debt of gratitude to a black man —just the opposite of the popular literary formula when a black boy is dramatically rescued by a white man. In a manner analogous to this literary twist, the collaborative entanglement frequently lies at the heart of the struggle for anti-racist justice when the novel explores racism as a framework for challenging social injustice rather than constituting the practice of law as a ‘backup’ friend of racial justice.<sup>9</sup>

Together with genuinely expressing his gratitude to Lucas and fully satisfying his inmost desire to restore a sense of racial equilibrium, Chick takes on in various roles, starting as a young beneficiary of Lucas’s generosity and then setting moral action in motion primarily in order to wipe out the almost unpayable and indescribable debt.<sup>10</sup> Not only is Faulkner’s use of sarcasm and irony notable in Chick’s stubborn insistence on unloading a significant amount of emotional burden, but it permeates the characters’ exchanges and speeches. Police patriarchal powers are so entrenched that they sometimes fail to operate outside the law. Specifically, understanding the nature of sarcasm in Faulkner’s fiction fills us with a feeling of happiness, which may get intermingled with sadness and disillusionment when Chick, a local boy, is able to bring us the unadulterated truth about manhood: “Men cant listen. They aint got time. They’re too busy with facks” (Faulkner 1994: 70). It might also be noted that many local authorities are in fact men of words, and not necessarily men of action. Due to the fact that Chick’s team effort yields some decent results, and almost nothing could possibly make their top-notch investigation less than perfect, we can visualize the teamwork with the same effortless immediacy that very likely the corroborative evidence, unearthed by amateur citizen investigators, not only eliminates the risk of false incrimination, but also gives a weak local judicial system and ineffective law enforcement agents a sardonic wink. For one thing, in considering the dire circumstances which surround Lucas, Chick has to take extra measures to get Lucas released without having to wait for a conviction. Owing to time restraints, digging up the coffin on their own has become an extralegal method to clear Luca’s name and, thus, an

exception to standard rules. After Chick and his team members have also navigated a wide area of potentially threatening circumstances, they come to a conclusion that it is impossible to carry out their rescue plan in full through legal and bureaucratic channels. It is feared that members of the white mob then will try to break into the county jail and demand Lucas's death before the coffin is exhumed.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, familiar with human nature, Chick knows that men play by the "rules and cases", whereas women and children work through any extenuating "circumstances" (Faulkner 1994: 110-111). No concept lies more firmly embedded in Chick's mind than this appraisal of human nature, and it is no wonder that his extralegal team consists exclusively of two children and a woman.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, even though Chick and his team are able to achieve their goals with the highest degree of efficiency, their main contribution is widely considered to be a "private and community-based action", which lacks the full legal capacity to expedite the release of Lucas, but to a large extent it engenders cynical disrespect towards the judicial process (Sassoubre 2007: 203). In this regard, there is a scene in which Chick, a bystander, ultimately finds himself drawn into the investigation, and in which Faulkner's stories "illustrate the virtues" of a group of amateur sleuths and "the incompetence and impotence of established authority" (Panek 2006: 190). Efficient and reliable though they definitely are, the kinds of qualities demonstrated by Chick and his teammates in general do not necessarily hold their ground against law enforcement officials, not even when mixed with a good dose of sarcasm and irony. Or could it be possible, from the perspective of later generations, that Faulkner was paying a tribute to the police, who are initially wimpish, but who finally gather the momentum and overcome procrastination?

The plot gradually unfolds a murder mystery, which comes to symbolize the lingering racial trauma in America, and the race-related stress often boils down to one major factor: the refusal of the Caucasian race to afford a black man the dignity of equality. In order to discuss Lucas's false murder accusation, compounded by the existing racial tensions, let us for an instant stretch the truth a little and dim the light that stands for the values of justice. Then, the following scenario becomes possible: if Chick and his team went through the criminal justice system, they probably would wind up absolutely nowhere. On second thoughts, the members of Chick's group do not lose contact with reality, as they turn to Gavin Stevens and Sheriff Hampton, the legal authorities of the town, for help, in order to launch a new lawsuit. In one way, we are pleased to see that Lucas is finally exonerated, although the efforts and accomplishments of Chick's team are never publicly acknowledged. In another way, it can be a very harsh awakening as we realize that without detection, reporting, or notification of appropriate authorities, the solid evidence, which is furnished by Chick and his team, cannot stand up in a court of law. Maybe the townsfolk are not very interested in the process of retrieving

evidence or proper trial procedures, when Gavin Stevens notes, “We are after just a murderer, not a lawyer” (Faulkner 1994: 231). Acting upon empathy, Chick and his team initiate an investigation, which not only restores racial harmony to the community, but also directs satire at the judicial bureaucracy. As Sassoubre deduces, “Once a humble and courageous few set the change in motion, local legal authority will begin to follow by finding solutions within the established norms of the community” (2007: 204). Just as Chick’s material evidence ultimately draws public attention to an almost sealed murder case and forces this case to be reopened, so fortunately the empathetic touch here maximizes Lucas’s chances of a positive legal outcome.

While Chick deserves great credit for helping to prove Lucas’s innocence, we might question whether refuting all allegations against a negro suspect is too heavy a burden for an adolescent to shoulder or not.<sup>13</sup> Without a doubt, Lucas’s case has marked one undeniable moment of change, and also a set of circumstances, such as “exhuming a body, hiding Lucas at the sheriff’s house, [and] entrapping the real killer”. This not only alters Chick’s world, but also accelerates his process of his mental maturity at an accelerating rate (Faulkner 1994: 431). Yet, just as we are left wondering if the court system would evolve through a series of changes, which could lead to the possibility of racial harmony and equality, so the ending offers no suggestions of judicial improvement at all; only a touch of insight and humor lightens the mood and eases racial tensions. In many respects, Chick’s involvement in the ongoing criminal investigation (for he believes that Lucas should have a chance to go free), exemplifies in all aspects the meaning of the literary term, *Bildungsroman*, in which through a series of events, a young individual undergoes an emotional metamorphosis and emerges as a mature person, or, briefly, an novel recounting “an individual’s maturation and development” (Hsiao 2006: 12). In other words, Lucas’s alleged criminal act, to a considerable degree, has accelerated Chick’s psychological metamorphosis in response to a hierarchical society and legal loopholes. Chick becomes increasingly involved with issues of racial and social justice and provides a tragic parallel to Joe Christmas’s wrestling with questions of racial identity in *Light in August*. Like Chick’s gradual journey towards emotional maturity, Joe Christmas’s inward conflict is triggered by his disoriented sense of personal identity in the midst of omnipresent racism and internal community squabbling. To replace a happy ending, Faulkner bolsters the novel’s conclusion with a realistic portrayal of the endemic anarchy and challenges to great extent the notion of a post-racial America.<sup>14</sup>

The potential conflict between justice and revenge now eclipses racial strain and friction between black and white as the greatest source of tension, for the long entrenched boundary between legal and illegal is shifting in southern communities

in general, even when the boundary remains debatable. In the townsfolk's eyes, it is not a misguided attempt to transform any vindictive sentiment into retributive justice. In stark contrast to local townspeople's burning thirst for revenge, the long conflict resolution process, akin to Chick's social awakening, does not come to an end until an ultimate epiphany hits Christmas. Christmas, in a flash of inspiration, attains supreme enlightenment to the effect that he cannot get away with Joanna Burden's murder. As he murmurs to himself, "But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo" (Faulkner 1932: 321). One can see that running parallel to Christmas's distorted life, "violence is compulsively re-enacted, multiplied, compounded", and "there is no escape from the corrosive effects of crime" if one enlarges the scope of reading (Glover 2003: 145). In like manner, perhaps Christmas's bone-breaking cruelty and racial exploitation in his southern upbringing meet with persistent impunity which only serves to embolden Percy Grimm. The apparent transparency of this observation belies our expectations. While readers have long assumed that under normal circumstances, justice should put an end to Christmas's evil behavior, get him a fair trial without denying him any legal rights, and mete out proper punishments to this real offender, the truth tells us otherwise, since the racial tensions and the broad injustice within the community have expedited Christmas's death. Just as Christmas's inner torment, for some reason, is alleviated in what seems to be unsparing and unrelenting nature, so the reader is subsequently reminded of a cruel irony of his death which does not occur in isolation, but rather in combination with other disorders, for instance Christmas's mindless escapade, the severe racial intolerance of the townspeople, and the opportune appearance of Percy Grimm to capture Christmas. Hence, Grimm's punitive action, if we understand public acquiescence and support for on-duty extralegal police violence in this case, is able to fend off a future persecution and cut the police investigation short by escalating the cycle of violence. When we take a deep reflective look at Christmas's condition in the light of a continuous stream of violence and killing in the local community, *Light in August* displays alleged police brutality attack against Christmas, one of the classical signs of police force gone bad in the real world. From this perspective, the satirical nature of Christmas's passive-aggressive behavior and his premature demise further characterize the gray side of law enforcement while Chick's team attempts to meet the legal challenges tossed in the way of maintaining Lucas's innocence.

And indeed, *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August* illustrate the dysfunction of the criminal justice system. In a manner, *Light in August* also results in Faulkner's irreversible enlargement of the 'textual space', a writing technique which may not be considered an archetype for detective fiction, for his novel is not a literary compendium of measures to de-emphasize 'social issues' and equate them to "the

moralistic simplifications of crime and punishment” (Priestman 2003: 3; Cawelti 2004: 290).<sup>15</sup> There are many instances of illegality. Namely, that Percy Grimm takes the law into his own hands is highly illegal and punishable by law not only because it facilitates the police transition from neutrality to ferocious support of extrajudicial executions, but also because it unveils the hidden reality that justice cannot counteract a racially inflammatory and powerful *lex talionis* which goes in crescendo in the face of extreme challenge. The shocking revelation in *Light in August*, in essence, is the disclosing of a harsh reality when the revelation tries to ferret out the motivations for seemingly inexplicable, and often violent behavior, to defuse Joe Christmas’s racial identity crisis, and to enumerate the consequences of illegal acts committed by a crooked cop (Percy Grimm). Thus, the townsfolk’s tacit acceptance of extralegal violence tempts Percy Grimm into situations, which call for the wanton use of excessive force, because they frequently involve blacks being perceived as disrespectful of white people, not of the police. In practical terms, the textual space is so extensive that when Faulkner subsequently created a tense standoff between the police and the man wanted for Joanna’s homicide, he embellished “the means of death, making it the focus of the [unresolved] enigma” surrounding Christmas’s questionable identity and America’s deep-rooted racism (Panek 2006: 85).

Perhaps the concept of textual space makes room for unprecedented changes, so Faulkner quickly fills it up with perceived legal missteps and extralegal police aggression rather than recognizing the accomplishments of law enforcement. For example, Grimm’s irreparable mistakes not only doom Christmas to a premature death, but also rapidly sabotage the investigation into the murder at a tremendous rate. It is the expansion of absent presence, which has increasingly absorbed our attention. I wish to explore further what follows, for instance the hasty crime scene tracking and footprint evidence recognition, an inability to gather and document all evidence related to the crime, and a vicious miscarriage of justice by a toothless legal system.<sup>16</sup> If we give full rein to our imagination, dreadful missteps of procedure such as those mentioned above, one after another concretely confront the racist-fueled anger, which exacerbates the lingering legal certainty in resolving Christmas’s criminal case, though a \$1000 reward is put forward for any information leading to the arrest.<sup>17</sup> However, the improprieties, such as improperly handled evidence and breached procedures, as part of an ongoing investigation, cannot entirely disassociate this novel from conventional crime writing, since occasionally crime or detective stories “explore the depiction of crime with no necessary detective element”, and in many cases with greater intensity than ever before, they “hardly concern crime at all” (Priestman 2003: 2-3). This literary exegesis apparently does not set us on “the quest for purely detective writing”, but instead it enables us to delve into racist violence and expulsion, issues which often become

buried beneath the glorification of crime-fighters (Priestman 2003: 3). Because the idea of textual space has come into consideration, unsavory characters or even villains begin to act out their evil deeds upon the living under ghostly circumstances. Likewise, textual space is great for avid readers and busy professionals alike, for them to ponder over the ongoing racial strife addressed in this novel.

In essence, never has *Light in August* become the escapist refuge of racially frustrated groups while “escapist mass literature [...] seeks and finds easy solutions to social problems” (Cawelti 2004: 290). Just as many literary critics are still inclined to equate conventional detective writing with a sub-genre of fiction and to alternately criticize it for making the small-scale structure of the scene, for losing touch with reality, and for providing one more example in sum of the unpragmatic utopianism, so Faulkner’s story confronts the deep and haunting predicament of racial justice which seems to remain forever controversial, indecipherable, and unsettled even today. If we grasp the intricacies of changing racial dynamics, when they come under heavy public scrutiny, the entanglement transcends the dichotomous notion of “exterior simplicities” versus “interior complexities” (Cawelti 2004: 137). In retrospect, Joe Christmas, “a half-breed a white man”, is considered a “white Negro” in extreme forms of racial stratification (Faulkner 1932: 4). Again, Faulkner used a caricature to great effect when he described the emotional outbursts of Christmas’s maternal grandfather (Mr. Hines). Mr. Hines grows yet more importunate and clamorous in his demands and echoes the calls for harsh punishments to be handed out despite the fact that he preaches regularly in the black neighborhood. Akin to Mr. Hines, Gavin Stevens (the District Attorney), who is unable to stay objective and unbiased, provides elliptic and partial explanations of the intractability of Christmas’s behavior when duty calls.<sup>18</sup> On a purely symbolic level, Stevens seems to have a lever to pry open the eyes of the world to the painful plight of Christmas’s racial confusion, yet his remarks are often generated from underlying racist beliefs and practices: “And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it” (Faulkner 1932: 424).

I imagine that for most readers the beginning of the novels is permeated by a balanced outlook on life, regardless of various subplots. Nonetheless, the townsfolk’s tacit consent to Grimm’s hate-motivated behavior shapes the reasons for our concern as racial disparities and social injustice lurk beneath the surface. Once we move beyond a misplaced and widespread sense of loss at Joanna Burden’s death, we attain a sound understanding of the townspeople’s twisted imagination in which they visualize themselves as self-appointed jurors who are forced by the exigencies of Christmas’s case to hand down a guilty verdict without much deliberation. After Christmas’s case has become a public scandal, the determination

of guilt or innocence and the administration of punishment are prescribed by the court in this instance to echo the increasingly popular sentiment which has become a public outcry. Thereafter, Joe Christmas’s existential anxiety and aggressive behavior, reverberating with tragic resonance, suggest unremarkable lives of unrelenting grimness and desolation a mark of Faulkner’s work. This way, this novel employs variation in escapist literature, for it explores the extent and nature of racial violence, the critical local factors, and dysfunctional police performance. As opposed to “a determined and totalized conclusion”, such as utopian visions for restoring racial harmony and enhancing social justice, which are the most popular, recognized literary devices in escapist fiction, the tacit approval of physical abuse by Grimm against Christmas gathers strength by judicial irresolution and inaction (Wang 2008: 121).

The aforementioned novels are not often categorized as classical detective or crime fiction, yet they include crime scene investigation, hot pursuit of suspects, and recovery of evidence. In the aggregate, the transition to a full-fledged court scene entails a long and bumpy road full of pitfalls and contradictions as Faulkner’s stories, to some extent, often bring an odd coexistence of anarchy and the law possible. A great deal may be said about Faulkner’s novels, such as *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*, as well as to *Intruder in the Dust* and *Light in August*, which have begun preparing for the worst-case legal scenario when the wanted fugitives and absconders remain at large, and felony is pinned on innocent civilians. Those who accidentally stumble across murders and are indicted on charges connected with the homicides, for example Lee Goodwin in *Sanctuary* and Lucas Beauchamp, are intimidated by the harsh face of reality that their innocence frequently hinges on an enormous amount of evidence, eyewitness testimony, and most importantly, by a once-in-a-lifetime lucky coincidence, in order to turn the wheels of justice and get their convictions overturned. At first, if the first two key elements, for some reason, are ruled to be inadmissible before the court, then the prime suspects probably have to pray hard for a coincidental factor, or as Loren D. Estleman renames it “some sardonic twist of fate”, or “a stroke of luck”, to step in and compensate for their apparent lack of legal aid and knowledge (2003: vii; Lee 2004: 19). Take Lucas Beauchamp as an example: he spirals down into greater racial hardship and legal subjugation than ever after he is arrested on suspicion of involvement in the murder and is thereby a fatal and impudent blunderer. A tidal wave of public indignation sweeps the community because clearly it has something to do with Lucas’s perceived marginalization and the townsfolk’s commitment to upholding white supremacy. Lucas is unhesitatingly denigrated as the intruder while many townspeople believe that until then they had been living in a state of continual harmony and concord which ensures local dynamic stability. When the title of the novel drops hints that Lucas Beauchamp is being labeled as the

“Intruder in the Dust”, in many ways, Faulkner’s play on the word, “dust”, casts a coldly critical eye on the justice system. Unsettled dust is, so the town and the legal system have acted arbitrarily and capriciously in administering justice.

To weigh the ethics of sticky legal situations and grapple with the signaling complexities engendered by interacting factors, for instance homicides, race groups, law enforcement, and public sentiment, which make the administration of strict justice so difficult, the following imaginative scenario might be proposed as an aid to a full understanding of the existing legal system. A splash of human blood is left behind at a crime scene, and gradually the ground surface is covered with layers of mud and blood. Then, a small puddle of blood, dust-like in appearance, lingers and accumulates. In a metaphorical sense, Faulkner’s novels explore the hypocrisies and idiosyncrasies of the ineffective legal system, which in theory is supposed to resolve issues related to criminal justice. Yet, the exploration tells us otherwise, since the system not only remains relatively unchanged over time, but also ironically it leads to more social instability and confusion than ever before. On the one hand, as time goes by, the blood congeals in a matter of hours, engenders the inseparability of the dysfunctional legal system and ceaseless criminal actions, and afterwards carves a nonseparating cycle path of good and evil.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it is certain that, whilst the hot discussion about the ongoing legal uncertainty shows that the criminal justice system is sometimes mysteriously unable to render judgments, an ambivalence of law nevertheless does not mean sabotaging the common target of the administration of justice. Nor does it lead to an elevated violent crime rate in order to boost the court’s reliability. Thanks to the polemical nature of their dealings, crime and justice move beyond the narrowly constructed black-white dichotomy, as the dynamics of their coexistence ultimately resolve a long-lasting conflict by reaching some kind of middle ground.

Without a doubt, Faulkner’s works express opposition to social injustice and reflect an implicit endorsement of racial equality, while the general public presupposes that justice and injustice should form a pair that is mutually exclusive, not because of a tautology, but because of the determination of innocence or guilt and then the punishment for criminal mischief. However, in recognition of social reality, we have to admit that it is actually quite a mind-bending concept to meet: that sometimes justice and injustice pose as mutually exclusive alternatives in a never-ending cycle of violence. Simply put, justice, to a great extent, works in tandem with injustice. This new legal relationship generally boils down to a double-sided and substantially interchangeable embodiment of good and evil because justice and injustice, like good and evil, are concepts of value, an arbitrary human inventions. The reading public does not recognize or resist the subtle and covert embodiment perhaps thus upholding a set of social ethics and preserving moral

integrity. An alternative literary hypothesis might be that Faulkner further magnified the attractiveness of injustice and the unattractiveness of justice as allowed him to relish his moment of hesitation about fully endorsing “a reassuring ending” in which the perpetrators should be punished with the full weight of the law while innocent men ought to go free (Glover 2003: 144). Instead of making a barely credible commitment toward pursuing justice, Faulkner showed the juxtaposition of an overwhelmingly Caucasian criminal justice infrastructure with the low socio-economic profile of the ethnic groups on the periphery. The juxtaposing by public opinion of crime with justice and the hierarchical design of the legal system proves the restoration of public order, protection of “the common good”, and the revival of local communities to be more formidable than assumed (Lee 2004: 11).

To some extent, readers might have lost their faith in the justice system if they remain sensitive to the rising tide of public outrage as being directed not at reckless homicide investigations, but for all practical purposes, at swaying the verdict one way or the other. Just as readers cannot isolate the effect of the variables, for instance racial bigotry, the unreliability of eyewitness testimony, and the broad popular sentiment against non-white suspects, so the number of associated variables is presumed to be constant. Regardless of the fact that all these variables very likely pose a challenge to the impartiality of the judicial system and overrule any hard physical evidence presented in court, Faulkner’s stories truly provide by far the most modernist closure, in which everything returns to normal. For instance, *Light in August* ends with an amazing synthesis of the feminine softness and maternal strength of Lena, who goes on a long journey with her newborn baby and Bryon Bunch. After the final pages of the novel have revealed something less figurative, Lena’s glow of motherhood, in a broad sense, deconstructs the legal ambiguities and racially motivated conflicts inherent in the horrifying tragedy of Joe Christmas. And at this point while extending modernism to include Faulkner’s works, it is worth recognizing a subtle resemblance to the ending of *Intruder in the Dust*. Faulkner’s occasional use of twist-endings brings this masterpiece to an unexpected close, in which Lucas and Chick’s uncle are haggling over a price, options, and a fair settlement for “corrupting a minor and him for practicing law without a license” (Faulkner 1994: 468). Certainly the rapid de-escalation of racial tension gives a light-hearted twist, so a ‘minimalist’ approach chosen here makes Lucas’s case for a ‘maximalist’ change, though it is not a total overhaul, and helps to reinstate the dignity of black. By the same token, it is sufficient to say that at first sight, many human factors discussed above not only lead to judicial inconsistencies or legal indeterminacy, but also appeal to racial prejudice and emotions of the populace. But akin to the artistic endeavor of modernists and crime writers, who strive to restore social order and promote

ethnic harmony, fulfilling the promise of equal justice under law involves a combination of circumstances, people, evidence, and investigations. That is to say: epistemological modernism seems to have something crucial, which can be applied to help catch criminals via “the jigsaw-like process of sifting through evidence to piece together the crime scenario”, whereas Faulkner’s fiction enlightens the reader by scrutinizing the binary polarization and by undermining epistemological certainty, when a sarcastic sign with a twist of humor not only establishes a fulfilling sense of closure, but also reminds us to look beyond the surface.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>. Though the effectiveness of our justice system depends, in large measure, on public confidence, the system has been recognized as a neutral independent legal sovereignty by various law enforcement agents, for example Henry C. Lee. Lee remarks on the ever-changing nature of the criminal justice system and presumably the possibility of improvement: “Most Americans know that this country’s justice system is imperfect. To paraphrase the British statesman Sir Winston Churchill, I have found the American justice system to be full of pitfalls, complexities, and even some contradictions, but our criminal justice system is still as good as any that can be found throughout human history” (2004: 245).

By investigating conflict resolution and peacekeeping, Henry C. Lee, “with an unflagging faith in reason, a belief in the gradual, inevitable perfection of humanity”, has reinforced his belief twice in the same book (McGill 2016: 2). Rather than manipulating and brainwashing readers, Lee also reflects upon professional experiences that faith and human frailty have always proved a volatile mixture in the dynamics of legal systems: “Our legal system is designed to protect the innocent, while prosecuting and punishing the guilty. As a component of the human equation, this justice system is not perfect, but it is the best that we can do” (2004: 284). Lee often makes his points in a positive tone and with the power of positive

thinking throughout his book and offers reasons why we will soon live in a modern utopia, in which “potential perpetrators will think twice before committing a ghastly crime”, for “enormous technological progress” in forensic science will ease public concern by enhancing criminal investigations and empowering law enforcement to nab the suspected criminals and exonerate the innocent (2004: 287).

<sup>2</sup>. Because the immeasurable extent of the real world may affect crime writing, the real world has a direct impact on the materials used for writing. John Cawelti codifies the ground rules of detective stories. As stated in Cawelti’s book, the traditional elements, which hold this genre of fiction together, are: “a crime, an investigation, a solution, and a denouement. In the solution section, the detective explains the crime and puts the events surrounding it in their proper perspective. Then, as denouement, the criminal is apprehended and justice is meted out” (2004: 272-73). In one way or another, Cawelti’s theory expounds the prevalence or the nature of crime in general. Multiple social factors and other variables, such as poverty, emotional appeals, social climate, and race, are just but a few examples.

Compared with Faulkner’s closure with a twist, conventional detective stories usually come to a definite end, namely “a closed structure”, prior to which a captivating story-telling voice spells out the crime

committed and provides a brief description of the nature of the crime. Then, “the discovery of the criminal” and “the re-establishing of order” highlight the tremendous subtlety and depth of detective fiction, so the effect of which will be to make the characters behave accordingly to ensure social harmony (Marcus 2003: 248).

<sup>3</sup>. In common with the great intention of many writers to uplift the status of their works, detective fiction aims to earn public recognition from the mass audience as a classical example of serious high-brow literature opposed to a once definitely low-brow outsider. Known for its unswerving dedication to defusing tensions during times of social unrest and turning chaos into order at the end, modernism also has a long-standing reputation for supporting the basic tenets of the genteel tradition, which impinges precisely upon the doctrine that “the traditional canon is elitist” (Ruland 1993: 428). No wonder, in this respect, leading crime-fiction writers, apart from addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour and detailing their movements toward the ultimate goal of administering true justice, have announced their intent to merge with modernism in the high hope of morphing into “a legitimate form of literary expression” (Panek 2006: 211).

<sup>4</sup>. In his lucid and engaging book, Brian McHale adopts a whole new view of the role played by the kinship metaphor possibly in an attempt to demystify the bond between detective stories and modernism, although his exploration of kinship networks, in practice, has run into problems of accountability. For instance, one Taiwanese scholar, Yuan-Shuan Lin, elaborates on the possible flaw, which very likely has deconstructed McHale’s argument and identified his questionable assumption: “麥克海爾認為偵探小說是現代主義文學作品的姊妹類型。[但] 深究麥克海爾對偵探小說與現代主義文學作品的關連如何建立 [McHale believes that detective fiction is the sister genre of modernist literature, but we have to explore their literary relationship in greater depth]” (Lin 2013: 111). For this reason, the assertion of a conclusion, based on Lin’s observations, seeks to establish the fact that McHale somehow is unable to provide the critics with a cohesive and compelling rationale to

support his conjecture, which could have reinforced an otherwise sound argument. A look at the original text tells all: “the popular detective thriller is modernist fiction’s sister-genre” (McHale 1987: 59). Perhaps after the failure of the alliance between detective fiction and modernism meet expectations of crime writers, a number of them have instead added a touch of realism to their writing. To this shift has been added the sheer grit and determination of detective story writers to rewrite the canon of crime fiction, so that their works will fit into the category of “serious fiction” (Kinkley 1993: 56).

<sup>5</sup>. To craft defense strategies against criminal charges, Lucas first tells Chick that the gunshot wound found in Vinson’s body does not match his Colt 41. Following up all possible leads, Chick and his groupies plan to exhume Vinson’s body, but by accident they stumble upon the corpse of a lumber dealer, Jake Montgomery. The only salient feature of Lucas’s private investigation in his move beyond scepticism into deep cynicism about the high level of racial bias in police behaviour, which ironically underscores the importance of a diametrically opposite approach, the efficient collaboration among ordinary unarmed civilians. Because Lucas and Chick look beyond the law and apply extralegal standards to solve the murder mystery, Faulkner’s fiction, aside from grappling with long-existing racial tensions, aims to expose the terrible legal wrong wrought through their extralegal actions.

<sup>6</sup>. In order to expand readers’ appetite for detective fiction, fire up their imagination, and encourage them to follow an investigation through to completion, the trend line, videlicet the move toward a more upscale market position, appears to indicate continuous improvement over time in the American pulp publishing industry. As a result, “sanguinary standards of what constitutes a good mystery” should have a potent effect in captivating “the most blood-thirsty” reader (Estleman 2003: xvii).

<sup>7</sup>. Due to a long-standing racial controversy, there would seem to be plenty of reasons why Lucas’s accidental encounter with a white boy should not escalate into direct embroilment, after he rescued Charles (Chick) Mallison from a frozen creek. The entanglement

of race turns into a genuinely affecting plot, which thickens and gradually reveals a deep well of nastiness and ugly hypocrisy. For example, without a shred of supporting evidence, Gavin Stevens subconsciously harbors negative feelings toward blacks, so Lucas is automatically assumed to be guilty. Any way, Lucas's lack of gratitude adds embarrassing insult to emotional injury, when Chick considers himself a loser in more ways than one. Not only does Chick feel a great sense of degradation and rejection, but he is also in desperate need of a mechanism to foster racial reconciliation, so he can pay off the 'emotional debt'. On the one hand, Chick's emotional distress, to a large extent, obscures the underlying racial tension and institutional structures which fan the fire. On the other hand, it also brings the cumulative stress of racism back to the foreground. The myth of racism probably has overwhelmed many readers, as Chick and Gavin Stevens are completely unaware of internalized racism, whose patterns feature so prominently in fiction.

Gavin Stevens drops quick, sarcastic comments, and predicts doom for Lucas's case, when "finally the ideology of racial superiority serves to reinforce individual beliefs in white supremacy" (Vysotsky 2014: 6). Stevens explicitly foreshadows Lucas's impending doom. His remarks are more than a slip of the tongue: the chances of obtaining justice look bleak, unless "Lucas lives long enough to be tried by a judge and a 'District Attorney,' who 'don't live within fifty miles of Yoknapatawpha County'" (Sassoubre 2007: 202).

<sup>8</sup> While listening to Lucas's speculation about the murder weapon, Chick tries to convey Lucas's specific message to Gavin Stevens, but the latter doubts the accuracy and validity of the information. Accordingly, Chick initiates further remedial actions so they dig up Vinson's coffin with the assistance of his friends, Aleck Sander, and the old spinster, Miss Eunice Habersham. Gavin Stevens does not take part in the graveyard investigation until Chick locates Jake Montgomery's body buried in Vinson's coffin. Gavin Stevens and Sheriff Hampton decide to conduct a joint investigation into the suspected unlawful killing now with a heightened sense of urgency.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Ticien Marie Sassoubre, whose insights into Lucas and Chick's interethnic relationship put all possible perspectives together. Looking through a historical lens, Sassoubre associates their cross-age friendship with racial reconciliation and community cooperation on a large scale: "Faulkner intends this relationship between Lucas and Chick to provide a model for a new regime of race relations in the South: continued mutual interdependence" (2007: 202). Sassoubre's conclusive remark, though it gives a broad overall idea of race, seems to make a sweeping assumption about fierce racial divisions and attempts to soften racial antagonism, before the local residents are willing to accept Lucas's individuality and idiosyncrasy.

<sup>10</sup> All night long Chick's conscience keeps him awake, so he spends hours tackling Lucas's uncertain future. As Chick questions, "Will he die or not?" (Faulkner 1994: 314-315).

<sup>11</sup> Chick does not give out any information regarding exhumation to his uncle beforehand. If he did so, Gavin Stevens would immediately go to "the sheriff's house and convince him and then find a [Justice of the Peace] or whoever they would have to find and wake and then convince too to open the grave" (Faulkner 1994: 73). In practice, as there seems to be a tacit understanding that Chick's extralegal actions do not unduly exaggerate concerns for Lucas's safety, it takes approximately "six hours" for police officers to obtain a search warrant, before they conduct a permissible search or make an investigatory seizure, following police protocol (Lee 2004: 150).

<sup>12</sup> Chick arrives at a conclusion based on a set of observations: "if you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, don't waste your time on the menfolks; get the womens and children to working at it. Men cant listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks" (Faulkner 1994: 70).

<sup>13</sup> Lucas's case entails an excessive moral burden on Chick. The reader might take pity on him because "He is, after all, a mere boy forced into taking on a role of adult responsibility and shares with them a

terror of being entrapped” (Seelye 1986: xiii). Never has Chick had a chilling encounter with murders; nonetheless, his courage and persistence in seeking justice gather momentum to make dramatic changes in Lucas’s criminal convictions.

<sup>14</sup>. The motive for Joe Christmas’s murder and later his directionless decision points, in juxtaposition with the rising hatred in an ironic display of white supremacy, indicate that he has totally messed up his life beyond redemption. We should not be in denial of the fact that in a figurative sense, Christmas’s long ignored or maybe outright denied existence also dissolves into individual randomized trails, when his mind is as scattered as footprints found in different places. The escape routes, charted by the disoriented Christmas, offer no journey out of his own isolation, while he remains stuck in that small town mentality, and “he has lost account of time and distance” (Faulkner 1932: 321). Following the escape trails, which leads him nowhere, Christmas never actually leaves the immediate neighborhood of the crime scene, in which “the legal presumption of innocence” can be overturned “in the face of public demands for vengeance” (Albon 1995).

<sup>15</sup>. Taking a broad view of detective fiction, Ming-Fong Wang, a literary critic, argues that crime writing extends well beyond the representation of descriptive realities, although crime writers occasionally lapse into an altered state of reality: “The content of detective novels is not merely a hide-and-seek game between the master detective and the cunning criminal; it also depicts the social and everyday life” (2008: 52).

<sup>16</sup>. In stark contrast, the presence or absence of evidence aims to expose the particularity of “indirect forensic evidence”, also known as “missing forensic evidence”, owing to which an investigation could very likely wind up taking several wrong turns (Lee 2004: 115). By all odds, examples of human recklessness or the adverse impact of inevitable natural phenomena, such as rain washing away the bloodstain prior to retrieval with sufficient evidence, “may inadvertently interfere with evidence collection and hinder police efforts to file criminal charges” (Lee 2004: 115). While looking into the probability of detection and

conviction, Lee provides some degree of immunity against uncertainty: “The absence of evidence is equally as important as the presence of evidence”; for “the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence” after all (Lee 2004: 116).

<sup>17</sup>. Joe Christmas finally meets his demise when a minor character, Percy Grimm, who does not even appear in the first half of the novel, shows up near the end. On some level, Grimm becomes increasingly seen as a controversial figure to add complexity. While we ponder over Grimm’s delayed appearance, Richard Moreland performs in-depth historical analysis of Faulkner’s fiction. As he explicitly states, Grimm, a symbol of an “apparently meaningless slaughter of World War I”, not only defies “a presumed cultural consensus”, but also poses major challenges to “the world’s most civilized nation”; when he employs extreme “archaic violence toward Christmas” (1995: 21).

In order to ease insertion of an unusual character, the brutal Percy Grimm, David Glover puts forth an argument for the simple reason, because he does not equate “less important figures” with “any loss of suspense” (2003: 144). Instead, he indicates that Faulkner presented a distorted view of police actions involving deadly force and a cruel, egomaniacal captain of the State National Guard. In this light, “villain, victim, and private detective” are thoroughly intertwined in the plot, which identifies a recurring feature within modernism. The feature is also “characterized by a sense of chaotic instability rooted in the revelation”, but it launches an ultimate attempt to resolve a conflict associated with binary opposites (Glover 2003: 144).

<sup>18</sup>. Gavin Stevens is no stranger to Faulkner’s readers, because he reappears in novel after novel, for instance in *Light in August*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, and *Go Down, Moses*. Gavin Stevens, who runs counter to the essential value of law enforcement, in practice is a male figure with an incurably romantic disposition. Not only is he portrayed as an “ineffectual lawyer in love”, but he also “resembles an escapist precursor-at-law in Yoknapatawpha, Horace Benbow” (Watson 1993: 224).

<sup>19</sup>. The age-old adage, which expounds reciprocally interlocking relationships between crime and justice, suggests that “no hurt, no foul” should stand for “no crime, no punishment” in simple language (Panek 2006: 42). Contrary to our expectations, Panek’s comments shed new light on the reciprocal impact and on the close correlation between crime and justice, whose highly controversial nature will ignite further debate. Literally speaking, is it just a

coincidence or maybe an odd juxtaposition that the good qualities of the legal system, supposed to counterbalance the evil qualities, have in the course of time become watered down by their diametric opposition? A close examination would yield comparable results: “crime and punishment were a simple equation. They, in effect, cancelled each other out; for God or for society, judicial decision and punishment cancelled out the crime” (Panek 2006: 110).

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