Race and Aesthetics in William Faulkner's *Light in August*: From Racial Politics in the Civil War to Formalist Aesthetics in the Cold War

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The central argument in Edouard Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi* is that “Faulkner's oeuvre will be complete when it is revisited and made vital by African-Americans” (55). And, though he is not an African American but a Martinique-born writer in French, he fully explores the problem of the treatment of African Americans in Faulkner from an African Caribbean point of view. In short, his is a totally postcolonialist project of rereading a canonical author.

Faulkner's account or depiction of African Americans is, to Glissant's eye, not enough in the light of realism. It is not “part of a poetics of the real” (56) nor does the novelist “render the 'real' situation of Blacks” (57). Instead, they remain marginal stereotypes with little depth in characterization: “The 'pose' of Negroses in the Faulknerian narrative [...] is phenomenological in nature — that is, it does not assume any 'depth'” (68). As “slaves” and “silent and suffering witnesses,” observes the critic, they are never allowed to actively participate in the story. While “the Indians [...] have completely disappeared” and “Whites have changed” so they “'got into' a story” (58), “Blacks are the only ones who have not” changed: “Descriptions of Blacks cannot be other than immobile: Blacks are permanency itself” (59).

However, Glissant's argument is not at all an ideological attack on such realist/political incorrectness or insufficiency: “this reductive objectification of Blacks is not a matter of ideology” (66). Rather, he praises it as technical excellence: “The Faulknerian genius, occupied with deferring and at the same time revealing what torments the consciousness of Whites in the county, instinctively chooses to treat Blacks as if they had opaque, impenetrable minds” (70). This “deferring” is the key concept in his reading of Faulkner,
for through “this writing of the deferred” the novelist “harmonized the modalities of this stream of writing with the rhythm of tragic disclosure” (101). The novelist’s style (where the present and the past are inextricably intermingled and multiple characters’ streams of consciousness interpenetrate) and plot (where the process of “disclosure” is continually “deferred”) are in harmony with his subject matter — the South and its criminal origin, namely its plantation based on slavery: “Thanks to this writing of the deferred, the people thus described and presented have taken on such an enormity of vertigo, attesting to such a suspension of being, that we forget the real characters they incarnate or represent: the racist Plantation owner, the Black with the fixed stare [...], and so on, in order to allow only this suspension and vertigo, the measure beyond measure of contemporary humanity” (102). That is, what causes these “suspension” or “vertigo” is the replacement of characterization with racism, or, more precisely, redescription of writing technique into race politics. “Racism is in the depths” (66) while Faulkner’s African American characters lack “depth.” Racism lies in place of the characterizational depth.

Glissant’s attempt to account for Faulkner’s writing technique in sociopolitical terms without criticizing him ideologically marks a height of formalist Faulkner criticism in its subsumption of, and involvement in, race problem. To construct the organic unity of form and content, on one hand, has been one common fashion of demonstrating not only Faulkner’s but any other creative artist’s artistic excellence. Indeed, Glissant’s argument is, one might say, a version of the formalist aestheticization of Faulkner’s racism. On the other, his claim for Faulkner to be “revisited [...] by African-Americans” is obviously political, even identitarian. The project is political because it commits itself to race politics, and identitarian because it requires (exclusively) African American identity as a revisitor.

It is this kind of identity politics that formalism, at least its earlier version, tries to exclude from critical reading in its universalist claim. Its self-assigned task of valuing literature through textual analysis and the consequent exclusion of extrinsic contexts like author biographies including her or his political correctness imply that such intrinsic literary value appeals universally, that is, beyond racial differences. Actually, when Faulkner’s Nobel Prize for literature was announced in 1950, such aesthetics enjoyed its prime under the political condition of the Cold War. Of course, identity politics like Glissant’s African Americanism is exactly a reaction to such aesthetic ideology, its point being that formalism does not appeal universally and that minority politics is committed to universality in its claim for Faulkner to appeal not only to the majority but also to the
minority. In a slightly different light, however, both formalist aesthetics and minority politics, in their own commitments to universality, have to deal with and overcome the problem of race, or of racism. Glissant's is an attempt to embrace both, a logical consequence of the dualism between them.

The aim of this essay is to consider this problem of formalist aesthetics and race politics in Faulkner and Faulkner criticism, which is and has been one of the central issues in Faulkner criticism. The main objects are *Light in August* (1932) and Lawrence H. Schwartz's *Creating Faulkner's Reputation*, an attempt to give a cultural/political account of what he calls "[t]he sudden inflation of William Faulkner's literary reputation after WWII" (1). If the former depicts how race or blood functions as the source of identity conflict in the Civil War and the Reconstruction South, then the latter explores how such conflict had to be overcome as an aesthetic ideology instead of identity politics for Faulkner's reevaluation by formalist critics in the postwar American literary criticism. Their treatments of race, one as identity and the other as ideology, show how literature and its study, either formalist or postcolonialist, should deal with race and racism to establish themselves.

Schwartz begins his book with a question: "how was it possible for a writer, out of print and generally ignored in the early 1940s, to be proclaimed, in 1950, a literary genius, perhaps the best American novelist of the century?" (1).

It is, Schwartz argues, the result of "new literary consensus," where those he calls "New Critics" and "New York intellectuals" collaborated beyond their political differences and "exalted Faulkner's traditionalism and southern [sic.] nationalism as part of both a new moralism and a new political orthodoxy" (208). It was not only the formalist modernists' aesthetic attack on Marxist criticism but also a cultural as well as political aspect of the

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1 By "New Critics" Schwartz means "the Agrarian/Fugitive group" like John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Donald Davidson, and "those who were interested in explication of poetic texts and who published in and were involved with *Southern Review, Sewanee Review, Kenyon Review*, and the Kenyon School" like R. P. Blackmur, Yvor Winters, W. K. Wimsatt, René Wellek, Austin Warren, Robert Heilman, Robert Stallman, Mark Schorer, Arthur Mizener, William Van O'Connor; and by "New York intellectuals" "critics and writers drawn to the *Partisan Review* in the late 1930s (after its clear break with the Communist Party) and throughout the 1940s" like Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Lionel Trilling, Clement Greenberg, William Barrett, Dwight Macdonald, Diana Trilling, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Delmore Schwartz, Leslie Fiedler and Alfred Kazin (6).
Cold War: “The liberal aesthetics traditionally associated with naturalism and socially conscious literature came to be identified with the ‘totalitarianism’ of the Soviet Union and Stalinist politics. A historical art-for-art’s-sake formalism was adopted as the aesthetics of postwar America and became redefined as cultural liberalism” (209). And in the political/nationalist context of the Cold War Faulkner’s theme and technique were reread and redefined, his regionality of the Reconstruction South redescribed into the universalization of formalist aesthetics: “Ultimately, Faulkner’s work was championed and canonized because his often supremely individualistic themes and technically difficult prose served an ideological cause” (210).

Schwartz in his first chapter quotes negative comments on Faulkner in the 1930s, then positive ones at the publication of Intruder in the Dust (1948), and contrasts them. The earlier, negative commentators all mention the novelist’s great writing technique but after all deny his value. They invoke the two conditions, excellent technique and proper content, as a logical conjunction; they judge a literary work is valuable if and only if it satisfies both of the conditions. For them, Faulkner is not good literature, for his work is not valuable in content even though its technique is brilliant. In the later, positive comments, only writing technique matters; they value the novelist as long as he satisfies technical standard, while recognizing his violent themes or Southern nationalism. This is clearly shown in Maxwell Geismar’s shift from the 1942 book to the 1948 review article. For the earlier Geismar, “Faulkner was a writer trapped by the old South” (14). Believing, on one hand, that the novel is “perhaps in sheer craft the best American writer of his generation” (13), on the other he points out, in a chapter called “The Negro and the Female” in Writers in Crisis, “[h]ow similar to the fascist use of the Jews” Faulkner’s treatment of African Americans and women is (14). Several years after, he reviewed Intruder in Saturday Review of Literature, and this time, though “still highly critical of Faulkner’s southern nationalism” (242 n.19), the review “was rather positive [. . .] calling Faulkner the best novelist of his generation” (151) on the ground of his technically complicated prose: “[h]e is not always easy to read and is difficult to translate, but his exalted place in the minds of European critics is nevertheless secure”; “he is fast becoming in the minds of intellectuals here and abroad America’s premier novelist” (quoted in Schwartz 151). The point here is that obviously the earlier conjunctive standard is the stricter while the later single one is the more “liberal,” and so is the shift itself, which, according to Schwartz, made Faulkner’s reevaluation possible.
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Between these two critical currents was the major change in American literary criticism caused by what Schwartz calls the victory of “New Critics” and “New York intellectuals” over the socially conscious literary traditions of naturalism/realism. Interestingly enough, Schwartz dedicates half a chapter to “the controversy surrounding the Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound” as “the major literary dispute of the period” to illustrate that victory (154). The point he makes here is not that the controversy “demonstrates equivalency between the two artists,” Faulkner and Pound, but that it “brought to the surface the underlying ideology whereby what mattered in great art seemed to be technical virtuosity, not content” and which enabled Faulkner’s reevaluation (157). It is interesting, however, because it also illustrates, and actually demonstrates, the difficulty with which formalist aesthetics should tackle with race politics, namely anti-Semitism. To overcome this is not only the necessary condition of formalist or New Critical aesthetics but also, as will be argued below, one of the major Faulknerian subject matters.

In late February 1949 the prize was announced, and in June Robert Hillyer’s two articles were printed in *Saturday Review of Literature*, which maintained “that Ezra Pound was a traitor and that the *Pisan Cantos* was an obscene and grossly anti-Semitic book” (154). Hillyer attacked “the hegemony of art-for-art’s-sake formalism,” on which the award was established, and “charged the poet, the poem, the jury, and the benefactor with Fascist tendencies and with creating a conspiracy within an agency of the United States government [the Library of Congress]” (155).

It was Allen Tate, one of Schwartz’s “New Critics,” that “helped to create a ‘sanity’ defense for Pound” in 1943 with those who “were worried that Pound, indicted for treason *in absentia*, would be executed once captured,” and five years later planned and led the effort to make the award to the poet. And if Tate’s project epitomizes the establishment of the New Critics/New York intellectuals hegemony, the dialogue that took place between Tate and Karl Shapiro in the process represents the potential tension between formalism and racism, or how the latter should be overcome by the former as Shapiro was persuaded by Tate.

Shapiro was the only Jewish member of the jury, the Fellows in American Letters for the Library of Congress at that time. In November 1948 they met and voted for Pound, and the award was to be announced in February 1949. But Shapiro wrote to Tate in late January that he could not support the award to Pound: “he could no longer ignore the pressure of the poet’s anti-Semitism” even though “[h]e was in full support of Pound, the poet” and “believed *Pisan Cantos* was the best book of 1948” (159). Tate wrote back
asking him to “return to his November position of support, because such a stand would be a way of launching the most direct assault on anti-Semitism while simultaneously affirming the value of the artist” (160). He went as far as to assert that “he [had] almost voted against Pound because he despised the politics and anti-Semitism” but that he had voted for the poet in the end “not because the Pisan Cantos were great poems but because the work was the best book under the terms of the award.” After some more exchanges, they came back to terms. Though Shapiro published in Partisan Review (May 1949) his statement that he had “voted against Pound in the belief that the poet’s political and moral philosophy ultimately vitiates his poetry and lowers its standard as literary work,” he wrote to Tate again, just prior to its publication, to apologize for the statement and “any implied suggestion of Fascist sympathies” in it (160-61). Tate asked Shapiro to make a public statement that “the jurors had acted in good conscience,” which appeared in the July issue of Partisan Review and then “returned Shapiro to the family” (161). After all, Shapiro’s politics against anti-Semitism was, Schwartz seems to conclude, persuaded into Tate’s aesthetic claim of the autonomy of art. After Hillyer’s attack was published, Shapiro “accepted the legitimacy of Tate’s argument and helped to organize the public defense of the Fellows,” if not of Pound.

In the counterattack on Hillyer, the debate between Tate and Shapiro was to be reproduced, for, as Schwartz argues, “[o]f course, Shapiro’s argument about anti-Semitism and a conspiracy for Pound [in the May 1949 issue of Partisan Review] was not very far removed from the attack Hillyer was to make in June” (160). Even the “New York intellectuals” including such Jewish writers as, among others, William Phillips, Diana Trilling, Philip Rahv, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin and Lionel Trilling, and Commentary, “the leading American journal of Jewish opinion” (167), joined the attack. Their arguments are summarized by Leslie Fiedler’s comment: “As we permit to [sic] art [...] so we must permit [...] anti-Semitism. I would myself be unwilling to give up, even in a self-imposed boycott, The Merchant of Venice or the poems of Ezra Pound because they contain evil doctrine; beside the corruption, there is beauty and a degree of true vision that we cannot afford to sacrifice” (quoted in Schwartz 167). Literary formalism is liberal because, according to its standard, a literary work is regarded as valuable in spite of its “evil doctrine” or “corruption” as long as it is beautiful and to some degree true.

The issue here is art’s separation from politics. While “Shapiro saw a vote for Pound’s art as an acceptance of his politics” (161), for the formalist-liberalist Tate “[a] vote for Pound was not a vote for his politics or his anti-Semitism” but “a vote for artistic
independence” (162). In the latter’s view “Shapiro’s position was too narrow because he refused to acknowledge the possibility of a great art deriving from an unpopular minority position” (162). It is what Tate calls Shapiro’s narrowness that deploys Shapiro’s “political” twofold standard (both technique and content) against Tate’s “liberal” single one (technique only). And Shapiro’s reunion with Tate, the “liberal” shift already seen in Geismar, marks the victory of “art” over “politics.”

However, it is clear, of course, that this deployment of “artistic freedom” against “politicized art” is itself not only political but also nationalist, or Americanist. In his 1957 Memoirs of a Revolutionaryist: Essays in Political Criticism, Dwight MacDonald, a New York Intellectual, writes: “The award is indeed [. . .] a political act — and one which should demonstrate to many parts of our world that at least some Americans have a right to oppose Soviet totalitarianism” (quoted in Schwartz 168-69). In fact, the point Schwartz makes in this account is that the whole controversy represents a conflict between political ideologies in the sense that it also symbolizes the whole cultural Cold War of the United States and its liberal democracy against communist Russia’s, or even fascist Germany’s, totalitarianism: “the defense of the award was a clear protest against politicized art, and clear evidence of artistic freedom in the United States” while Hillyer’s articles in SRL “practiced methods of literary criticism associated with Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia” (168).

It is precisely at this point that the attack on Hillyer, and perhaps on political criticism in general, ceases to make sense, and actually begins to sound logically incoherent. Hillyer, who originally blamed Pound and his supporters for anti-Semitism and fascism, is associated with Nazi Germany. Then it should logically follow that Shapiro, who not only criticized Pound for anti-Semitism and fascism but was himself a Jew, is associated with Nazi Germany, too. In the sense that the anti-Semitism Shapiro or Hillyer employed to criticize Pound is a matter of racism rather than of politics in general, the course of the debate either between Tate and Shapiro or between them and Hillyer represents how racism had to be overcome — permitted, to borrow from Fiedler — to practice, actually enforce, formalist aesthetics. The logical and political incoherencies seen above, then, mark the difficulty with which to deal with racism.

It is partly because formalism had to refuse minority politics (anti-racism) in its aesthetic claim of the separation of art and politics, and partly because formalism had to rationalize that refusal in its nationalist claim against totalitarianism. The appeal to United States
nationalism was, Schwartz’s account suggests, required here to associate minority politics with totalitarianism — not only Marxist or any form of politics with communist Russia but anti-anti-Semitism with fascist Germany — while politically justifying formalism as an aesthetic counterpart of United States liberal democracy. As a result, associated with nationalism, the attack on Hillyer amounted to red baiting and “under the influence of the Cold War and operating with formalist aesthetic criteria [...] [a] Fascist could be an excellent poet, but a communist or naturalist could not” (Schwartz 170). In the name of liberal democracy, a fascist could prevail while a racial minority never could.

This is exactly what happened in the Tate-Shapiro debate. To defend the award to Pound in the name of art was in fact to defend the poet and the award from the criticism against his anti-Semitism for the sake of democratic freedom. Yet, obviously Shapiro’s anti-anti-Semitism, or anti-racism as such, sounds more liberalist or democratic than Pound’s anti-Semitism (or racism as such); anti-racism is by definition a practice to help and save the weak and oppressed, namely, the minority. It is this politics in favor of the minority that Shapiro claimed in his vote against Pound; Pound and his supporters should change their political view to be good enough for the award. And the implicit but central claim in Shapiro’s politics of anti-racism, or in politics as such, is that Pound, and any anti-Semites, should stop being anti-Semites because they could, while on the other hand Shapiro, or any Jews, could not stop being Jews. That is, it is not Shapiro’s anti-racism but Pound’s racism that is politics. One can (therefore should) change one’s politics from an inferior to a superior one (from racism to anti-racism, for example), but not one’s race.2

On the other hand, it is also this very politics that formalism, or at least Tate’s version of it, has to exclude as what renders over-demanding the literary value judgment standard, according to which a literary work should be technically excellent as well as politically correct. In Tate’s view, Shapiro’s position was too narrow, which is why Tate asked Shapiro to revise his aesthetic attitude; Shapiro should give up, or at least suspend, his “politics” and by doing so, as a man of letters, should adopt formalism as a superior aesthetics. Minority politics is, in other words, an inferior aesthetics for Tate.

Tate’s claim is, of course, not that Shapiro should stop being a Jew but that he should suspend his anti-racism to judge a work of art. He claimed he did not support anti-

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2 The whole argument of this essay on ideology and identity owes much to Walter Benn Michaels’s analysis on “posthistoricism” (especially 19-81).
Semitism — actually he told Shapiro that he despised it. Therefore, when “Tate suggested that Shapiro’s own Pulitzer could have been denied on the same grounds as Shapiro’s rejection of Pound” (Schwartz 161-62), he refused both Pound’s anti-Semitism and Shapiro’s anti-racism as “politics” — “unpopular minority positions” — in order to evaluate them as artists, for the sake of art. These two “unpopular minority positions” are, however, “unpopular” in different senses. On one hand, Pound’s anti-Semitism is “unpopular” because it is not only “insane” or “crazy” — in their “sanity” defense for Pound, Tate and his friends would have claimed that Pound was “crazy” (157) — but “evil” and “corrupted,” as Fiedler remarked. If, on the other, Shapiro’s anti-anti-Semitism is unpopular, that is because it is just “minor,” just representative of a certain “minority” position. In short, what is “unpopular” in Pound is his politics while in Shapiro it is his racial identity. And in treating them similarly, Tate is not only treating Shapiro’s Jewishness as politics, or, more precisely, aesthetics, which one can (therefore should) change; he is also treating Pound’s anti-Semitism as identity, which one cannot (therefore need not) change.

If, however, Shapiro’s anti-anti-Semitism can be regarded as politics, or, more radically, aesthetics, not only can he revise it but also he should revise it insofar as it is inferior to anything else. Actually, Shapiro accepted Tate’s claim when he returned to him and helped defend the award; that is, he gave up his anti-Semitism and therefore quit being a Jew to be a formalist, at least in his activity as a Fellow in American Letters. In this sense, Tate’s formalist project to depoliticize art is indeed an attempt to overcome racism — anti-racism, more precisely — by redescribing race into aesthetics, as if to suspend one’s Jewishness were to employ a better aesthetic position; and it succeeded when Shapiro followed it.

Anti-Semitism operates against formalist aesthetic standard also in Faulkner criticism. As has been argued above, it is the core of Maxwell Geismar’s social/political criticism against the novelist’s Southern nationalism in “The Negro and the Female,” its point being that “Faulkner was a writer trapped by the old South” and that his treatment of “the negro” and “the female” is similar to “the fascist use of the Jews.” The fact that Geismar was not totally persuaded into formalism suggests the difficulty with which formalism has to cope with race politics. Even in his later, more positive review of The Intruder in the Dust, where Schwartz tries to see his shift from Marxist criticism to formalism, Geismar, “still highly critical of Faulkner’s southern nationalism,” does not seem to totally give up his.
political criticism — could not overcome racism, in other words — to be a full-fledged formalist.

Geismar’s invocation of fascism and anti-Semitism in his 1942 book is, of course, a figure of speech. It is a trope to mobilize the ideological conflict of the time, the war between the United States and Nazi Germany, and therefore to mobilize nationalism, into his criticism on Faulkner’s Southern nationalism. The strategy here is, in other words, to associate World War II with the Civil War by way of racism, that is, anti-Semitism with white supremacy, and consequently the old South with fascist Germany and the North with the United States. Indeed it is because of this kind of association that for the formalists like Tate Faulkner’s Southern nationalism had to be transformed into certain universal value, and they did so by paralleling it with United States liberal democracy, also through the nationalist discourse against Russian communism.

Obviously such association of Southern nationalism with fascism (or even totalitarianism in general) is not uncommon. In The Mind of the South, W. J. Cash concludes that “[t]he final great result of Reconstruction [. . .] is that it established [. . .] the savage ideal as it had not been established in any Western people since the decay of medieval feudalism, and almost as truly as it is established today in Fascist Italy, in Nazi Germany, in Soviet Russia” (134). Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. catalogues the leftist Southern writers in the 1930s and 1940s like Erskin Caldwell, Lilian Smith, Richard Wright and Katherine DuPre who “examined in their work various manifestations of Southern injustice, frequently making connections between Southern culture and fascist ideology and practice” (78). Robert Penn Warren, a New Critic, cynically summarizes Faulkner’s critical perception in the 1930s and 1940s: “with a few exceptions, Faulkner had up until Cowley’s book [The Portable Faulkner] been characterized as ‘a combination of Thomas Nelson Page, a fascist and a psychopath, gnawing at his nails’ ” (quoted in Brinkmeyer 71). Even Faulkner himself recognized a fascist character in Percy Grimm: “If I recall him aright, he was the Fascist galahad who saved the white race by murdering Christmas. I invented him in 1931. I didn’t realize until after Hitler got into the newspapers that I had created a Nazi before he did” (Selected Letters 202).

Grimm is the most fitting character to discuss here, for he is the very site where Southern white supremacy and United States nationalism are interpenetrated. Since he was too young to serve in World War I, “[i]t was the new civilian-military-act which saved him” (Light in August 450) by enabling him to live up to “a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races
and that the American uniform is superior to all men" (451). Warwick Wadlington gives a background account on it: "the Spanish-American war and especially the First World War provided occasions for the South to reestablish itself as an essential part of patriotic America, martial but peaceful. Thus Captain Percy Grimm, by virtue of the National Defense Act of 1920 [. . .] is calmly confident that he represents Uncle Sam" (141). The United States nationalism boosted by World War I not only lets live the Faulknerian white supremacist but, according to Wadlington, stood for the reunion of the North and the South in history. Thomas Woodrow Wilson, who, as a person, was the first Southern President since the Civil War (and since Andrew Jackson), and, as a politician, led the nation to the war against Germany in 1917, "had symbolized American reunification after the Civil War, not only in his person but in his policies" (Wadlington 132-33).

This interpenetration of regionalism and nationalism, or more precisely, redescription of white supremacy into Americanism, puts Grimm in a complicated position. On one hand he is a lawful "soldier" who feels obliged to protect Christmas from mob lynching: "We must let the law take its course. The law, the nation. It is the right of no civilian to sentence a man to death. And we, the soldiers in Jefferson, are the ones to see to that" (Light in August 451-52). On the other, it is he who, in uniform, shoots and mutilates Christmas as an alleged "negro": "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell" (464). In this light, this character comes to epitomize both sides of the Civil War; the loser as a murderous white supremacist of the Dixie and the winner as a (make-believe) "[s]pecial officer sent by the governor" of the Union (458). It sounds no less inconsistent than a fascist can be an excellent artist in the Pound debate.

Grimm's commitment to nationalism, like the formalists' commitment to it, rationalizes racism or the refusal of minority politics in general. In his critical analysis on race and blood in Light in August, Jay Watson comments: "Grimm's primary responsibility is to his country; he is, after all, a member of the National guard. America is his first and truest love" (83). Referring to "the Great Migration" (80) of fugitive slaves in 1910s and 1920s and the logic of "1920s-era American nativism" (83), he offers the theory of Joe Christmas's "transformation [. . .] from structurally white to structurally black" (84): "The farther he runs from the protection Grimm offers, the blacker he will get; the blacker he gets, the more dangerous he will become; and the more dangerous he becomes, the more

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3 It has often been pointed out that Wilson was a South-bred white supremacist himself, and practiced his white supremacist policy in the White House. In this respect this essay owes much to Lawrence J. Friedman 150-73 and passim.
violence against him will be justified in the name of preempting the violence expected from him” (83-84). It is because Christmas “no longer accepts the protection of the law,” that is, because he steps out of the range of protection offered by the American law, that “the man whose mission was to keep Joe from getting lynched can wind up single-handedly lynching Joe himself” (84).

In other words, it is not until Christmas stops being an American citizen by giving up the right he otherwise could enjoy that Grimm can lynch him in uniform, in the name of America. It is an absurdity to Sheriff Kennedy, for to him it is in no way a reasonable choice: “How did I know he aimed to break, would think of trying it right then and there? [...] when Stevens had done told me he would plead guilty and take a life sentence” (Light in August 458). To Gavin Stevens it is rationalized as a matter of “blood”: “But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it” (449). In Watson’s attempt to reemphasize the socially constructed origin of racism, Stevens’s essentialist conclusion is reread from a constructionist viewpoint and the causal account is reversed; in Stevens Christmas escapes because he is “black” while in Watson he is “black” because he escapes. More precisely, however, Christmas’s racial identity should be irrelevant in Watson’s account of his murder. Legally speaking (as Watson does), insofar as Christmas, whether “black” or “white,” remains an American citizen, Grimm should protect Christmas, for example, from the expected lynch mob; and as soon as Christmas escapes with a fully-loaded gun, Grimm, as a peacekeeper, should capture and perhaps kill him. It is then that Watson asserts Christmas starts being “black”; or it might make more sense to say it is rather when he is “lynched” to death that he renders himself “black.” Anyway, for Grimm as an American soldier to murder Christmas as “black,” Christmas has to start being “black” at a certain point, just as if racial identity were something one can start or stop belonging to, something one can adopt or discard like political or aesthetic positions.

It sounds as if the Grimm episode repeats the Pound story. In Faulkner, Christmas, whose “tragedy” is “not to know what he is and know that he will never know” (Faulkner in University 72), had to start being an African American to be killed by Grimm. In Schwartz, Shapiro, a Jewish critic who criticized Pound for his anti-Semitism, had to stop being a Jew to be a formalist. Both episodes show how the appeal to nationalism is required in their racist claim; and how racism like Grimm’s white supremacy and Pound’s anti-Semitism, associated with United States nationalism, prevails. Meanwhile, minority racial identities like an African American or a Jew are redescribed into aesthetic or whatever
ideologies, something one can choose to assume and stop assuming at will, so that one may change one’s racial identity to support the dominant, Americanist, discourse. The point here is to embrace racism requires one (a formalist, for example) to treat minority racial identity as choosable, like aesthetic or political ideologies. In fact, even if one cannot stop being a Jew, one can stop being an anti-anti-Semitist; and even if one cannot stop being an African American, one can stop being an anti-white supremacist. Logically, at least, to belong to, or stop belonging to, one’s race is one thing while to have one’s racial politics, or to give up a certain political or aesthetic standpoint and have a different one, is quite another.

Needless to say, it does not necessarily mean that Grimm is artistically or aesthetically excellent. Actually, not only Christmas but also his men do not appreciate him in this respect: “when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit” (Light in August 464). Rather, the point here is the lack of such excellence in his nationalism/white supremacy. “In fact,” the narrator of Light in August reports, “his first serious fight was with an exsoldier who made some remark to the effect that if he had to do it again, he would fight this time on the German side against France”; and to Grimm’s question “Against America, too?” he answered he would “if America’s fool enough to help France out again” (450). The veteran supports the United States insofar as he can support its diplomatic policy while Grimm unconditionally does so; the former is Americanist because America is good enough (and he stops being so as soon as it is not), but the latter is Americanist because America is his country—because he is American (that is, he never stops being Americanist as long as he never stops being American). In short, Grimm, instead of offering his Americanism as an excellent choice (as Tate did in his formalist claim), practices it as identity politics.

That is one way to account for Christmas’s suicidal run. If Shapiro chose Tate’s formalism over anti-racism because it was a superior aesthetic position to anti-racism, then Christmas has no such aesthetic or whatever ground to choose in order to join Grimm; rather, the fact that he refuses to “take life sentence” and escapes only to be lynched might even suggest that the choice to escape is worth for Christmas. Actually Christmas, whose racial origin and therefore racial identity no one including him knows and will ever know, is precisely the one who knows he can stop and start being “white” or “negro” when he “bedded with the women [. . .] and then told them that he was a negro” (Light in August 224); when he “tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight
them” (225) and “fought the negro who called him white” (225); or when he “lived with negroes, shunning white people” (33) in Chicago or Detroit and then starts working as a “white” man, at least as “a foreigner,” at a mill in Jefferson. He could have been ready to live as a “white” to be a Southern white supremacist and enjoy a set of rights and freedoms Grimm’s America offers. And yet he lacks what formalism is to Shapiro.

More precisely, of course, rather than the Grimm episode repeats the Pound controversy, it is the latter that repeats the former. In other words, Schwartz’s account of WWII and the Cold War reproduces Faulkner’s account of WWI and the Civil War. Geismar’s racism as a trope, connecting Pound’s anti-Semitism and Grimm’s white supremacy, suggests that these racist politics are the bases on which formalism as well as the South depends. On one hand, if the Civil War and the South’s defeat in it problematize the South’s il-/legitimacy, the central problem is precisely white supremacy, that is, “injustice and oppression — namely slavery and the slavery system” (Glissant 122) on which the South is regarded as founded: “Both on the Plantation and in the world developed around it, something’s rotten in the act of appropriation and colonization, as long as one persists in slavery and its unpardonable derivative, miscegenation (founded on rape)” (132).4 On the other, Tate’s formalism should and actually did overcome anti-Semitism in Schwartz’s account of the Pound debate. In the Grimm-Christmas confrontation, white supremacy takes a form of deadly violence, which ultimately reveals the illegitimate ground of the South; in the Tate-Shapiro debate, anti-Semitism was redescribed by Tate’s formalism into a superior aesthetics at least to anti-anti-Semitism. That is, in the former racism is illegitimate, groundless violence while in the latter formalist aesthetics renders it legitimate, providing the ground to choose it. That is why Tate was able to persuade Shapiro into his aesthetic camp and Grimm had to resort to violence to confront Christmas.

So if, as Schwartz claims, the Pound controversy shows — narrativizes — how Tate’s version of literary formalism established “the basis on which Faulkner was being presented for reconsideration” (171), then the narrative not only retells but also revises the Grimm episode. With certain excellence to choose, like formalist aesthetics for Shapiro, Christmas need not have been killed; and it is that aesthetics which enabled Faulkner’s postwar reevaluation. What Schwartz calls the victory of formalist aesthetics over the literary

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4 For the discussion of the Civil War and slavery as the illegitimate origin of South, see Doyle’s whole argument.
traditions of naturalism/realism transforms the splendid failure of the Grimm-Christmas confrontation into the successful aesthetic reunion between Tate and Shapiro, thus the violence of Southern white supremacy into the aesthetic excellence of (potentially anti-Semitic) formalism. This rationalization of racism is, as has been argued, deployed along with the victory of United States liberal democracy both against the South in the Civil War and Nazi Germany in WWII, and furthermore communist Russia in the Cold War. Without such nationalist/Americanist by-context, Grimm could not lynch Christmas as a national guard nor could Tate attack Hillyer and Shapiro, who criticized Pound for his fascism and anti-Semitism, as if they were Nazis.

If one of the points made in Faulkner and Faulkner criticism is that racial identity is, whether in an essentialist or constructionist light, fixed and everlasting, Joe Christmas is the one who questions it not only by his death but by his argument.⁵ When Joanna Burden says, "I had thought about that. Why father didn’t shoot Colonel Sartoris. I think that it was because of his French blood" (Light in August 254), he talks back: "Dont even Frenchmen get mad when a man kills his father and his son on the same day? I guess your father must have got religion" (254-55). What is being discussed here is the political conflict between the Yankees and the Southerners about race politics, namely “a question of negro voting” (248); John Sartoris killed two Calvins, Joanna’s grandfather and stepbrother, the former of whom “got a commission from the government [...] to help with the freed negroes” (251). While Joanna tries to rationalize the incident in terms of “blood” — Nathaniel, her father, does not kill Sartoris because of his French blood while Sartoris kills the two Burdens because of his lack of it — Christmas questions her logic, suggesting that it should be religion or some other social, cultural or political ideologies.

Insofar as the conflict is caused by their difference in “blood,” it is impossible to solve it, for such a difference cannot be undone as a disagreement in ideologies (like politics) can. It is precisely such impossibility that Joanna arrives at: “It was all over then. The killing in uniform and with flags, and the killing without uniforms and flags. And none of it doing or did any good. None of it. And we were foreigners, strangers, that thought differently.

⁵ One of the major points in Faulkner is, as many critics have argued, that even one’s racial identity is something “absolute” (to borrow from Glissant). Among them are those earlier critics like Vickery (68-69), Bleikasten (1987: 98, 1988: 50) and Brooks (50) whose focuses are on the individual as a product of the community, their point being that even in their social constructionist model identity behaves as the absolute.
from the people whose country we had come into without being asked or wanted” (255). However, insofar as it is a matter of “thought,” there should be a way to negotiate and persuade; precisely because she invokes a matter of blood, she arrives at the vision of an everlasting conflict. The Civil War (“the killing in uniform and with flags”) and the Reconstruction as its aftermath (“the killing without uniforms and flags”), insofar as they are conflicts between “bloods,” between the “Yankees” and the “Southerners” as “foreigners,” leads to nothing but a conflict fought by force, which Joanna seems to believe can be stopped only by Nathaniel’s nonresistance and nonviolence.

This is precisely what Glissant offers as an account of how race functions in Faulkner, the picture of African Americans as “permanency” or “absolutes” (59). Race, or in a more Faulknerian-sounding term, blood, is a fixed, everlasting category of difference whose temporal continuation brings eternal spatial fragmentation that marks the Faulknerian world view like Joanna’s. It defines people as different from each other and divides them in different groups, which results in ever unreconcilable conflicts (while the everlasting past a.k.a. identity the characters suffer complicates the writing style as well as the plot, as is argued by Glissant).

The way race/blood functions here is precisely what Samuel P. Huntington calls “the fault lines between civilizations [. . .] as the flash points for crisis and bloodshed” (50) in his theory on the contemporary globalized society, the post-Cold War world where ideological conflicts are over. Differently put, insofar as the Civil War is regarded not as an ideological conflict (the political one between racism and anti-racism, for example) but as an identitarian conflict (between the “Southerners” and the “Yankees” as well as the “whites” and the “negroes”), the conflict never ends even after the war is over itself.

Schwartz’s account of formalist aesthetics, therefore, redescribes the (Faulknerian) Civil War as an identitarian conflict into the Cold War as an ideological conflict, or in other words, Huntingtonian “crash of civilizations” into “the conflict of ideologies first among communism, fascism-China and liberal democracy, and then between communism and liberal democracy” (Huntington 44). Through this redescription the cause of formalist aesthetics and liberal democracy not only could and, according to Schwartz, did solve the Civil War/Reconstruction conflict between the South and the North but also transformed the vanquished into the victor — Faulkner’s (and New Critical formalists’) South nationalism into United States liberal democracy. The central concept is, as has been argued above, the transformation of racial identity into aesthetic ideology claimed by formalists such as Tate.
And if the central idea, or condition, of formalism is the ideologization of racial (or whatever) identity, which enables one to revise minority politics or minority identity as inferior aesthetics, the central idea of multiculturalism is the transformation of aesthetic ideology into racial identity, that is, formalism into, for example, Eurocentricism. Just as the Huntingtonian identitarian account of the world is a theory to explain the post-Cold War international politics, so postcolonialist multiculturalism is a theory to describe and evaluate the post-Cold War literary criticism — literary criticism after the predominance of formalism — and its rereading and recanonization. Glissant's concept of African American racial identity as "absolute" obviously reflects such a world view, and his account of Faulkner is the project of practicing formalism based on such a concept. Insofar as the world is (re-)described and (re-)narrativized, Glissant's practice makes sense as criticism on the fictionality and illegitimacy of the origin and the basis of formalist aesthetics, namely the refusal of minority politics. It is also true, however, that only by redescribing identity as eternal difference into ideology, what one can choose and revise, can one overcome conflicts, either political or cultural.

The redescription is essential in literary criticism, or aesthetics in general. Whether formalist or not, the concept of aesthetics, or that of art, has to contain that of evaluation, without which aesthetics or art has to be a concept or act of categorization. It is a logical consequence, therefore, that formalist, art-for-art's-sake aesthetics needed the Cold War as an ideological conflict to flourish. Insofar as it is an ideological conflict, like the one between the United State's liberal democracy or capitalism and the Soviet Russia's communism or socialism, there can be a possibility of argument, persuasion, and agreement; that is, the superior ideology can prevail. And from this viewpoint, postcolonial identity politics is just the opposite, where there are only everlasting conflicts precisely because there can be neither superior nor inferior identity — one race is neither superior nor inferior to but just different from another — and therefore no argument, persuasion or agreement is possible. That is the purpose of the separation of aesthetics from racial politics, or the redescription of racism into aesthetics, which is the necessary condition for formalist aesthetics, or aesthetics as such, to establish itself insofar as it is a means of evaluation. In this light, the Grimm-Christmas confrontation is both its harbinger and failure.
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