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FAULKNER'S *PYLON*: A NEGLECTED COMMENTARY ON
TECHNOLOGY AND THE SOUTH

In his introduction to *Southern Writers and the Machine*, Jeffrey J. Folks makes some very astute observations on the response of southern writers, including William Faulkner, to the quick-paced modernization of their region. He claims that change, most notably the rapid transformation of the South from a basically rural and agrarian society into a modern, technologized and industrialized one, is the central concern of most southern literature in this period. His underlying assumption is that the concept of change is the central subject of all representative modern texts coming from the South, to an even greater extent than in modernist literature in general (1). He asserts that the basis of the aesthetic with which Southern writers responded to technological progress derives partly from the nineteenth-century British notion of the Victorian technological sublime and partly from an inherently American attitude of attempting to situate and conceive of technology within the pastoral tradition (3). Folks maintains that, contrary to the general associations of the South with conservative and traditionalist thinking in conflict with progressive ideologies, most of the major intellectuals of the early twentieth century had long acknowledged the ultimate defeat of such a reactionary, backward-looking position. "There is plenty of nostalgia for the past," he writes, "but very little conviction of an actual attempt to return to a pre-industrial order" (4). This does not mean that Southern writers in and after the 1920s were direct proponents of industrialization and pioneers of technological development, but by

and large they had at least made “an attempt to come to terms with the modernization which was well underway and clearly irreversible” (4).

Pylon (1935) is perhaps the Faulkner novel that most thoroughly bears out the above dichotomy focusing on a technology that in many ways proved to be an excellent choice for an icon of technological progress in the 1930s: the airplane. Faulkner’s choice of aviation as the representative technology with which to demonstrate his ambivalence toward unlimited trust in technological progress and development is hardly accidental; in fact, it is deeply rooted in his biography. On top of the intensified interest of the general public in flying after World War I, further heightened by the accomplishments of Charles Lindbergh in the late 1920s, Faulkner’s own personal interest, as well as a lifelong association with aviation, was also a significant factor. To put it very bluntly, William Faulkner was an “airplane nut” of the worst order. His fascination with flying dates back to his childhood when he first caught a glimpse of balloonists at the Lafayette County Fair in 1908.¹ A few years later he and his brothers would actually build an “aeroplane” of sorts, which, as a matter of course, thirteen-year old Billy crashed on its maiden flight, or rather fall, from a low bluff in the Falkner backyard (Harrison 22). This early aviation incident, a combination of enthusiasm and pending disaster, could be seen as a foreshadowing of Faulkner’s subsequent aviation adventures.

In the 1910s when the earliest barnstormer troupes toured many places in the South, and the war was just around the corner, young William Faulkner became even more enchanted with the chivalric nature of aerial combat, admired these “knights of the air,” and wanted to become like them. When World War I broke out and the airplane found its first practical use in the military, Faulkner resolved to become an aviator. Even to this day, various contradictory accounts are in wide circulation on Faulkner’s service in World War I. After the war Faulkner came home to Mississippi in style, wearing an RAF

¹ As his brother John later recalled, the fatalism surrounding the aviators was very much a part of this early encounter: “All airmen of that day were looked on as lunatics [...] We knew one of them would fall and be killed sooner or later, and... we wanted to be there and see him when he got what was coming for him” (qtd. in Harrison 21).

uniform, spreading the news, or at least not refuting it, that he had been wounded in an air crash, or even in air combat overseas, that he had destroyed two German planes in France, and that he had at least two major operations that resulted in a metal disk in his hip and a silver plate in his head. (Less sympathetic critics add that he was noted to even feign a limp to prove the former, and used the latter on occasion to cover up for a little too much drinking.) His version of the events, at least in those early years, is well summarized in the following account of his life, printed along with an interview in 1931:

In 1915 he enlisted with the Canadian air force and went to France. He crashed behind his own lines. He was hanging upside down in his plane with both legs broken when an ambulance got to him. [...] After he recovered he transferred to the American air force. He has a pilot's license now and sometimes flies a rather wobbly plane owned by a friend in Oxford. (qtd. in Meriwether 23–24)

The fact is, of course, that the legends of being shot down were part of the self-created myths that Faulkner projected for himself. He was, indeed, a flying cadet in Canada, but his entire military career was spent in ground school training. He never made it to Europe before the Armistice, and in fact he only learnt to fly a plane in 1933—two years after the above interview was published.

The following year, however, he also bought a Waco C type airplane and for a while piloted it on a semi-regular basis. He also encouraged his younger brother Dean to learn to fly, and even financed his flying lessons “hoping the talented Dean would stick to something he could make a living at” (Karl 521). First with his flying instructor and friend, Vernon C. Omlie, and later with his brothers John and Dean, he took part in several air shows in northern Mississippi. In 1934, he and Omlie flew to New Orleans to attend the air show staged at the occasion of the opening of Shushan Airport, which was one of the most memorable aviation events of the times in the South. This event, where he had an opportunity to see some of the most famous exhibition fliers of the country, was a direct inspiration for *Pylon*, written in the same year and published in 1935. By this time, aviation “became Faulkner’s ‘baseball,’ a metaphor for the way he linked himself to a national pastime, a pastoral with frail machines” (Karl 518). Faulkner, his brother Dean and some of his friends even

set up an air circus not unlike those described in *Pylon* and “Death Drag.” Then, however, tragedy struck: on November 10, 1935, Dean crashed the plane during an air show and was killed along with three passengers. This was one of the most devastating experiences in Faulkner’s life. He felt guilty since it was he that encouraged Dean to fly and gave him the airplane in which his Dean was killed. Nine months later Omlie also died in a plane crash. For a whole year Faulkner would not touch the controls of an airplane, and only occasionally afterwards.

Significantly, when asked about aviation in an interview in 1955, Faulkner gave other reasons for his recent negligence of the earlier hobby. Only a few decades after the pinnacle of the aviation sublime, he complained of the gradual disappearance of freedom and spontaneity once associated with flying. “I still enjoy aviation,” he said,

but it has become so mechanical that the pleasure I had once is gone. One has to be a mechanical or technical expert to fly any more. The days when anyone with an airplane and a tank of fuel could fly where he wanted to is past. [...] After the First World War, aviation was new. People were willing to pay up to \$100 to go up in a plane. You didn’t need any license to practice this activity. As flying got more regimented and as there got to be more planes, it got less interesting and you earned less money at it, so I left it. (Meriwether 139)

While conveying a sense of loss and disillusionment prevalent in the post-World War II period, this comment allows little insight into the true meaning of aviation for Faulkner in earlier decades. As Robert W. Hamblin asserts in his entry on aviation in *The William Faulkner Encyclopedia*, Faulkner was attracted to flying primarily by the risks it involved: “Small in stature, effeminate in appearance and bearing, unfortunate in love, Faulkner appears to have sought to assert his manhood and courage by courting danger and death at the controls of a plane” (26). Amazement at the power and potential of airplanes, especially as seen against the background of the skies of the technologically backward, agricultural South, combined with a constant awareness of the dangers inherent with it—this is a special

version of Faulkner's technological sublime.² However, as Gray notes, Faulkner always "remained just on the margins of things; knowing enough now to share in the adventure, to experience vicariously the thrill of transgression, but unwilling to push things farther, to venture beyond the role of the weekend pilot" (195). Such a cautious reconsideration of the sublime of aviation would especially be timely after the tragic losses of his brother and his friend, just after the publication of *Pylon*, Faulkner's comment on the technological sublime in the 1930s.

Little wonder, then, that aviation also plays a significant part in Faulkner's art. Some of his earliest writings, poems like "The Ace" and "The Lilacs," as well as short stories in the early 1920s, such as "Ad Astra," "Love," "Landing in Luck," "Death Drag," and "Honor" were inspired by aviation, particularly the image of the war pilot. Most of these writings reach back to the cult of the World War I ace, while some of them, most notably "Honor" and "Death Drag" with their barnstormer characters, anticipate *Pylon*.³ The dichotomy of dreams and reality, which is at the core of Faulkner's attitude toward aviation is well borne out in his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926). The book tells the story of two young soldiers' return home from World War I, one unharmed, the other disabled physically and psychologically. The chief characters of the novel are Cadet Julian Lowe, Faulkner's real alter ego, who never had a chance to be in combat, and the dying ace, Lt. Donald Mahon, his self-made alter ego, a projection of his wishes. A similar contrast is played out in Bayard Sartoris, the protagonist of *Flags in the Dust* (1929) and his twin brother John, who were also combat pilots in World War I. John is shot down by a German plane while Bayard survives, but the wartime experience leaves him incapable of reintegrating into peacetime society. Tortured by survivor guilt over his brother's death, he is

² In addition to fulfilling his need for danger, denied in World War I, airplanes also allowed Faulkner a means of constructing an alternate identity and to escape, however temporarily, the drudgery of everyday life and the responsibilities it entails. Paradoxically, horses fulfilled a similar need in a later stage of his life (Karl 496). In this respect, it is interesting to note the parallels between the lives of Faulkner and his fictional character, Bayard Sartoris.

³ There is even a *ménage à trois* in "Honor," which can be regarded as a preparatory sketch for *Pylon*.

constantly looking for a substitute sublime, something that is as thrilling, exhilarating, and at the same time as dangerous as flying those fighter planes was. He seems to find this first in a high-powered automobile, which eventually kills not him, but his grandfather, and then in a wild stallion, which fulfills much of the same need. Eventually, he comes full circle back to aviation, and significantly dies when testing an experimental airplane—if not on the altar of patriotism, then at least as a sacrificial victim for progress.

More importantly, in addition to the texts mentioned above, in which the sublime of aviation is an important, if not central, motif, Faulkner also devoted a full novel to this topic. *Pylon*, Faulkner's eighth novel, is about flying and the motivation of the fliers, reflecting its author's ambivalent feelings of fascination for aviation combined with his fears, soon justified in his brother's accident. Given the importance of the changes brought about by the quick technologization and urbanization throughout the United States it is all the more surprising that *Pylon* is perhaps Faulkner's most underrated novel. The book received a rather lukewarm reception from contemporary reviewers, although it was later very warmly praised by Dos Passos and Hemingway. Edmond L. Volpe asserts that *Pylon* "provides an unsatisfying, almost irritating, reading experience" (175). The highly fragmented, allusion-laden, innovative style and language of the text may also be an alienating factor: "Its frequent unannounced shifts in point of view and narrative voice, over-reliance on Eliotic subject matter, and neologistic vocabulary—these are the traits that have repeatedly irritated *Pylon*'s commentators" (McElrath 277). In his critical biography, Richard Gray even went as far as calling *Pylon*, citing what he considered unanimous critical consensus, Faulkner's least satisfactory novel. He seems to ground this claim in Faulkner's own ambivalence and confusion regarding aviation: "He could not, in short, turn the dream of flight into a convincing fiction [. . .]. He could only report his confusions and leave it at that; after which, it was not the bar he sought, by way of compensation, but other stories nearer the earth" (203). While it must be granted that the plot of *Pylon* is rather meager, Michael Zeitlin is justified in claiming that the story of *Pylon* is "secondary to its more important function, which is to record, transcribe, interpret, and so *manage* successfully the phenomena of a radically transformed reality" (233; his emphasis). In my own

analysis, I hope to show that the confusion, ambivalence, and indeterminacy may well be there, but rather than discounting the value of the work, in fact, they further underline the themes of the text, including Faulkner's commentary on the technological sublime of the 1930s.

As I mentioned above, one of the reasons why many critics denounced the text was Faulkner's apparent overdependence on Eliotian material. Granted, Faulkner deliberately engages in a seemingly never-ending intertextual game with T. S. Eliot. The city and especially its new airport, built on land that was formerly a swamp, are invariably presented as wastelands. As one critic puts it, the whole "novel ultimately is about waste: human waste mainly, but also the waste of energy, waste of meaningful life, waste of what should be the best" (Karl 530). As part of the intertextual game, there is even a Valley of Bones here, as well as a chapter entitled "Lovesong of J. A. Prufrock," not to mention the "burial by water" of Roger Shumann, the pilot protagonist who crashes into the lake. As Susie Paul Johnson puts it, however, these critics disregard the "abundant and original detail and concern" (288) that Faulkner invests. The airport "celebrates the promise of technology and represents the future as New Valois sees it. But in *Pylon* planes become instruments of exploitation; their ability to attract the crowds is valued more than the safety of the pilots" (Johnson 292). The essential motive is greed for profit, which is contrasted with the aviators' foregoing of the same. Crowds of ticket-holders come in anticipation of tragedy, to see the professional pilots flirting with death. The sublimity of the airplanes for many spectators directly translates into the spectacular crashes, fireballs with waste of human life and machine. Technology so used offers no promise of escape from the wasteland; indeed, it contributes to the wastelanding of the world.

Another reason for the unpopularity of *Pylon* is the inaccessibility of its highly innovative language. I would like to argue that this, too, is related to the sublimity of technology. As Michael Zeitlin notes, the language of *Pylon* appropriately complements its theme: "so alien, so fast-paced, so beyond the range of established literary language and convention did Faulkner find the contemporary scene that he needed to invent a new language, one now determined by the imperatives of a

mechanized culture” (232). As several critics have noted, *Pylon* is really an extended poem in narrative form (Volpe 176; Karl 532). The abundance of neologisms, composite, portmanteau words, such as corpseglare, wirehum, gaslinespanned, pavementthrong, traffic-dammed, machinevoice, gearwhine, typesplattered, reminds the reader of Dos Passos, whose use of newspaper headlines interspersed in the text is also utilized here. As Cecelia Tichi notes, this technique “underscores the rapid-transit age with the technique of jamming words together to suggest rapid-fire speech and instantaneous perception” (198). Time and space collapse as a result of technology, and the technique that Faulkner uses in an attempt to recreate this feeling is the mechanization of the text, writing prose made of standard parts (repetition is an important device in *Pylon*), and creating text based on engineering standards.

The fame of William Faulkner, “the sole proprietor of Yoknapatawpha County,” rests on his works set in and around the immediate vicinity of his hometown, Oxford, renamed Jefferson, in his fiction. *Pylon* is a notable exception to the generally rural settings used in most of his longer fiction. This is Faulkner’s only novel set entirely within or on the very outskirts of a major American city, even if a fictional one, and Faulkner’s “first real attempt to register the voices of the city” (Gray 198). New Valois, Franciana is, as Faulkner himself admitted, a rather thinly disguised fictional version of New Orleans, Louisiana. The description of the city abounds in images of decay and spiritual corruption. The time is during the week of Mardi Gras, which is also the time of the opening of the city’s new airport, significantly named after the corrupt Jewish chairman of the municipal sewage board.⁴ Mardi Gras, of course, symbolic of death and rebirth, provides an excellent backdrop to Faulkner’s examination of the anxieties regarding an artistic response to technology. *Pylon* is also unique in being Faulkner’s only novel set in the future: the novel was written in 1934, but is set in 1935. It is a “prophetic book, in which air racing is used as a general metaphor for a nightmarish vision of the future” (Harrington 154).

⁴ Faulkner’s somewhat anti-Semitic attitude, as borne out in his characterization of Colonel Feinman, may be traced back to his rather negative experiences in Hollywood.

In addition to airplanes, other technologies like telephones, taxicabs, typewriters—all of them icons of the big city and tools of a newspaper reporter, this archetypal city character—are also prominently featured. As Zeilin notes, technological images like “the telephone’s ‘dead wirehum’ or the lamp’s ‘corpseglare’ refract a dying civilization [...] a grotesque anti-pastoral, a viciously fragmented world” (234). While Faulkner’s indebtedness to Eliot is doubtless, he owes much to Dos Passos’s description of the pulsating city as well, even though the nameless reporter is definitely no Jimmy Herf, and New Orleans in 1935 is certainly no Manhattan. However, although situated in the heart of the South it may well be on its way to becoming a metropolis, and Faulkner skillfully pinpoints those aspects of urbanization and technologization which seemed inevitable, yet ambiguous: awesome while frightening. The roadster of Hagood, the reporter’s boss, as painted against the background of the old “French Town,” is a case in point: “a machine expensive, complex, delicate and intrinsically useless, created for some obscure psychic need of the species if not the race, from the virgin resources of the continent, to be the individual muscles bones and flesh of a new and legless kind” (87). This shift in the fundamental background of his fictional work, a clear, although only temporary, break, a “holiday from Yoknapatawpha County—and from the Southern past” as Cleanth Brooks called it (178), is at the same time also the earliest and the best articulation of his rather ambivalent views on the role of technology in contemporary America, and especially in the South.

The novel features many typically Faulknerian themes. Flying emerges in *Pylon* as symbolic of the general disillusionment and restlessness of youth in the post-war period. Another obvious theme is that of survival, never a purely materialistic necessity, but balanced against certain ideals that are hardly rational. Faulkner’s concept of psychological necessity, that men and women must do what they are driven to do by their most profound inner motivations, is brought to the foreground. A central question in *Pylon* concerns human motivation and the complexity of why people do things, ranging from external circumstances and physical needs to inner desires, compulsions, and even obsessions. Onlookers, newspaper reporters, and members of the audience speculate about the flyers’ motivation: Do they fly just for the money or for another reason? The answer is

uncertain: “they dont need money except now and then when they come in contact with the human race” (47), the reporter claims. The airplane can eradicate the need for money—it has no value up there. It almost creates a superhuman, or a cyborgian, but in any case non-human race out of those who fly it. The central dilemma of the reporter, and thereby of the text as a whole, is whether the fliers are human to defy death like this?

“Because they aint human like us; they couldn’t turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn’t want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight and they dont even holler in the fire; crash one and it aint even blood when you haul him out: it is cylinder oil the same as in the crankcase.” (45)

The reporter’s implication is that if they are not human, then human morals, ethics, or emotions do not apply to them. “It ain’t adultery; you cant anymore imagine two of them making love than you can two of them aeroplanes back in the corner of the hangar, coupled” (231), the obsessed reporter repeats his mantra to convince himself even and to make sense of his experience of the fliers.

As the passage above, and many other passages in the text suggest, *Pylon* frequently foreshadows the postmodernist project of deconstructing traditional binary oppositions. A text grounded in anxiety and conflict regarding progress versus nostalgia, *Pylon* also reveals “a deeper unease of unresolved uncertainties about male and female, past and future, pastoralism and technology, stability and change” (Gray 197). The sublime of aviation prompts Faulkner, for example, to express dissatisfaction with the dichotomy of mechanic and organic. On the very first page of the novel, the airplanes on the advertising placard are compared to “a species of esoteric and fatal animals not trained or tamed but just for the instant inert” (7). A few pages later, the new airport is described as having “a mammoth terminal for some species of machine of a yet unvisioned tomorrow”; then on the same page we get our first actual glimpse of the racer planes, which are presented here as “waspwaisted, wasplight, still, trim, vicious, small, and immobile” (18). After Shumann’s first crash in their original plane, the reporter describes the machine as “lying on its back, the undercarriage projecting into the air rigid and delicate and

motionless as the legs of a dead bird” (164). The last moment of idyll, of a positive sublimity of aviation before the disintegration of Shumann’s plane mid-air, is also a description of the racers from a distance, in pastoral, organic terms: “The noise was faint now and disseminated; the drowsy afternoon was domed with it and the four machines seemed to hover like dragonflies silently in vacuum, in various distancesoftened shades of pastel against the ineffable blue, with now a quality trivial, random, almost like notes of music—a harp, say—as the sun glinted and lost them” (233). After that, the airplane becomes very mechanical again, fuselage and tail section apart, all of it becoming along with the human pilot part of the “refuse from the city itself [...] any and all the refuse of man’s twentieth century clotting into communities large enough to pay a mayor’s salary—dumped in the lake” (236–37).

The crossover between organic and mechanical, however, works both ways. The reporter’s description of the aviators is just as unforgiving: “Yair; cut him and it’s cylinder oil; dissect him and it aint bones; it’s little rockerarms and connecting rods...” (231). Apparently, however, this is not only the reporter’s perception, but also the narrator’s, and by extension, Faulkner’s. Jiggs, the barnstorming team’s mechanic, is especially frequently described in terms of machinery. He is “walking at his fast stiff hard gait like a mechanical toy that has but one speed” (11), moving his legs with “tense stout pistonlike thrusts” (23). The reporter is also described in terms of a mechanical entity. His face freezes “like a piece of unoiled machinery freezes” (243), and his namelessness also suggests non-human, inanimate qualities, as does his most frequent association by several characters with a scarecrow.⁵ Unconsciously, he even wishes

⁵ Faulkner’s own comments in an interview on the namelessness of the reporter seem to discourage such interpretations. Characters name themselves, he claims, and the reporter just never revealed his name to him: “I have written about characters whose names I never did know. Because they didn’t tell me. There was one in *Pylon*, for instance, he was the central character in the book, he never did tell me who he was. I don’t know until now what his name was. That was the reporter, he was a protagonist” (Meriwether 132). But then, again, why the reporter never seemed to possess a name, this most basic of all human possessions, is open for interpretation. (Cf. also the rather unconvincing article by David

to be an interchangeable part in the efficient mechanism of the aviators, to be like them, free of society's normal restriction, and especially to partake of Laverne in their promiscuous lifestyle, which fascinates and repels him as much as the world of aviation: "Sometimes I think about how it's you and him and how maybe sometimes she dont even know the difference, one from another, and I would think how maybe if it was me too she wouldn't even know I was there at all" (175). At the same time, despite all his awe and fascination with aviation the reporter always remains a complete outsider of technology. He has but one hour's flight instruction to his credit, and it turns out that he does not even know how to drive a car (267). The ending of the book, where he attempts to write up the story of the barnstorming team but writes "not only news but the beginning of literature" (314) proves that he is indeed more of an artist than an efficient journalist, the cog in the machine he is expected to be.

Another binary similarly deconstructed is gender: in the all-male environment of the aviators the only female protagonist, Laverne, is described as genderless, or at least as a person whose gender is uncertain and of no significance: "a woman not tall and not thin, looking almost like a man in the greasy overall" (21). By contrast, she is very much gendered in the important inserted story of Laverne's first parachute jump where "[s]he wore skirts; they had decided that her exposed legs would not only be a drawing card but that in the skirt no one would doubt that she was a woman" (194). Even here, however, Laverne is attempting to obliterate the stereotype of the bashful female when crawling back to the cockpit and initiating sex with Shumann, and then jumping out of the airplane with no undergarments, causing havoc among the hundreds of spectators underneath. Industrial production and human reproduction are intermingled, the previously separate categories of human, machine, animal all but melted into one, as in the reporter's account of the circumstances of Jackie's birth: "the kid was born on an unrolled parachute in a hangar in California; he got dropped already running like a colt or a calf from the fuselage of an airplane onto something because it happened to be big enough to land on and then takeoff again" (48).

Yerkes, which claims that the real name of the reporter, born on April Fool's Day, is "That".)

In an article examining gender, technology, and utopia in *Pylon* and “Honor” (an earlier short story by Faulkner which contained some of the key elements of the novel), Vivian Wagner offers what she calls “a forgiving and hopeful reading of Faulkner’s airplane tales” (82), an analysis of techno-utopianism through the lens of feminist theory. Machines, fetishized by “high, white, male Modernism,” generally function as weapons “to conquer and destroy a feminized, organic world” (81). The airplane in *Pylon*, however, can be an exception in these stories, she asserts, since the revisioning of gender roles invariably occurs in and around airplanes: “The airplanes are, ultimately, substitute wombs, where the characters are engendered and where their roles are both determined and questioned” (89). *Pylon*’s utopia then, as represented in the character of Laverne, is in its challenging of the patriarchal authority of the nuclear family and its heterosexual norms. While I feel that Wagner’s reading is stretching the boundaries of interpretive liberty, it certainly is right on target as far as the richness of the symbolic interpretations of the airplanes, and the interplay between sexuality and technology are concerned. Described by the reporter in terms of an orgasm (97), flying is almost inseparably tied up with sexuality in the novel. Speculating on the motivations of the barnstormers, one of the reporters notes that flying is a compulsion for some: “It’s because they have got to do it, like some women have got to be whores. They can’t help themselves” (292). Speed and risk are aphrodisiacs for Laverne, who conjoins the two ephemeral sensations in the parachute jumping episode (147). As a result of his fascination, indeed obsession, with both Laverne and aviation, the reporter also strongly associates sexuality with flying.

Several critics have commented on the reporter protagonist’s, and by extension Faulkner’s, ambivalent attitude to the fliers as an underlying theme in *Pylon*, and usually regarding this indeterminacy as a problematic point of the novel. Using Faulkner’s own comments made at the University of Virginia, Edmond L. Volpe claims that “[s]ympathy for them in their isolation from society merges with antipathy for them as rootless beings beyond the range of God and love” (176). Brooks also realizes that the reporter is “torn between two ways of seeing [the barnstormers]—as merely passionless machines or as heroic supermen” (181). Gary Harrington reiterates the same argument, also noting the shift in pronoun use as signaling the

reporter's attitude: "[w]hen viewing the fliers romantically, the reporter uses the plural personal pronoun 'we,' indicative of an inordinate sympathy with—and involvement in—their predicament; when considering them cynically, he uses 'they,' suggestive of his distancing himself from their behavior or even of an antipathy towards it" (53). The romantic perception of the fliers is especially powerful initially. As an idealistic young man, he easily subscribes to the glamorizing image of the flier constantly conveyed by the loudspeaker voice of the air meet, the sensationalist newspaper headlines, and other elements of the popular culture around him. "[G]lamor may not be quite the right word to describe the quality with which the Reporter's imagination has invested them; perhaps 'awe' would be more accurate" (183), Brooks notes. The reporter gradually realizes, however, that the barnstormers and the ideas they represent offer no salvation, no means of escape from the wasteland. Through the description of a series of technological mishaps starting with Colonel Burnham's fiery crash and culminating in the disintegration of Shumann's plane in mid-air, Faulkner exposes the almost religious awe and veneration with which many of his contemporaries regard machines. As a powerful statement to this effect, in one of the concluding episodes of the novel, Roger's father, Dr. Shuman symbolically, almost ritualistically, destroys the toy plane of Laverne's son with the frustration and anger of a Luddite: "He stooped and caught up the toy and held it up, his face twisted into a grimace of gnomelike rage, and whirled and hurled the toy at the wall, while the boy watched him, ran to it and began to stamp upon it with blind maniac fury" (312).

In his analysis of Southern writers and the machine, Folks concludes that after the initial rejection of the iron demon, Faulkner finally embraced technological progress as inevitable. On the basis of the textual evidence I would argue that it is just the other way round. After an initial period of unconditional fascination with aviation came disappointment. As Brooks claims, *Pylon* is "the bitterest indictment of modernity (and its worship of speed), with the possible exception of *Sanctuary*, that Faulkner ever wrote" (200). *Sanctuary* and *Pylon* are the two novels by Faulkner that take a direct look at the industrial and urban culture of the future rather than retreat into traditional world of

agrarian manners, and neither of those texts finds much to admire in that culture.

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