confronting division," cautioning us "about indulging in fantasies of redemption via the appealing features of biotic solidarity, . . . romanticized reunions with natural and nonhuman otherworlds" (63). Stripping away "the prostheses of modernity," we find ourselves to be just things like any other things in our world, "parts capable of disassembly" (83). In a weird South, "the logics of propriation do not loosen their grip without struggle or causalities," as "the concept of relationality works only if the playing field is truly leveled" (74). The weird South asks us "to revisit and revise two of its most essential conceits: those of land and race, apart and intertwined" (74). "Weird southern texts present us with the ghostly hauntings of fixed locations" and also "radically exceed them" in terrifying unmoorings. Their authors ask us to be here, now, but also someplace and sometime else. Reality may not be legible, Taylor writes, but stories are our shared real.

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## *Faulkner's Hollywood Novels: Women between Page and Screen.* By Ben Robbins. U of Virginia P, 2024, 295 pp.

In his 1975 "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," Fredric Jameson proposed that narrative genres contain imaginary resolutions to real social contradictions and conflicts. Following this claim, in her sociological analysis of one example of the romance genre, E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Eva Illouz concluded that the novel's central relationship "functions narratively as a resolution to the tensions inherent in modern heterosexuality" (66). While many contemporary readers are familiar with the *Fifty Shades* film series, and the discussions of its heroine's femininity and sexuality, today's audiences may be less familiar with Hollywood cinema from the 1930s, '40s and '50s, even though films from this period, being more numerous and diverse, can be analysed in similar, if more complex, ways in terms of gender and sexual politics in

their own socioeconomic contexts. Exactly such an analysis of women's representation on screen across different genres can be found in Ben Robbins's *Faulkner's Hollywood Novels: Women between Page and Screen*, which addresses not only novels but also screenplays, both produced and unproduced, with women at the centre. This thematic aspect, focusing on Hollywood's golden era itself, makes for the book's broadest appeal to anyone interested in the history of (Hollywood) cinema, and will certainly encourage its readers to seek out and (re)watch many a Hollywood classic. Even though Robbins's specific interest lies in only one literary figure's adventures in Hollywood, what emerges from it is a much wider picture of the industry and its changing mores, working conditions, products, and literary ramifications.

Robbins's monograph concentrates on William Faulkner and his intermittent commercial work as a screenwriter for Hollywood studios between 1932 and 1954 as well as on his fiction inspired and influenced by the Hollywood experience. Specifically, in the first academic study of this kind, through the lens of gender studies, the author examines Faulkner's representations of women in film and fiction, in the context of the abovementioned period's gender norms and ensuing conventions, as well as Hollywood studios' changing policies. For Faulkner, as Robbins emphasises, "to engage with Hollywood genre was also always to engage with gender" (3).

As we learn from the acknowledgements, the author's research on Faulkner took over a decade and involved investigations in multiple archives, including examination of unpublished and so far largely unexplored materials as well as the use of new tools from the digital humanities. The resultant in-depth quality of the study is visible throughout the book and reflected in its rich bibliography, including works by Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Barbara Creed, Richard Dyer, Betty Friedan, Jack Halberstam, bell hooks, Ann E. Kaplan, and Laura Mulvey.

The book's extensive Introduction outlines Faulkner's long-standing and creatively successful connection with Hollywood, albeit in the role of "an economic migrant" (2). From the very beginning, Robbins critically regards Faulkner's own dismissive attitude toward Tinseltown and puts it aside as a "reductive antagonism" as well as a kind of performance (3). At times, it involved sexist discourse, common for modernist thinkers, equating mass cultural forms such as "hack writing" with feminisation (8–9). This gender bias against popular culture was an expression of the perceived threat that women started to pose in male-dominated culture. The modernist writer's declared distaste for Hollywood, standing for all popular culture, was consistent with the pronouncements by two philosophers of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, who also migrated to California. Yet, as Robbins sets out to demonstrate, in his own fiction writing from the 1930s onwards,

Faulkner "unabashedly borrowed from the techniques and genre conventions of commercial cinema" (6), thus productively blurring the mythical distinction between "high" and "low art."

The evidence for this practice is abundant in what Robbins defines as Faulkner's "displaced Hollywood novels," which have tended to be overlooked and critically marginalised in the Faulkner canon, due to their hybridity and less formal literary experimentation. Set in geographically distant locations, the novels are close to Hollywood in terms of conventions and themes, including the tension between money and artistic endeavour, and their interplay with female sexuality. These literary works of fiction are analysed side by side with Faulkner's produced and unproduced screenplays. Through this joint analytical exercise, the author shows the "transmedial exchanges between modernist fiction and cinema" (14) in Faulkner's works, the formal cross-pollination between them, and above all the dialogical relationship between Faulkner's screenwriting and fiction writing in his creation of female characters and their heterosexual relations to men. What Robbins also stresses in the Introduction and repeatedly later on is the role of Faulkner's complex relationships and collaborations with female screenwriters and script supervisors – both very numerous and sought after by the studios in the discussed period – as well as female actors, such as Joan Crawford and Lauren Bacall. In this sense, the monograph deconstructs the myth of the "high modernist": Rather than the masculinised figure of a "lone genius," Robbins presents Faulkner to us in a role culturally coded as feminine and therefore historically regarded as inferior, i.e. that of a participant in networked, industrial labour. For all the above reasons, Robbins's book belongs to "the recent dialogic turn in studies of Faulkner and film," stemming from "broader shifts in modernist studies," which have left hierarchical divisions behind to highlight the connections between modernist and popular culture (21).

In the book's six chapters, Robbins demonstrates how, at a time when women constituted the biggest audience for Hollywood productions, Faulkner participated in shaping representations of women in his screenplays, which helped to solidify "the status of woman as image in commercial cinema" (40). Yet "his Hollywood novels would go on to question such framings" (40), as the writer used revised gender stereotypes in his work by reconfiguring genre conventions, which presented ideological perspectives and value systems – or, to refer to Jameson again, contained imaginary resolutions to real social contradictions and conflicts.

Chapter one focuses on Faulkner's 1931 novel *Sanctuary* and the figure of the flapper, also known as the New Woman or the "bad girl," from the pre-Code era. The Hays Code, i.e. The Motion Picture Production Code implemented by the Production Code Administration in July 1934 and replaced by the current motion-picture rating system only in 1968 (Rosenfeld), functions as an important caesura in Hollywood history.

Even before the studios' self-imposed binary moral economy, or "accounting" requiring "compensation" for any perceived wrongdoing, came fully into force, the sexually transgressive "bad girl" was conventionally condemned. However, Faulkner rendered her more hybrid, both cautioning against and revelling in her excesses.

In the early post-Code period, the "bad girl's" sexuality became sublimated into collaborative labour, which reflected changed working conditions for women in the Depression era and the Second World War. Chapter two addresses this new type of heroine, the so-called "Hawksian woman." In Robbins's catalogue of Faulknerian women, this gender-bending archetype, described as feminine-masculine (100), androgynous (94), and a transvestite (88), whose relationships with men were based on equality as an ideal of heterosexual relations, is particularly fascinating.

Chapter three offers a sophisticated discussion of the gendered relationship between feminine-coded popular culture and masculine-coded high art in the context of the market, commerce and labour. This problem is represented by a gender role reversal in Faulkner's 1939 novel *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* with yet another masculinised female protagonist at its centre.

Chapter four concentrates on Faulkner's wartime noir and Gothic screenplays, including a little-known mid-1940s script of a vampire horror film. Robbins demonstrates how their characteristically indecipherable or unreadable type of heroine influenced the post-war evolution of Caddy from the fallen Southern woman in *The Sound and the Fury* to femme fatale in the Compson "Appendix."

Chapter five is devoted to Faulkner's first major post-Nobel Prize work *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), an experimental prose-drama hybrid, and to Hollywood melodramas, their focus on maternal suffering and sacrifice, and their impact on Faulker's fiction in the context of the early Cold War era. Robbins's attention stays focused on the discussed period and the importance of the nuclear family in the face of a possible nuclear war in the mid-twentieth century. However, it is highly interesting to consider how this genre's "domestic containment ideology" (199), with warnings against "the perils that await women who fail to commit themselves fully to domestic cohesion" (198), at the historical moment of the post-Second World War crisis, later re-emerged in US culture. In the post-9/11 context, the threat to the state was again framed as a threat to the domestic sphere (Faludi) and has recently returned in the post-2008 financial crisis and post-pandemic figure of the Tradwife. Faulker's approach to this convention is shown, again, to be subversive.

Chapter six analyses Faulkner's penultimate novel, *The Mansion* (1959), and his most complex female character, according to critics. Robbins discusses Linda Snopes Kohl as "a medley of Hollywood archetypes" (247), which provides a useful summary of all the types of heroines analysed so far. In addition, it is proposed that, as a deaf character, Linda represents "the difficulties of speech and the communicative gap

between the textual and verbal" (245–46), and that through her Faulkner seems to "lament" all his fully-developed film characters who remained silent because they "never made it onto the screen" (247).

Robbins's book offers six reproductions of still photographs from selected films and a very detailed index. The absence of "camp" in today's understanding of the aesthetic is perhaps surprising, as this may have been an interesting additional category to include and apply to some of the film interpretations. Its omission, however, does not take away from Robbins's meticulous, engaging, and thought-provoking readings. *Faulkner's Hollywood Novels: Women between Page and Screen* will be highly relevant to all readers interested in film, Hollywood, US fiction, modernism, gender studies, feminism, and in particular historic representations of women in cinema and literature, and it is a must-read for scholars in the field of Faulkner studies.

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