

ARENDTIAN ALLUSIVENESS, FAULKNERIAN ELUSIVENESS:
A QUOTATION OF A CHRONICLE (AND VICE VERSA)

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the twentieth century political theorist Hannah Arendt's references to the work of the twentieth century novelist William Faulkner. It does so as a way of examining the relationship between "storytelling" (or "chronicle") and "politics." While Arendt frequently employs literary voices and invokes matters of "story" and "word" in her discussions of politics and the political, she frequently ignores larger questions of perspective and voice that are crucial to the novels of Faulkner. However, if the forms of storytelling that Faulkner and Arendt employ *differ*, they converge not only literally in Arendt's text but in a commitment to supporting the status quo (and its racism) in mid-twentieth century American politics, particularly on the question of school desegregation. In the following, I suggest that reading the two authors together and against each other opens up a more radical and just way of thinking the mechanism of "allusion" and thus, the role that the story plays in politics.

Keywords: Arendt, Faulkner, chronicle, allusion, story, political

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chelsea Thomeer grew up in Williamsville, NY. She attended Williams College in Williamstown, MA, where she double majored in English literature and political science and completed an honors thesis entitled “Containing Multitudes: James Joyce and the Irish Nation.” She earned her B.A. in June 2017 and began her graduate studies at Cornell University in August 2018.

In memory of Mary Campbell Spegar

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In brief, the question “Who am I?” is simply: “You are a man—whatever that may be”; and the answer to the question “What am I?” can be given only by God who made man.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

“Yessum,” Quentin said. *Only she dont mean that*, he thought. *It’s because she wants it told.*

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

INTRODUCTION

There is something very literary about Hannah Arendt's political thought. *On Revolution*, for instance—purportedly a text about, well, revolution—devotes several long pages to discussions of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*; the book ends with a quotation from Sophocles's play, *Oedipus at Colonus*.¹ Dostoyevsky is cited in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which Joseph Conrad also makes an appearance.² Most pertinently for this investigation, and as the political theorist Patchen Markell calls attention to in a 2017 essay entitled "Anonymous Glory," the twentieth century American writer William Faulkner is alluded to at least three times across Arendt's political philosophical texts: once in a footnote to the final chapter of *On Revolution*, once in a footnote to the "Action" chapter of *The Human Condition*, and once in the aforementioned *Origins of Totalitarianism*, at a pivotal argumentative moment.³

All of these allusions are, in their own way, worth studying. But it is the last that is perhaps most striking—and, as I shall try to show, most fraught. Arendt references Faulkner in the "Concluding Remarks" to the first edition of *Origins*, a section in which she posits that totalitarianism can be understood as the "attempt to make men superfluous," for it is rooted in a nihilistic *resentment* of the human condition.⁴ Arendt claims that "The alternative to this resentment ... would be a

¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 72-8, 273.

² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, with an introduction by Samantha Power (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 227, 242, 291, 300.

³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307; Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 181; Arendt, *Origins*, 631; Patchen Markell, "Anonymous Glory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (January 2017): 77–99, doi:10.1177/1474885114567344.

⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 620-1. These "Concluding Remarks" were deleted in subsequent editions of *Origins*.

fundamental gratitude for the few elementary things that indeed are invariably given us, such as life itself, the existence of man and the world.”⁵ “Generally speaking,” she writes—and this is where she draws on Faulkner, or, more specifically, on a line from Faulkner’s 1948 novel, *Intruder in the Dust*—“such gratitude expects nothing except—in the worlds [sic] of Faulkner—one’s ‘own anonymous chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle . . . in gratitude of [one’s] time in it.’”⁶

The allusions noted above do not, of course, constitute a comprehensive list of the myriad instances of what we might call Arendt’s “literary allusions,” which can be found throughout her writings. Yet what I wish to stress here—and what I believe this just-noted Faulknerian citation particularly suggests—is that these literary references are *not* mere stylistic flourishes. Arendt’s poetic and prosaic citations do not just add ornamentation to her theoretical work, but are a part of the very structure of her political theory and of what she calls politics.⁷ Arendt, of course, is well-known as a theorist of action in the public sphere.⁸ However, her very conception of “action,” as outlined in *The Human Condition*, is crucially tied not just to “deed” but also to “word,” and it is through *both* that, she says, “we insert ourselves into the human

⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 630.

⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 631; William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 189. This edition of *Origins* contains a misprint; the first edition of Arendt’s *Origins* reads “words.” I shall return to this “typo” later in the essay. The bracket is Arendt’s.

⁷ Seyla Benhabib, “Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative,” *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 167-96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970582>; Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 87.

⁸ Dana Villa, “The ‘Autonomy of the Political’ Reconsidered,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 28, no. 1 (2007): 29-45, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5840/gfpj200728117>; Markell, “Arendt’s Work: On the Architecture of *The Human Condition*,” *College Literature* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 16-20, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

world, and this insertion is like a second birth.”⁹ The ability of persons to enter “into” what Arendt, through Faulkner, terms, “man’s enduring chronicle” is thus highly important for comprehending her political philosophy.¹⁰

Other writers have previously called attention to the “literariness” of Arendtian thought. Richard H. King, for instance, argues that “Hannah Arendt brought a rich literary imagination to bear on her work as a thinker,” and notes that the German-born theorist was heavily involved in the American literary scene in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ Seyla Benhabib has gone even further, arguing that narratives were not just an *inspiration* to Arendt’s work, but, as suggested above, a fundamental part of her political theoretical thinking. Arendt, Benhabib contends, “developed a conception of political theory as ‘storytelling.’”¹² And yet: if it is true, as Benhabib claims, that Arendt developed such a conception, did she also develop—or at least employ—a literary theory through which to conceptualize and comprehend this “storytelling”? What *is* storytelling, in an Arendtian sense? In what sort of voice is it spoken? Who is included in an Arendtian story, and who is able to tell one?

Narrative concepts such as voice and perspective seem to linger in the subtext of Arendt’s thinking and yet, all too often, are brushed to the side, as if ignoring them will allow the theorist (and her audience) to avoid any problems such notions might open up. In *The Human Condition*, for instance, the text in which Arendt argues that both “speech” and “action” are integral to politics, she also contends that “although we

⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

¹⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 163.

¹¹ Richard H. King, “Hannah Arendt and the Uses of Literature,” *Raritan* 36, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 106-24, 171, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1913309479?accountid=10267>.

¹² Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 87.

know much less of Socrates, who did not write a single line and left no words behind, than of Plato or Aristotle, we know much better and more intimately who he was, because we know his story.”¹³ Here, Arendt alludes to three of the most famous figures—and two of the most famous writers—in the history of Western thought, using this reference as a way of buttressing her theoretical claims. At the same time, she does not expand upon this claim through a reference to any specific text, any specific line of Plato’s that proves we *know* Socrates’s story. She makes her claim and moves on; the next paragraph concerns heroism and Homer—another allusion, another Arendtian thread.¹⁴

Yet one might ask: who is this “we”? What is this “story”? And, finally, *who* is this Socrates? Put another way: do we know Socrates’s story, because we have the writings that purport to describe it? After all, Socrates (at least according to one of the stories “we” have of him) expresses himself to be quite skeptical about the power of writing to convey “truth.” In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, for instance, Socrates speaks of writing in the following manner:

You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You’d think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been

¹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support.¹⁵

Discourse, once written, Socrates opines, “roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately.” Another edition of the *Phaedrus* translates this phrase as stating that words “once written down ... are tumbled about everywhere.”¹⁶ Arendt herself was certainly a word-tumbler; the pages of her political theory are rife with direct quotations of and allusions to other writers and thinkers—not just contemporary novelists and poets but ancient playwrights and philosophers, political theorists, historians, and even statespersons. Across her texts, her use of citation—of allusion—is critical to the very structure of her political thought, which seems united in emphasizing the relation of *story* and *politics*. Nonetheless, this *tumbling* nature of words seems to be left undertheorized in her notions of story, her notions of the words that inscribe deeds.

Thus, in her texts, Arendt fails to attend adequately to matters of subjectivity, to matters of perspective and voice, which is to say, to questions that have long been queried in literary studies and literary works themselves, including those of William

¹⁵ Plato, *Plato on Love: Lysis, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades, with Selections from Republic, Laws*, edited by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 148.

¹⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Teddington, Middlesex: Echo Library, 2006), 65.

Faulkner. This, then, brings me to the central aim of my thesis: to examine “Arendtian allusiveness” through the lens of what I shall call “Faulknerian elusiveness.” By this, I mean that my intention is to investigate both how Faulkner’s account of “man’s enduring chronicle” is *different* from Arendt’s, as well as how this difference ought to affect our understanding of her political theory—and more specifically, to borrow again Benhabib’s phrase, our understanding of her “conception of politics as ‘storytelling.’”¹⁷ How does a more literary—a more Faulknerian— notion of the “chronicle” change the way we ought to think about Arendtian “politics” and, even more particularly, Arendtian “revolution”? In other words: if we do *not* know more of Socrates than Plato, because we only know a story that we cannot be sure is his—is, perhaps, only *partially* his¹⁸—then how are we to think of the “enduring chronicle” into which we enter, the “word and deed” that Arendt says in *The Human Condition* are the means through which we “insert ourselves into the human world”?¹⁹

¹⁷ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 87.

¹⁸ In fact, it is not at all obvious that “truth” is something that exists on the surface of Plato’s writings, easily grasped and render-able into aphorism. Jill Frank has argued that the dialogues are best understood *not* as emanators of philosophical truth on the level of content but rather as texts that represent the process of “coming to know”— philosophy—as requiring “robust and demanding ... activity” — activity that is “not infrequently refused by Socrates’s interlocutors” (6). As Frank notes, Plato’s works contain “abundant analogies and examples, fables, allegories, parables, myths, and similes” such that “alongside more conventionally linear styles of argumentation, we are given a multitude of letters, both big and small” (7-8). These various stylistic “elements ... make manifest that the dialogues are staged,” and suggest that “Plato’s writing, with its pluralities of standpoint, disposition, image, and style of argumentation, may not be static and univocal, saying the same things over and over, but moving, kinetic, and polyphonic” (8-9). Thus, Frank argues, reading Plato’s text requires a kind of dynamic engagement with the *style* and *language* of the text—its “truth” only emerges through an encounter of the writer, characters *and* audience. As I shall hope to show in this thesis, this is the kind of reading that Arendt, all too often, refuses. See Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2018).

¹⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

Most broadly, my thesis asks two overlapping questions: how ought a conception of narrative perspective impact a theory of *politics*, and how ought political concerns—most centrally, a concern for *justice*—impact a theory of narrative, or, more concretely, the ways we read, write, and allude? As has been said, Arendt often cited lines from poetry, novels, and plays in her work, using them, in many cases, in order to support a theoretical argument. Indeed, in *On Revolution*, her mention of Faulkner’s texts suggests that she sees his work as containing a political valence. “Faulkner’s literary procedure,” Arendt writes, “rather than the content of his work, is highly ‘political’ and, in spite of many imitations, he has remained, as far as I can see, the only author to use it.”²⁰ And yet, as I shall argue, if Faulkner’s “literary procedure” was “highly ‘political’” despite its content, what we might term Arendt’s “political procedure” was not sufficiently literary, despite what frequently is its literary content.

What might happen, then, if we read Arendt differently, read not Faulkner-through-Arendt, but Arendt-through-Faulkner—and back again?

²⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

CHAPTER I
THE STORY OF HANNAH ARENDT

Before we can examine how Faulkner’s notion of the “chronicle” might force a revision and complication of Arendt’s account of “story” and “politics”—her “conception of political theory as ‘storytelling’”—we need to understand what that conception is.²¹ For if it is true (as I will argue it is) that Arendt’s theory is insufficiently “literary”—insufficiently attuned to voice and perspective—it is clear that her work contains a robust account of the relation between narrative and politics. “Story” and “storytelling” are concepts that recur throughout Arendt’s writings, including in the two works I shall focus most upon throughout this chapter—*The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*—as well as in her slightly later work, *On Revolution*. Through my readings, I aim to show that across her texts, Arendt contends that politics depends on the *story*, which is to say, that it depends upon a “framework” or “organization” that is facilitated (at least in part) through narrative—if not, I shall hope to show, a particularly “literary” one.²² To anticipate terms that will only be unpacked fully in the closing chapter of this project, it is the *singularly* of the story and, relatedly, the way the “recorded story” is treated as *imitative* or mimetic of the “original” “enacted story” that will emerge as a central problem.

(i)

²¹ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 87.

²² Arendt, *Origins*, 376.

In reading Arendt as a theorist whose conception of politics depends upon “word” and “story,” I am following in the wake of theorists such as Markell and Laura Ephraim, who both break from what the former terms the “territorial” reading of *The Human Condition*.²³ In order to explain Markell’s and Ephraim’s readings, I need first to explain this latter mode of “territorial” Arendtian analysis to which the pair responds. This way of interpreting Arendt, which has long held sway in the field, takes as its point of departure what is often seen as the structuring thesis of *The Human Condition*: that “human activity” (the “*vita activa*”) can be divided into a tripartite pyramid of “labor,” “work,” and “action.”²⁴ Labor “corresponds to the biological process of the human body” and exists in the realm of nature and of the “vital necessities,” while work “corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence” and is situated in an “‘artificial’ world of things”—things that are produced and manufactured, *made*.²⁵ Last, action is the activity through which people engage with one another and in politics.²⁶

Neither Markell nor Ephraim disputes that the book marks these distinctions; Arendt is so explicit about doing so early in the text that one simply cannot ignore the role these definitions play entirely, and neither Markell nor Ephraim do so.²⁷ Instead, what is disputed is *how* these conceptualizations ought to be understood and in particular, how rigidly Arendt’s writing maintains their boundaries. Markell argues

²³ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 16; Laura Ephraim, “Earth to Arendt,” in *Who Speaks for Nature?: On the Politics of Science* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2018), 34.

²⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7. Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 16.

²⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

²⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

that to read Arendt's book "territorially" is to see the text as *primarily* invested in drawing rigid distinctions among these terms, such that, "labor, work and action" are understood, in his words, "as disjunctive categories into which individual instances of human activity can be sorted, each of which properly belongs to a separate domain, whose boundaries must be secured for the sake of resurrecting and preserving the especially fragile and valuable experience of action in particular."²⁸

On a territorial understanding of *The Human Condition*, each category of the *vita activa* has a "separate domain," a separate and well-bounded *place*. Labor belongs in the realm of nature; work belongs in the world of things, which is the artificial, human-made realm. The "place" of action—of politics—is the "space of appearance," which Arendt describes in the passage quoted below

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.²⁹

²⁸ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 16.

²⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

According to a “territorial” understanding, the “space of appearance” is situated *above* and does not overlap with the other planes of nature and work. It “predates and precedes” all “formal constitution” and “forms of government”; it is *unlike* “spaces which are the work of our hands”; and it is utterly ephemeral, “does not survive the actuality of the movement that brought it into being.”³⁰

If one understands *The Human Condition* as marking separate spheres for separate activities, such that the “place” of politics is unrelated to other planes and places of human life, Arendt’s thinking seemingly becomes distinctly irrelevant—and perhaps even hostile—to a number of concerns that many, especially on the contemporary left (among which this writer would like to include herself), believe *must* be able to be thought within the “political” sphere.³¹ Indeed, many of Arendt’s readers have found this tripartite Arendtian structure “problematic” for these sorts of reasons.³² Markell, for instance, writes that Arendt’s apparent “insistence on the separateness and autonomy of action has also seemed, even to sympathetic readers, to risk reducing action to a kind of ‘empty posturing,’ purified not only of contamination by necessity and instrumentality, but also of the content that might give it significance.”³³ Likewise, Bonnie Honig notes in her introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* that the stark separations of Arendt’s tripartite *vita activa*, along with the theorist’s hard distinction between “politics” and “the

³⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

³¹ One of the passages in which Arendt’s hostility to these modes of politics seems most explicitly stated comes in the chapter on “The Public and the Private Realm,” in which Arendt critiques the modern tendency to “see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping” (*The Human Condition*, 28).

³² Markel, “Arendt’s Work,” 16.

³³ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 16-7.

household,” has left many of Arendt’s feminist readers dismayed, while Dana Villa has observed that to anyone “brought up in ... the social democratic tradition (with its focus on social justice), Arendt’s insistence on the inherent value of political action will look both strange and beside the point.”³⁴ Somewhat similarly, Chad Kautzer argues that Arendt’s hierarchy of rigidities is unable to recognize the structural injustices and violence that perpetuate racism. Kautzer argues that, “Arendt’s entire body of work is engaged in identifying and policing boundaries,” and that her writings “define the human condition through four fundamental ways of being in the world—contemplation, labor, work, and action—none of which capture the violence of war, revolution, law enforcement, punishment, colonialism, slavery, state and sub-state terrorism.”³⁵

Thus, the *problems* of a “territorial” understanding of Arendt’s philosophical framework have been made clear by numerous theorists; these critics are, I think, quite correct, and I share many of these concerns about the implications of certain Arendtian tenets. And yet: is the “territorial” reading the *only* way to understand Arendt’s work? Is it even the *correct* one—the one that has the most textual support? Perhaps not. While some theorists, such as Kautzer and Patricia Owens, have produced arguments suggesting that Arendt’s theories ought to be rejected wholesale, others have taken a different tack.³⁶ Markell, for instance, points out that the “territorial” reading of

³⁴ Bonnie Honig, “Introduction: The Arendt Question in Feminism,” in Bonnie Honig, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park, PA: State University Press, 1995), 1-4; Villa 30.

³⁵ Chad Kautzer, “Political Violence and Race: A Critique of Hannah Arendt,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 3 (June 2019): 4, 8, doi: 10.7771/1481-4374.3551.

³⁶ Kautzer 2, Patricia Owens, “Racism in the Theory Canon: Hannah Arendt and ‘the One Great Crime in which America Was Never Involved,’” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3: 403-424, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817695880>. One of the essays

Arendt—while not without textual support—misses out a great deal of *The Human Condition*'s nuance and complications, and thus, a great deal of its key insights.³⁷ He argues that the book's "conceptual triad of labor, work, and action is best understood not as a single, functionally continuous three-part distinction, but rather as the fraught conjunction of two different pairs of concepts—labor and work, and work and action," and further contends that "territorial" readings have tended to obscure and even "impoverish" the crucial role that "works of art" plays in linking and distinguishing the realms of "work" and "action."³⁸

Markell contends that not only is it true that "political action depends on 'work' in the sense that action, in its fragility and ephemerality, requires a 'durable institutional home' ... to create a stable setting within which a public sphere can thrive" but, even more than that, a "range of worldly artifacts"—including artworks—are "relevant to action" not only in ensuring its possible stability but in *creating* a space of freedom.³⁹ Action and work are *interdependent* activities, Markell asserts, and their relation in Arendt's thinking is best understood *not* as one of stark separation; rather, the play between Arendtian work and Arendtian action "is also a

that Owens seeks to rebut in "Racism in the Theory Canon" is her own, for she had previously drawn on some of the theorist's conceptions prior to Owens' further unpacking of some of the racist underpinnings of Arendt's work. Owens freely and openly admits the fact that she changed her mind, writing in "Racism in the Theory Canon," that her latter essay "considers how to approach important 'canonical' political thinkers whose writings have been exposed as racist, including methodological strategies for approaching such a body of work, and engages in a form of self-critique for marginalising the problem in earlier writing on Arendt" (409). For one of Owens' earlier essays that draws on Arendt, see Patricia Owens, "Human Security and the Rise of the Social." *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 2012): 547-567, <https://jstor.org/stable/41681478>. I shall return to Owens' critique—which is, I think, essential to bear in mind in any analysis of Arendt—later in this thesis.

³⁷ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 16-8.

³⁸ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 16-8.

³⁹ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 35-6.

relation of provocation and response between things in their meaningful appearances— not just walls or laws but artifacts of all sorts—and what we say about and do to them and the world they constitute.”⁴⁰

Ephraim, who follows Markell in rejecting a purely “territorial” reading of Arendtian terms, builds on his work to suggest that natural objects, as well as made ones such as art, are a crucial part of the constitution of what Arendt terms the “common world.”⁴¹ Ephraim draws on a passage in *The Human Condition* in which Arendt describes “the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests” as “overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men’s acting and speaking directly *to* one another”; this in-between, Arendt says, is what we refer to as the “‘web’ of human relationships.”⁴² “Territorial” readings have understood these “in-betweens” as existing in a kind of parallel relation in which the planes extend forever and never touch. Ephraim sees things differently, writing that in *The Human Condition*, the “physical, worldly in-between” (of worldly artifice and natural earth) and the “not tangible” and “subjective in-between” (of human action) are not two distinct realms; rather “[Arendt’s] distinction ... layers and entwines them.”⁴³

Both Markell and Ephraim stress the role that the “appearance” of “things” and “nature” play in provoking, enabling, and, in a more narrative idiom, setting the stage,

⁴⁰ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 35-6.

⁴¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 28; Ephraim 36-9.

⁴² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182-3; Ephraim 47.

⁴³ Ephraim 47.

the space, for action.⁴⁴ Both stress that natural objects and work artifacts are not merely of instrumental use to humankind but are objects that enable humans to see themselves as occupying a “common world”—a world to and in (and “into”) which they can *respond*.⁴⁵ As Ephraim puts it: humans “not only relate to nature qua sustenance ... we also receive nature qua appearance as spectators and speak for it as actors, establishing conditions for life in common.”⁴⁶ Nature “qua appearance” is what facilitates people’s ability to erect “a ‘space of appearances,’ a public realm where men and women gather to reveal themselves and to witness one another’s words and deeds.”⁴⁷ Thus, nature is not just something we exploit or consume, but something that, as Arendt puts it, “gathers us together.”⁴⁸ Neither Markell nor Ephraim argue that these objects *determine* human action in Arendtian thought. Arendt’s account of action makes it clear that human deeds are *not* contingent on the make-up of bodies or worlds. But if Arendt insists that the “space of appearance” that “comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action” and “predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government,” Markell and Ephraim suggest that individuals *can only* come together

⁴⁴ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 31; Ephraim 39. In making this argument, both Markell and Ephraim draw on a particular passage from the “Work” section of *The Human Condition*, in which Arendt writes: “For although the durability of ordinary things is but a feeble reflection of the permanence of which the most worldly of all things, works of art, are capable, something of this quality ... is inherent in every thing as a thing, and it is precisely this quality or the lack of it that shines forth in its shape and makes it beautiful or ugly. To be sure, an ordinary use object is not and should not be intended to be beautiful; yet whatever has a shape at all and is seen cannot help being either beautiful, ugly, or something in-between. Everything that is, must appear, and nothing can appear without a shape of its own; hence there is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or ugliness, is identical with appearing publicly and being seen” (172-3).

⁴⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 28, 199.

⁴⁶ Ephraim 36-9.

⁴⁷ Ephraim 46.

⁴⁸ Ephraim 39; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

inasmuch as a “common world” of objects “appears” to them.⁴⁹ Arendt’s “space of appearance ... predates and precedes” all “*formal* constitution of the public realm,” but this does not mean it comes before and above any constituted realm altogether.⁵⁰

Drawing on the work of Markell and Ephraim, then, I want to contend that it is *word* and *story* that brings these various spaces together—word that enables humankind to understand themselves as occupying a “common world,” which is to say, as part of a common story: a story in which they can participate and into which they can (possibly) perform. While Arendt takes up the concept of the “story” in slightly different ways in different books (and sometimes, in different chapters of the same book), this, as I shall show, is a theme we can find across three of her most well-known works.

(ii)

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1951, Arendt traces the rise of Hitler and Stalin, examining (among other things) the history of anti-Semitism, the colonization of Africa through the mechanisms of race and bureaucracy, the organization of parties, the decline of the nation-state, and the rise of a mode of nihilism that professes that “everything is possible.”⁵¹ *Origins* is a complex book that does not—its title notwithstanding—identify one, two, or even three *singular* causes of the rise of totalitarianism.⁵² Nonetheless, Arendt does stress that one of the

⁴⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

⁵⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199, emphasis added.

⁵¹ Arendt, *Origins*, 563. This phrase itself may be another of Arendt’s borrowings; the same phrase is used in Dostoyevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment*.

⁵² Despite the title and the basic organization of the book (which is divided into three chapters on “Antisemitism,” “Imperialism,” and “Totalitarianism”), Arendt’s unpacking of the events that led to the rise of the regimes of Stalin and Hitler is highly nuanced; the story she tells is not one of linear causation. As she writes in the book’s preface, “Since only the final crystallizing

conditions that leads to totalitarianism is the stripping of an individual's "right to have rights," which depends on one's capacity to *tell* one's story and to *have it be heard*.

According to Arendt, World War I and the ensuing refugee crisis that swept Europe in the early twentieth century exposed the "decline of the nation-state," thus demonstrating the inability of this political form to protect the rights of its citizens. As she argues in *Origins*,

We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation.⁵³

In her understanding, refugees "lost" their rights *not* merely by losing the "freedom of movement" or the "freedom of opinion," but by losing a "framework," by losing "some kind of organiz[ation]" of "community."⁵⁴ She insists: "The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective."⁵⁵ What is "at stake" in such losses is "much more fundamental than freedom or justice," for

catastrophe brought these subterranean trends into the open and to public notice, there has been a tendency to simply equate totalitarianism with its elements and origins—as though every outburst of antisemitism or racism or imperialism could be identified as 'totalitarianism.' This fallacy is as misleading in the search for historical truth as it is pernicious for political judgment" (*Origins* 8-9).

⁵³ Arendt, *Origins*, 376.

⁵⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 376.

⁵⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 376.

what is at stake is one's ability to *belong* to a political community, or, in Arendt's terms, to have a "place in the world."⁵⁶

Why does one *need* a "framework," a "place in the world"? According to Arendt, it is because freedom requires not just the ability to do what one wills, but to enact something within a world occupied by more than just oneself. Thus, to be free is to have the capacity to perform something *and* to have that action *received*, a reception that depends (as we shall see again in *The Human Condition*) upon the ability to speak and be heard. As Arendt puts it: the "loss" of "human rights"

entails the loss of the relevance of speech (and man, since Aristotle, has been defined as a being commanding the power of speech and thought), and the loss of all human relationship (and man, again since Aristotle, has been thought of as the 'political animal,' that is one who by definition lives in a community) ... This was to a certain extent the plight of slaves, whom Aristotle therefore did not count among human beings.⁵⁷

Thus, the "right to have rights"—the right to *belong*—can be understood as the right to both *speak* in a community—to narrate oneself, to tell one's story—as well as the right to have that story be heard and recognized. Arendt writes that, "Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals."⁵⁸ The fact that this "organization" is one that is structured around speech, word, and *narrative* is emphasized not only through her citation of Aristotle

⁵⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 376-7.

⁵⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 377.

⁵⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 382.

but also through her allusion to the words of Faulkner in *Origins*' "Concluding Remarks."⁵⁹ The "right to have rights," one might say, consists most basically in one's "chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere *not just in but into man's enduring chronicle*."⁶⁰

In Arendt's contention, the ability of people to "perform something ... not just in but into man's enduring chronicle" is what differentiates a community living under totalitarianism from a properly *political* community. Arendt argues that the capacity of a person to speak "in and into" an "enduring chronicle" can *never* exist under totalitarianism, a state in which one loses the right to "enter in" and "build a common world."⁶¹ According to Arendt, totalitarian order is established on a dual and contradictory insistence upon an inescapable "givenness," on the one hand, and an insistence that "everything is possible," on the other.⁶² Like non-totalitarian regimes, totalitarian orders are posited through a kind of narrative. However, this is not a narrative in which *all* are able to "act into"; rather, the "story" is authored (like all law) by a singular "will," the will of the leader or small party of leaders in power.⁶³ Such "totalitarian leaders," Arendt says, "are convinced that they must follow consistently the fiction and the rules of the fictitious world which were laid down during their struggle for power" though these same rulers "discover only gradually the

⁵⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 382, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 631, emphasis added; Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 196. Benhabib argues that Arendt's mode of "political theory" involves "a form of storytelling which, in Arendt's hands, is transformed into a redemptive narrative, redeeming the memory of the dead, the defeated, and the vanquished by making present to us once more their failed hopes, their untrodden paths, and unfulfilled dreams" (196).

⁶¹ Arendt, *Origins*, 563, 630.

⁶² Arendt, *Origins*, 563, 630.

⁶³ Arendt, *Origins*, 528-30, 563.

full implications of this fictitious world and its rules.”⁶⁴ One essential difference, then, between Arendt’s account of “totalitarianism” and what she terms “politics” is that in the latter, every citizen has the ability to speak “in” and “into man’s enduring chronicle.” In contrast, in the former, all are subsumed into an entirely fictional universe created by the will of a leader or group of leaders who finally lose even their own ability to distinguish themselves from the terms of the original, originating fiction.

These themes are not unique to *Origins*, Arendt’s first major work. Rather, the interrelation between story and political life is also an important thread in *The Human Condition*, first published in 1958. In this text, Arendt lays out a scheme for her political philosophy and view of politics, differentiating, as has been mentioned, “work” and “labor” from “action.” In defining the last of these, Arendt writes that action is

the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, [and] corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the condition*—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.⁶⁵

Arendt might seem to break with her claims in *Origins*, inasmuch as “action” is described here as taking place *without* an intermediary and thus without the kind of

⁶⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 528-30, 563.

⁶⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

“framework,” “organized community” or “place” that she stressed in her earlier text. However, as becomes clear in the chapter devoted to it, “action” may “go on directly” without an intermediary but is, nonetheless, in need of some kind of medium. In fact, the “Action” chapter in *The Human Condition* begins with two epigraphs—one from the twentieth-century poet Isak Dinesen and one from the fourteenth-century poet Dante—that ruminate on a connection between the “act” and what is said about it, alternatively termed the “disclosure” and the “story.”⁶⁶ “Human plurality,” Arendt argues, is “the basic condition of both action *and* speech.”⁶⁷ While Aristotle is not directly cited in these passages, Arendt again stresses a kind of Aristotelian connection between the political nature of humans and their capacity for talk, just as she does in *Origins*.⁶⁸

In both books, then, politics depends upon people’s ability to act in a way that is comprehensible to and receivable by others. In *The Human Condition*, this can be seen in Arendt’s claim that “human plurality” necessarily has “the twofold character of equality and distinction.”⁶⁹ She writes:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech

⁶⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175. The epigraph from Dinesen’s work is, “All sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story or tell a story about them”; the epigraph from Dante’s work, provided in both Latin and English, includes the phrase, “For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image” (175).

⁶⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175, emphasis added.

⁶⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 377.

⁶⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175.

nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.

Politics here requires not just language (“signs and sounds”) but *narrative* and, moreover, a narrative *framework*. In *Origins*, Arendt argues that “political life” is founded upon “the assumption that we can produce equality through organization,” thus able to occupy and so *act in* a “common world” that has been “buil[t],” “together with [one’s] equals.”⁷⁰ In *The Human Condition*, she again emphasizes *equality*, for even though it is the individual who acts, the individual is ever in need of another (or an other) to see and testify—or even biographize—that action (this is the role, she says, that Plato plays for Socrates).⁷¹ According to Arendt: “the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: ‘Who are you?’”⁷² And this is not a question that one can ask oneself—at least, not if one wishes to have a *story*, for, “*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in the other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he was.”⁷³

And so individuals, naturally distinct, require a kind of equality in order to express that distinction, and fundamental to this equality is the ability of humans to craft narrative, to put forth speech. What would happen without such things? Arendt’s

⁷⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 382.

⁷¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

⁷² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

⁷³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

answer is clear: without story, there could be no politics, no communal life. She writes that

Without the accompaniment of speech ... action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject, as it were; not acting men but performing robots would achieve what, humanly speaking, would remain incomprehensible. Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words.⁷⁴

Importantly, Arendt insists upon the necessity of “speech,” even as she marks it as something *other than* “signs and sounds,” suggesting that in order to form a political community, people need to not merely be able to express a need for basic necessities, but to understand themselves as occupying the same “world”—or, to put it in terms that will become crucial to my analysis, as part of a larger “chronicle.” The commonality of speech enables the individuality of action; without both, we would lose, according to Arendt, the very core of what constitutes the human condition. “A life without speech and without action, on the other hand—and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word,” she writes, “is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.”⁷⁵

If in the above, I seem to give a collectivist bent to a theorist who is ordinarily understood as emphasizing and even glorifying *individual* action, I want to emphasize

⁷⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178-9.

⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

that I am not arguing that Arendt does not locate the impetus for action in the individual.⁷⁶ Action requires the story in order to count. But this does not mean, in Arendt's understanding, that humankind acts in a predetermined plot, for in her theory, political action cannot be compelled by any actor other than the self. If such compulsion occurred "the act" would not even be, on Arendtian lights, "an act." Arendt makes this clear in the way she speaks, sometimes in Faulkner's idiom, of the action as something inputted "not just *in* but *into*," not just *in*, but "*insert[ed]*."⁷⁷ Action breaks into the world ("like a second birth"); it is not merely contained by it.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, if I am *not* arguing that Arendt is *not* an upholder of "individualism," what I *am* calling attention to here is the way in which Arendt stresses that politics cannot and can never be a matter *only* of an individual act. After all, if one's act takes place and no one sees, hears, understands it—if no one writes it down—it is likewise not an "act" in an Arendtian sense.

The idea that action must be both individual and nevertheless, to use again the Faulknerian citation, part of an "enduring" story, is one Arendt returns to in her 1963

⁷⁶ Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 78. Markell writes that, "Arendt's phenomenology of 'action' is sufficiently strongly informed [by] what she took to be the archaic and classical Greek orientation toward achieving earthly immortality through memorable deeds and words that she could declare that 'action without a name, a "who" attached to it, is meaningless' ... and we are accustomed to thinking of her both as an exemplary mid-century defender of the individuality of action against its dissolution into the anonymous social behavior of the mass or the crowd, and as unremittingly hostile to the confusion of authentic politics with 'the urgencies of the life process'" (78). But even as Markell notes this, he also suggests—as I shall attempt to—that "in Arendt's own writing ... matters are more complicated" (78). Among the complications that Markell cites is Arendt's use of both Brecht and Faulkner in her writing; in the remainder of this thesis, I shall follow Markell in asking how Arendt's allusions complicate the *theory* of her texts, not just in her conception of individuality but of politics and the political altogether.

⁷⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 631, emphasis added; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176-7, emphasis added.

⁷⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

book, *On Revolution*. In this text, Arendt describes “the modern concept of revolution” as “inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold.”⁷⁹ She stresses the link here between the *newness* of the story and the very concept of freedom, writing that, “Crucial ... to any understanding of revolutions in the modern age is that the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide.”⁸⁰ Yet Arendt, who focuses her book primarily on a discussion of two of the most famous revolutions of modernity (that of the Americans and that of the French), also argues that the “freedom” for which these revolutionaries fought included *more* than merely “those liberties which we today associate with constitutional government and which are properly called civil rights.”⁸¹ “All of these liberties, to which we might add our own claims to be free from want and fear,” she says, “are of course essentially negative; they are the result of liberation but they are by no means the actual content of freedom, which ... is participation in public affairs, or admission to the public realm.”⁸²

As in *Origins* and *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues in *On Revolution* that “freedom” requires not just “individual” liberation but rather an ability to be *part* of a community, and again, she suggests that the structure that enables such belonging is *story*. A revolution means the casting forth of a “new story”; at the same time, this “new story” must be rendered into *material* and *memorable* form. Arendt marks a

⁷⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18-9.

⁸⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 22.

⁸¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 22.

⁸² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 22.

distinction between “liberation” and the “whole story of freedom,” a distinction between “liberation” and “the foundation of freedom,” arguing that, for men such as the American revolutionaries, the “acts and deeds which liberation demanded from them threw them into public business, where, intentionally or more often unexpectedly, they began to constitute that space of appearances where freedom can unfold its charms and become a visible, tangible reality.”⁸³ This passage in *On Revolution* not only gives further weight to the way in which Ephraim reads Arendt’s delineation of spatial layers in *The Human Condition* as an “entwining,” not a total separation; it emphasizes the role that *story* plays in this “entwining.”⁸⁴

The great wonder and power of the American Revolution, Arendt claims, lies in the “new story” that its founders *enacted*, and yet this story *also* required a *founding* to bring it into “reality.” One of her central concerns in this book is that if Americans do not *remember* this revolutionary founding, its significance will entirely disappear. As she writes:

That the republic was brought into existence by no ‘historical necessity’ and no organic development but by a deliberate act: the foundation of freedom.

Failure to remember is largely responsible for the intense fear of revolution in America, for it is precisely this fear that attests to the world at large how right they are to think of revolution only in the terms of the French Revolution.⁸⁵

Here, to act is to strike *deliberately*, not swayed by the dictates of body or history; at the same time a *failure to remember* imperils the revolutionary tradition in America,

⁸³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 23.

⁸⁴ Ephraim 47.

⁸⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 209.

enabling it to forget the revolution that is at the heart of its origins (or, at least, the revolution that Arendt sees at the heart of its origins; there are other aspects of American origins that are far less glorious and to which I shall return later in this thesis).

On Revolution, then, can be read as an argument that its titular term requires both actor and storyteller, hero and bard, newness and, perhaps, novelist, for, just as in *Origins*, Arendt employs Faulkner in order to express a relation between *story* and *politics*. In the book's final chapter, Arendt stresses the necessity of *reference* and *remembrance* to politics, writing that "What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in its turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it."⁸⁶ In a note to the line, she elaborates:

How such guideposts for future reference and remembrance arise out of this incessant talk, not, to be sure, in the form of concepts but as single brief sentences and condensed aphorisms, may best be seen in the novels of William Faulkner. Faulkner's literary procedure, rather than the content of his work, is highly 'political' and, in spite of many imitations, he has remained, as far as I can see, the only author to use it.⁸⁷

Thus: it is *narrative*, spoken by actors about objects, that creates the "framework" of "equality," narrative that *describes* the worldly in-between that allows for the "'web' of human relationships."⁸⁸ In fact, in a way, Arendt's use of Faulkner's

⁸⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212.

⁸⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

⁸⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 376; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

line from *Intruder in the Dust* condenses my argument in a single sentence, in a kind of aphorism. To quote her own quotation once more: “Generally speaking, such gratitude expects nothing except—in the worlds [sic] of Faulkner—one’s ‘own anonymous chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle ... in gratitude of [one’s] time in it.’”⁸⁹ The opportunity to act not just *in* (conditioned by) but *into* (freely) “man’s enduring chronicle” arises not despite or directly because of our sense that we are a *part* of this “enduring chronicle” but out of a gratefulness that we *are*—out of a gratefulness for what Arendt terms “the given.”⁹⁰

(iii)

But if it is now clear enough why Arendt chose to employ this Faulknerian citation in the conclusion of *Origins*, if the content of the line speaks—or, as we will see, *seems* to speak—to the way in which she understands politics as *dependent upon*, if not determined by, *story*, there is still a question of style, on several levels. For instance, one might ask, what kind of voice or perspective did Faulkner use in this line? What kind of voice or perspective did Arendt take up when she plucked it up out of Faulkner’s novel and inserted it (like an action?), used it (like a work?), into *Origins*?

More broadly, one might ask: what happens to the rigidities of Arendt’s work, when the role of “story” is highlighted? A mistake in the 2004 edition of *Origins* published by Schocken Books, which includes a copy of Arendt’s original

⁸⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

⁹⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

“Concluding Remarks,” is suggestive. In its reprinting, the Schocken version makes a slight, yet auspicious, typo: Faulkner’s “words” become Faulkner’s “worlds.” While the typo itself cannot, of course, tell us anything about Arendt’s thought, it prods us to consider how understanding the role of “story” might entail a melding of “action” and “world.” That is, when Arendt alludes, when she employs story, when story is employed in politics, do “territorial” distinctions fall away? And does noting this—reading Arendt as a politics of *storytelling*—enable contemporary readers to render Arendtian thought not hostile to but a valuable interlocuter for investigations and arguments concerned with social justice, feminist, and anti-racist efforts?

Markell and Ephraim—among others—suggest ways in which attending to the role of art or the role of nature and perspective in Arendt’s texts necessarily changes our understanding of the distinctions that Arendt marks and makes, and I have tried to follow their insights in suggesting that attention to the role of story, *in particular*, enables us to see the interplay and interrelation between “action,” on the one hand, and “world” and “nature,” on the other. At the same time, Arendt often seems to clamp down on this kind of play, to re-reify boundaries that seem sometimes to bend. After all, if Arendt’s use of Faulkner speaks to the centrality of the “story” in her thinking on politics, her use of Faulkner is also distinctly *un-literary*. Arendt incorporates a line of Faulkner’s that speaks of a chronicle but does not employ Faulkner’s chronicle or any context from the novel from which she quotes. She does not even say that the line is from a novel, much less its title, or the character from whose stream-of-consciousness the sentence is cribbed. Faulkner’s prose is turned into evidence for an argument, without any attention given to the perspective from which that line was

said, the voice or tone in which it was spoken. Instead, the words are turned into a universal truth, something that can be “Generally [spoken].”

This is something that can be said of Arendt’s use of “story” throughout her oeuvre. To be sure, she does sometimes give more context for the characters and works she quotes. Her discussion of Melville’s *Billy Budd* in *On Revolution*, for instance, includes a lengthy analysis of both its characters and themes, which are treated not just as collections of statements but as narrative.⁹¹ The footnote in *The Human Condition* in which Arendt cites Faulkner includes not only the name of the novel referred to, but a (very brief) mention of how the character in it represents a fact about the world.⁹² And yet even in such citations, Arendt does not attend to the style or voice of these works, using them instead as “object lessons” for politics, illustrations of situations or ideas that she believes to be true of the modern political era. She even writes that Faulkner’s propensity to deliver a political message through the use of “single brief sentences and condensed aphorisms”—a way of describing Faulkner’s style that will sound wholly odd, if not entirely errant, to anyone that has ever read a single sentence (which is to say, a single page) of Faulkner’s novels.

Arendt’s work seems to struggle to treat the literary objects it references *as* literary objects; likewise, Arendt’s philosophical framework—most especially the tripartite distinctions in *The Human Condition*—seems to struggle to incorporate the notion of “story.”⁹³ And so again, we must ask: What exactly *is* story to Arendt, and

⁹¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 72-8.

⁹² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

⁹³ Kautzer 8. Kautzer goes as far as to suggest that “storytelling” is hard to locate in Arendt’s work when he writes that, “Beyond the problem that state and legal violence pose for Arendt’s distinctions, the non-instrumental power said to define the political sphere is arguably also

where, *precisely*, does it belong? There are, as we have to some extent already seen, several interesting contradictions in Arendt's body of work on this matter. She begins the first chapter of *The Human Condition* with the assertion that, "Action," which "corresponds to the condition of human plurality," is "the only activity that goes on directly between men *without the intermediary* of things or matter."⁹⁴ This statement is seemingly *revised* in the chapter devoted to "Action."⁹⁵ Here, "Human plurality" is described as "the basic condition of *both* action and speech."⁹⁶ The contradiction could be resolved if one argues that "speech" is neither a "thing" nor something with "matter," perhaps. But then, this is only true if one reads Faulkner's line in *Intruder* as something spoken, and not a line of prose that he wrote and printed in ink upon a page—that Arendt read upon a page and then printed, too. And if there is a confusion *within* the text of *The Human Condition*, one could also mark a shift *in between* texts. For instance, Markell argues that Arendt's engagement with Faulkner's notion of "man's enduring chronicle" came at a period in which the theorist

was beginning to think through the difference between 'work' (Herstellen) and 'action' (Handeln) in terms of the indelibility of their results: whatever human

present in the social and private spheres as well. Because justice is not the goal of action, according to Arendt, one can imagine the power of speaking and acting in concert characterizing religious practices, collaborative projects in civil society, as well as song, dance, theater, and storytelling. It is not clear where to situate these activities in Arendt's *vita activa* model" (8). I believe that theorists such as Markell and Ephraim illuminate the ways in which Arendt "distinctions" *are not* as rigid as Kautzer suggests, and that there may be ways to locate these activities in her theory; nonetheless, Kautzer's work emphasizes the extent to which this *is* a problem in making sense of Arendt's text.

⁹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7, emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 18-9.

⁹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175, emphasis added.

beings make, she suggested there, they can also destroy; but what they do cannot be undone: it becomes a part of ‘man’s enduring chronicle.’⁹⁷

Markell adds that, “this formulation appears to reverse *The Human Condition*’s association of ‘work’ with durability and permanence, and ‘action’ with fleeting ephemerality.”⁹⁸ In *Origins*, the “chronicle” is “enduring”; in contrast to the ever-shifting nature of a totalitarian fictive-ness, in which *what is* is simply *what the leader wills*, the story requires a “common world.”⁹⁹

One way that Arendt seems to attempt to resolve these contradictions is by marking a distinction in *The Human Condition* between “the enacted story” and the “recorded story.” The one, according to her account, *becomes* the other; in other words, there is a forward and chronological relation between the two. As she writes,

The disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it ‘produces’ stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things.

These stories may then be recorded in documents and monuments, they may be

⁹⁷ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 84.

⁹⁸ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 84.

⁹⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 528-30, 563, 631.

visible in use objects or art works, they may be told and retold and worked into all kinds of material. They themselves, in their living reality, are of an altogether different nature than these reifications.¹⁰⁰

Arendt marks a distinction between the “story of the newcomer” that is enacted and that “alone is real” and the “reification” or recording of the story, according to which a life or act may be memorialized. Noting this distinction enables us to make sense of her arguments in *On Revolution*, in which she both claims that the content of the American Revolution was an *act* that was a “new story ... never known or told before” and also claims that the revolutionary tradition has been lost because it has not been remembered.¹⁰¹ In her understanding, the American Revolution is an “enacted story” that has been insufficiently reified, at least by and for the vast majority of Americans living at the time in which she writes.¹⁰²

Arendt employs this distinction between two kinds of narrative to square the notion of “the story” with a tripartite concept of the *vita activa* that draws a border (if not an entirely rigid one) between “action” and “work.” But if this definition quells any nascent instability amidst Arendtian distinctions, it also seems to divest the “story” of some of essential qualities, zapping narrative of not just what and how it means (or can mean) but perhaps more importantly, how it relates to us and relates us. Arendt, that is, treats the story both as *ephemeral* and as able to be transmitted *without the possibility of corruption*. Action, she readily admits, may not “achieve its purpose,” and yet she never suggests that an action might lose its character or content;

¹⁰⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

¹⁰¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18, 272.

¹⁰² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184, Arendt, *On Revolution*, 272-3.

wills *conflict*, in the webs of story—this is what makes a political order not a totalitarian one—but wills do not meld or corrupt or confuse one another. Likewise, when Arendt notes the *political* nature of Faulkner’s “literary procedure” in *On Revolution*, she refers to his words as “incessant talk.”¹⁰³ This is, I think, an apt way of describing Faulkner’s works, which are full of talk—talk within talk, talk *layered* upon talk, talk that speaks through other talk.¹⁰⁴ But Arendt does not delve into the nature of this “incessant”-ness; instead, by the end of the next sentence, Faulkner’s “incessant talk” has been reduced to “guideposts,” into “brief sentences” and “condensed aphorisms.”¹⁰⁵ The *talk* that is “incessant” that, perhaps, has no material form, is, when rendered into written form, “brief,” “condensed.”¹⁰⁶

Arendt can think of the “story” as accompanying action without corrupting it because stories for her, bespeak an incontestable reality; in the political sphere, stories are not *made* but *enacted*, and, once *enacted*, can only be preserved. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in a passage in *The Human Condition* in which she distinguishes between the “story resulting from action” and the “fictional story.” She writes:

The invisible actor behind the scenes is an invention arising from a mental perplexity but corresponding to no real experience. Through it, the story resulting from action is misconstrued as a fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and directs the play. The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this

¹⁰³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

¹⁰⁴ David L. Minter, *Faulkner’s Questioning Narratives: Fiction of His Major Phase, 1929-42* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 15-7.

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

¹⁰⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence. The distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was ‘made up’ and the former was not made at all. The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only ‘somebody’ it reveals is its hero and it is the only medium in which the originally intangible manifestation of a uniquely distinct ‘who’ can become tangible *ex post facto* through action or speech.¹⁰⁷

The story of humankind—the story that constitutes the very content of politics, Arendt says, has no maker. And if she does speak of a “medium” here, it is, in a sense, an entirely transparent medium. This is an account of communication in which speech acts never misfire, in which words are never twisted, are never—to use that Socratic idiom, “tumbled about.”¹⁰⁸

And yet if Arendt resolves the contradiction of story in her work by marking the “made story” off from the “enacted one,” there is something about this distinction that seems to buckle under its own weight. Other Arendtian theorists have called attention to this kind of buckling, if in slightly different contexts. Markell’s writings, for instance, emphasize that Arendt’s work is, indeed, *work*; in writing her books, she produces material objects.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Markell observes, in her “works,” Arendt *works* to articulate the definition of work (an articulation she does not quite pull off, if

¹⁰⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186. I shall return to this passage later in the thesis.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 20.

the aim is to utterly disentangle it from “action,” something Markell contests).¹¹⁰ In the course of the “Work” chapter of *The Human Condition*, Markell says, “the structure of the book, like a Möbius strip, twists over on itself.”¹¹¹ Arendt’s “work”—the durable product that is *The Human Condition*—“remains deeply and visibly marked by the twists and turns her thinking followed.”¹¹² Honig stresses this point (and employs a similar metaphor) when she writes that in *The Human Condition*,

Arendt secures her public/private distinction with a multilayered edifice. The distinction spawns numerous binaries, each one a new layer of protective coating on the last ... multiple self versus univocal body, male versus female, resistible versus irresistible, courageous versus risk-averse, speech versus mute silence, active versus passive, open versus closed, power versus violence, freedom versus necessity, action versus behavior, extraordinary versus ordinary, inimitable versus imitable, disruption versus repetition, light versus dark, in short: public versus private.¹¹³

Why, Honig asks, does Arendt’s distinction of public and private require “so many” oppositions to uphold it?¹¹⁴ “Binary distinctions and adjectival pairs are heaped, one upon another, in a heroic effort to resist the erosion of a distinction that is tenuous enough to need all of this,” Honig writes, and then leans on this point. “Tenuous,” she observes, “indeed.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 20.

¹¹¹ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 18.

¹¹² Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 20.

¹¹³ Honig, “Toward an Agonistic Feminism,” *Feminist Interpretation of Hannah Arendt*, 144.

¹¹⁴ Honig, “Toward an Agonistic Feminism,” *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 144.

¹¹⁵ Honig, “Toward an Agonistic Feminism,” *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, 144.

In this project, I want to suggest that Arendt's theories are *tenuous* because of the way that her work, and its very structure, its very material, its *language*, constantly threaten to unsteady the boundaries she lays out. Arendt can only *express* the political—can only *express* her conception of the “space of appearance”—through words, which are written on the page. Often, she expresses her vision of the political by employing quotes—allusions—references—which, as Leah Price notes, ever bring to the fore the fact of a text's materiality, such that allusion has a double sidedness that points to both an abstract layer and a more “mundane” one situated (literally) on the level of the page.¹¹⁶

My aim, then, in what follows, is to ask how Arendt's thought would have to be *rethought* if we read it not through the “aphoristic” claims that it makes but the modes of *talk* it engages—and re-engages and keeps engaging (to borrow a word from a word-borrower: “*incessantly*”). Benhabib once proposed that a study of Arendt requires one to “think with Arendt against Arendt.”¹¹⁷ Following in the wake of such a call, I want to propose something slightly different: that we “think with Arendt against Arendt,” which also means, given the profundity of allusion in her pages, to “read with Faulkner against Arendt.” I have, of course, chosen *Faulkner* for a blank that any number of writers or thinkers might fill—Arendt is so profuse in her citations, so very *allusive*. Yet, as a literary thinker—as a novelist whose work is deeply engaged with

¹¹⁶ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122. Price argues, for instance, that the rendering of George Eliot's prose into the lines of anthologies led readers to be newly aware of the status of the novelist's words as material. Price writes that, “Once recontextualized in the second edition of the *Sayings*, the passage draws attention to the materiality not only of the anthology, but of the novel” (122).

¹¹⁷ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, xi.

the material, the specific, the *place*—as a modernist writer whose stories are never direct, never concretize but ever allude, and, perhaps, elude—Faulkner is an ideal candidate to read with and against Arendt. Moreover, as I shall explore in the latter half of what follows, Arendt and Faulkner differed as much on the mechanisms and meanings of the story as they converged in their opposition to school desegregation in the American South, such that an examination of their overlaps is not just a literary or theoretical endeavor, but an examination of how certain modes of power—racist, exclusionary “power”—is written into “stories” in and of America of various forms and styles and purposes.

Let us, then, begin. (Unless I have already begun—stuck, as I am between one writer who glorified *the new story, a story never known or told before* and another whose character claimed, *The past is never dead. It's not even past.*)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18; Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage International, 2011): 73.

CHAPTER II
THE CHRONICLE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

Arendt invokes the “chronicle” sparingly. To my knowledge, she uses the word just twice in *Origins* (both times in quotations of other texts), once in *On Revolution*, and not at all in *The Human Condition*. The single other instance of “chronicle” in *Origins*—other than, of course, her reference to “the words of Faulkner” on “man’s enduring chronicle”—occurs in a footnote to a passage in “A Classless Society.” In these lines, Arendt quotes several writers and anonymous citizens as she attempts to describe the mood among the privileged classes of Europe just before the outbreak of the first world war. Arendt writes:

The elite went to war with an exultant hope that everything they knew, the whole culture and texture of life, might go down in its ‘storms of steel’ (Ernst Jünger). In the carefully chosen words of Thomas Mann war was “chastisement and purification”; “war in itself, rather than victories, inspired the poet.” Or in the words of a student of the time, “what counts is always the readiness to make a sacrifice, not the object for which the sacrifice is made” or in the words of a young worker, “it doesn’t matter whether one lives a few years longer or not. One would like to have something to show for one’s life.”¹¹⁹

In a footnote to this line, Arendt instructs the reader to “See the collection of material on the ‘inner *chronicle* of the first World War’ by Hanna Hafkesbrink, *Unknown*

¹¹⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 434.

Germany” and states that “The great value of this collection for the imponderables of historical atmosphere makes the lack of similar studies for France, England, and Italy all the more deplorable.”¹²⁰

As in the “Concluding Remarks,” Arendt invokes the chronicle here *in another voice, with another’s words*, in this case, not ones from a novel but accessed through the use of a “collection of material.” As such, Arendt’s employment of “chronicle” in both instances essentially accords with the word’s traditional definition. The Oxford English Dictionary entry for the term states that it is “A detailed and continuous register of events in order of time; a historical record, esp. one in which the facts are narrated without philosophic treatment, or any attempt at literary style.”¹²¹ This is the meaning that seems to inhere in the “Classless Society” passage, in which Arendt cites several quotations from early twentieth century German writers, before moving—without marking any distinction—into the recorded and *anonymous* voices of everyday citizens, interviewed for an “inner chronicle” said to speak to the “historical atmosphere” of the time.¹²² All of these allusions are thus treated in essentially the same way: as *talk* or *word* that can give a sense of the era, the life of “men, not Man” as it currently exists.¹²³ Chronicle here, just as “story” does as in *The Human Condition*, allows others to make sense of “deeds” in the “space of appearance” that is

¹²⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, 434, first emphasis added. I am grateful to Dr. Markell for calling my attention to this second use of “chronicle” in *Origins*.

¹²¹ “chronicle, n.,” *OED Online*. March 2020. Oxford University Press.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32576?rskey=OmQnt5&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
(accessed May 07, 2020).

¹²² Arendt, *Origins*, 434.

¹²³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

also the space of politics.¹²⁴ Words, as the OED puts it, serve to be a “register of event,” a narration of “facts.”

However, this is not, as I hope to show in the ensuing chapter, how words “work” for Faulkner, and thus, the OED definition does not encompass or even really speak to his own notion of the “chronicle”—as he writes *of* it as well as how he writes it. The novelist does not only use the word with greater regularity than Arendt does (six times in *Intruder in the Dust* alone). His employment of “chronicle” also endows it with a different *meaning*, a different *sense*. That is to say: Arendt writes, in the passage that has already been quoted several times, that “Generally speaking, such gratitude expects nothing except—in the worlds [sic] of Faulkner—one’s ‘own anonymous chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle ... in gratitude of [one’s] time in it.’”¹²⁵ What I will ask in this essay is if, in alluding to the words of another, one can bring “in” the words of someone else without also (as the almost Freudian slip of a typo in the 2004 edition of *Origins* suggests) bringing in that person’s *world* or perhaps most accurately, *worlds*.

(i)

The novel that Arendt alludes to in the close of *Origins* is not among Faulkner’s most celebrated.¹²⁶ The Southern writer published *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948, six years after the publication of his previous novel, *Go Down, Moses*, which

¹²⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

¹²⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

¹²⁶ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 84.

was first published in 1942.¹²⁷ In the intervening years, the author published only five short stories, marking what Carl Dimitri calls a “drastic” drop-off in the “productivity” of an writer who had published 15 books (13 novels and 2 short story collections) in the 16-year-period that ended with 1942.¹²⁸ In *Intruder*, Faulkner set his plot in Yoknapatawpha County, in a fictionalized version of his native Mississippi, thus revisiting a setting and a set of characters that he had written about before, including in *Go Down, Moses*.¹²⁹ The events of the book suggest that the time period of the novel is roughly contemporary with Faulkner’s own at the time of the novel’s publication (i.e. 1940s-era Mississippi).¹³⁰ The plot of *Intruder* begins with and centers upon the arrest of Lucas Beauchamp, a Black man who has been jailed for the murder of a White man, Vinson Gowrie—a murder that, as becomes clear over the course of the story, he did not commit.¹³¹ The county lawyer, a White man named Gavin Stevens, goes to the jail and attempts to help but quickly becomes frustrated with Lucas’s refusal to answer his questions and, more broadly, to act as a “proper” client who gratefully accepts Gavin’s offer of legal assistance (and thus also,

¹²⁷ Carl Dimitri, “Go Down, Moses to *Intruder in the Dust*: From Negative to Positive Liberty,” *Faulkner Journal* 19, no. 1 (2003): 11, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/26156971>; Ticien Marie Sassoubre, “Avoiding Adjudication in William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*,” *Criticism* 49, np. 2 (Spring 2007): 186, doi:10.1353/crt.0.0016. The extent to which *Go Down, Moses* ought to be considered a novel at all is somewhat contested; for instance, Sassoubre writes that, “Though it is widely considered Faulkner’s last great novel, there are few satisfactory readings of *Go Down, Moses*, and it is frequently described as lacking a unified thematic core, despite Faulkner’s assertion that he intended the book to be read as a novel” (186).

¹²⁸ Dimitri 11.

¹²⁹ Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (Vintage International, 1992). Lucas Beauchamp, one of the key figures in *Intruder*, is likewise a main character in “The Fire and the Hearth,” the long second chapter of *Go Down, Moses*; various other characters likewise appear in different sections of *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder*.

¹³⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*.

¹³¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3-16.

Mississippi's prevailing racial hierarchy).¹³² However, Lucas is able to solicit the help of Gavin's nephew, fifteen-year-old Charles "Chick" Mallison, who, along with Aleck Sanders, a Black teenager, and Miss Habersham, a White spinster, is able to prove, at least to Chick's uncle and the sheriff, that Lucas is innocent.¹³³

In an essay on Arendt's allusion to this novel, Markell describes *Intruder* as "part detective potboiler, part Bildungsroman, but mostly the tense and fraught story of a lynching barely averted ... though one would never get any sense of the setting or plot from Arendt's brief citations."¹³⁴ Markell's description of the book and of Arendt's succinct citation of it is quite correct. What I wish to focus upon here, however, is not just the *content* of what Arendt excludes but the *form*. Markell suggests that the book can be understood according to a trio of generic structures—a mystery, a coming-of-age story, a drama—and yet he mostly focuses on the last of these. It is the story of a "lynching barely averted" that is made most crucial to his characterization of the work as "one of Faulkner's most explicitly political novels," a book penned, Markell says, "in a rush in early 1948, in the wake of the report of Truman's Presidential Committee on Civil Rights."¹³⁵

But if this was a novel written in the wake of a report, Faulkner's narrative both flirts with and *rejects* the form of one. That is to say: the narrative of *Intruder* may be, in some ways, "explicitly political"; it may be "essentially" a drama centered upon a "lynching barely averted."¹³⁶ Ticien Marie Sassoubre even claims that

¹³² Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 58-65.

¹³³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 65-72, 170-5.

¹³⁴ Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 84.

¹³⁵ Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 84.

¹³⁶ Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 84.

Faulkner may have based the events of the book on his own experience. When the writer was only ten, Sassoubre notes, a Black man was lynched in Faulkner's native Oxford, Mississippi, only a short distance from his family home.¹³⁷ And yet: this is not merely some retelling of some act, some event, witnessed. On the contrary, in also being a detective story, a coming-of-age narration, Faulkner's book represents the processes according to which an event comes to be witnessed, made sense of, understood, which is also, of course, the way a story (or chronicle) comes to be told.

In what follows, I will conduct a series of close readings of *Intruder*. First, I will examine the book's beginning—the way it situates its reader in its setting, its world—and the use of flashback early in the novel. Next, I will examine the first two instances of the word “chronicle” in *Intruder*, both of which relate to the way in which Faulkner's protagonist, the teenaged Chick, comes to make sense of the story he witnesses and narrates in the book. These readings, as well as briefer engagements with several other appearances of the word “chronicle” in the text, will enable me to conduct a reading of the passage to which Arendt alludes in *Origins* that suggests very different implications for the political story than the one Arendt's own work seems to draw. While, as I will discuss momentarily, Arendt is far from the only reader who has

¹³⁷ Sassoubre 183. Sassoubre writes, “William Faulkner was ten years old when a Black man named Nelse Patton was lynched in Oxford, Mississippi. In a single day, Patton had been accused of slitting the throat of a White woman with a razor, arrested, and jailed under guard. During the night a mob of two thousand Whites gathered outside the jail while local authorities, including the sheriff, a judge, and a minister, tried to prevent the lynching. Their efforts finally failed when a prominent Oxford lawyer who had served in the United States Senate exhorted the crowd to lynch Patton in the name of justice. The young Faulkner may well have heard, if he did not in fact see, the lynching—his childhood home was only a few blocks from the Oxford jail.” While the character of Lucas Beauchamp is, as stated, not murdered at the end of *Intruder*, and not all the details listed here can be found in the novel, there are some salient similarities: a Black man who is accused and jailed the same day, a White mob that forms outside the jailhouse, the efforts of local White authorities to avert a lynching, and, finally, the presence of a young White boy as a witness.

examined *Intruder* as a kind of direct political statement on the part of its author, I will argue that such readers overemphasize the content of Faulkner's work, attending insufficiently to its form and its mode(s) of narration.

On that note, then, before I begin my own analysis of *Intruder*, I want to consider several matters of readerly methodology—which also involves a brief discussion of how Faulkner's *Intruder* has previously and predominantly been read. Like Markell, many of Faulkner's critics have understood the 1948 novel as a political book. In fact, Dimitri suggests that the “political” nature of the book is another of the aspects that marks it off from works of Faulkner's earlier period, in addition to the long stretch of time that preceded its publication. “In most general terms,” Dimitri writes, “Faulkner's ‘shift’ from his early to late period is characterized by a turn from a modernist aesthetic to an aesthetic of engagement.”¹³⁸ Dimitri's claim here can be associated with a trend of *Intruder* criticism primarily interested in determining which, and to what extent, the novel's characters speak for their author. Noel Polk, for instance, writes that, for the reader of *Intruder*, “it is difficult to escape a considerable sense of urgency, of ‘message’ in Stevens's diatribe against the North”—a monologue that takes up a large swath of the later part of the novel—“and equally difficult to resist assuming that Stevens is mouthing Faulkner's own sentiments, especially given the similarity of Faulkner's rhetoric to Stevens's as his own public involvement in civil rights issues grew over the next few years.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Dimitri 12.

¹³⁹ Noel Polk, “Man in the Middle: Faulkner and the Southern White Moderate,” *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* 141 (2003): 170, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.H1420053994&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

To be clear, neither Polk nor Dimitri suggests that Gavin’s voice simply *equals* Faulkner’s; Polk even writes that “we need to take seriously Faulkner’s efforts to distance himself from Stevens. The novel itself insists that we be careful about Stevens’s opinions about race.”¹⁴⁰ Moreover, in *Origins*, Arendt herself does not equate Gavin’s perspective with Faulkner’s; in claiming the line as “Faulkner’s words,” it is arguably Chick’s consciousness that she associates with the author. This, in fact, is also a move that Dimitri makes at the close of his essay.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, whether it is the fictional uncle or his fictional nephew whose “voice” is equated with Faulkner’s, all of these readings focus on the political (or, in Arendt’s case, the political philosophical) *content* of the book. As Sassoubre writes, “Accounts of *Intruder in the Dust* tend to bog down in discussions of Gavin Stevens’s gradualism with respect to desegregation, ignoring much of the rich and nuanced text in a narrow focus on the extent to which Stevens” —or, I might add, Chick—“voices Faulkner’s own views.”¹⁴²

In opposition to readings that seek to explore the *content* of *Intruder*—whether Gavin’s monologues or Chick’s—for its meaning, I want to focus more explicitly on the *form* of Faulkner’s work: on the *form* of his chronicle. I believe that it is only in focusing on not just content but form that one is able to read both “with and against” Faulkner—and thus to read the book *against* the racism and anti-Black grain that

¹⁴⁰ Polk 170.

¹⁴¹ Dimitri 25. Dimitri concludes his essay with the profession that “similar to his boy hero, Faulkner questions his own assumptions and struggles against them. He creates for himself a new understand of, and a new approach to, the social world *and* his art.”

¹⁴² Sassoubre 186. In a footnote to this line, Sassoubre cites several critical engagements with *Intruder*, including Polk’s.

courses through Faulkner's public statements and Gavin's fictional ones (of which more will be said later in this thesis).

That said, in staking out such "formal" aims, I am not, of course, exploring untrammelled ground. One perhaps *cannot* read Faulkner without being forced to think at least to some extent about form, nor is a formalist approach necessarily equivalent to an anti-racist one. Annette Trefzer suggests precisely this in her 2008 introduction to *Faulkner and Formalism: Returns of the Text*, in which she writes that even after the rejection of the New Critical approaches that initially formed the bulk of Faulkner criticism, "the practice of 'close reading' associated with formalist work never went out of fashion in superior Faulkner scholarship *no matter the political direction or ideological slant.*"¹⁴³ At the same time, Trefzer suggests that *Faulkner and Formalism* brings a "New Formalist" approach to Faulkner's work that *does* have something new to offer.¹⁴⁴ The volume's essays, she says,

take up returns of the text as a point of departure from which Faulkner's literature may be read at a wide range of theoretical angles. And yet, it seems to be commonly understood [by the contributors] that this return does not signal an emphasis on the privileged status of the literary text the way it was firmly established by the New Critics ... The broader arguments about the

¹⁴³ Annette Trefzer, "Introduction," in *Faulkner and Formalism: Returns of the Text*, edited by Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012): ix-x, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ Trefzer ix-x. This is not to say that Trefzer claims that the approaches taken by the various paper writers who contributed to the conference in *Faulkner and Formalism* are exactly the same. Indeed, citing Marjorie Levinson's description of New Formalism as a "'movement' rather than a 'theory or a method' because the 'modes of and degrees of identification with the movement are so various,'" Trefzer writes that Levinson's characterization of New Formalism as a whole is likewise "true of our collection" (x-xi).

social function of Faulkner's fiction in the world beyond the text remain and open up a dialectical relationship between aesthetics and politics."¹⁴⁵

Trefzer concludes that *Faulkner and Formalism* (and perhaps, one might say, Faulkner and *New Formalism*) provide a "'turnabout' to the aesthetic subtleties of Faulkner's prose that has always invited sophisticated textual exegesis but keeps on steady course with cultural and historical concerns."¹⁴⁶ My own analysis seeks to continue this "steady course," with an emphasis not just on "cultural and historical" concerns but with more explicitly anti-racist ones.

Trefzer's endorsement of a "New Formalist" approach to Faulkner suggests that Dimitri's approach to *Intruder* and others like it may be flawed in their emphases on the directly political nature of the text. That is, in seeing Faulkner's work as divided into two distinct periods, early and late, which can be characterized as espousing a "modernist aesthetic" and an "aesthetics of engagement," Dimitri fails to consider the way form itself—modernist or otherwise—might provoke engagement, might even be a *form* of engagement. In Faulkner's earlier works, Dimitri says,

Hopes for reconciliation between characters, or between his artwork and his society, were dashed as he generally created uncommercial, abstruse, and at times, shocking works of art. The idea of fixed, stable truth and that of an inherently meaningful universe were repudiated and supplanted by a contingent world often presented through multiple, decentered perspectives.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Trefzer xix-xx.

¹⁴⁶ Trefzer xx.

¹⁴⁷ Dimitri 12.

The only relation that Dimitri draws between Faulkner's early "modernist" work and the political and social realm is one of negation, such that the work becomes a kind of symptom of what Arendt might term "world alienation."¹⁴⁸ Dimitri writes that it "can be said that through this emphasis on the chaotic and ephemeral, Faulkner was revealing his desire for an undefiled and meaningful life," thus acknowledging that even this political "disengagement" is not necessarily "asocial or even apolitical."¹⁴⁹ But all this is still to draw distinctions too rigidly, too *quickly*. Dimitri's marks too much of a break between Faulkner's early and late work, between the decentered, multiple narration of works like *Absalom, Absalom!* and *As I Lay Dying* and the narration of Chick in *Intruder*, which may be "singular" in a sense but nonetheless, to borrow a phrase from Whitman, "contains multitudes." Moreover, such a claim suggests—contrary to the arguments of the New Formalists—that formal innovations can have a purely negative relation to the political and social world. It is worth contrasting Dimitri's assertion above with Trefzer's suggestion that formalist engagements with Faulkner "open up a dialectical relation between aesthetics and politics."¹⁵⁰

Following, then, in the wake of such engagements, this chapter aims to examine not just the content of *Intruder*, but also, its shape, the way that that shape influences our understanding of Chick's speech concerning "man's enduring chronicle," and, finally, how that shape inflects, or might inflect, Arendt's allusion to the phrase and our understanding of it.

¹⁴⁸ Dimitri 12; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 248.

¹⁴⁹ Dimitri 12.

¹⁵⁰ Trefzer xx.

As literary scholar Caroline Levine, who takes up a New Formalist approach in her own work has written: “Forms do political work in particular historical contexts”¹⁵¹ While Arendt would surely have contested the phrase—“political work” being, on even a relatively *non*-territorial reading of her work, something of a contradiction in terms—this is an apt phrase for what I am trying to explore here and what I think the narrative structure of *Intruder* suggests. That is, the book itself can be read as exposing the *political work* that is done *by* imbrication within structures that Arendt considered matters of “nature” and “world.”

Arendt’s story, after all, is that which is *inserted, enacted*, not just “in but into man’s enduring chronicle.” The chronicle *endures*, on Arendt’s lights, because it is made up of nature, in its eternal recurrences, and world, in its sturdy durability. The chronicle receives action; it does not *form* it, at least in Arendt’s conception, even if action would be impossible without it, without some stage upon which to enact something. But, as the following sections will argue, this is not the sense in which Faulkner writes of the chronicle, and it is not the sense in which he forms one.

(ii)

If Dimitri claims that Faulkner’s later works, including *Intruder*, are more simplistic and direct than his earlier ones, this is perhaps itself a feature of the novel, for the formal complications of the text are not immediately clear from its opening salvos. On the contrary, the book’s first sentence seems, at least at first glance, all too straightforward. The novel, which is narrated in third-person perspective, opens with

¹⁵¹ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 5, emphases removed.

the kind of statement that one might find in a diary or even in the kind of sociological or historical study that Arendt cites in “A Classless Society.” *Intruder* begins: “It was just after noon that Sunday morning when the sheriff reached the jail with Lucas Beauchamp though the whole town (the whole county too for that matter) had known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man.”¹⁵² This is the language of the chronicle, at least according to the OED’s definition of it: an accounting of recorded facts. The reader is given the *who*, the *what*, the *when*. The sentence lacks any kind of identifiable viewpoint, except one that can be associated with that of the “whole town” and even perhaps “the whole county too.”¹⁵³

However, the second sentence announces a different kind of voice—a more specific and *embodied* one. “He was there, waiting,” the reader learns, without immediately being told who “he” is, although we soon learn in the subsequent paragraph that this “he” is there

waiting ... Because he knew Lucas Beauchamp, too—as well that is as any white person knew him. Better than any maybe unless it was Carothers Edmonds on whose place Lucas lived seventeen miles from town, because he had eaten a meal in Lucas’ house. It was early winter four years ago; he had been only twelve then and it had happened in this way[.]¹⁵⁴

The sentence continues—I have substituted a period for a colon that marks the transition into flashback—with the retelling of a scene from the past that proves pivotal to understanding the conflicts of the book.

¹⁵² Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3.

¹⁵³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3-4.

Thus, if the book's opening suggests a kind of "objective" accounting of undisputed facts, this suggestion is quickly undermined or more precisely, complicated and layered. The reader is made aware of the fact that this is a story told by a specific *him* (even if we don't know who *he* is yet), and if the book initially seems to be narrated from a perspective of third-person omniscience, a stream-of-consciousness, third-person limited mode quickly takes over. As a result of this, we, as the audience, become aware that there may be more to this story—this chronicle, so to speak—than what the first line tells, more, too, than what the "whole town" and "whole county" seem to believe. We might even notice that there is no *why* given in that first sentence, which otherwise seems to mimic the form of a newspaper lede, as if any possible motive for why a Black man might kill a White man in mid-twentieth century Mississippi is too obvious to need speaking.

Instead of a story told from the perspective of a purportedly uninterested narrator, the progression and play of Faulkner's prose quickly suggests that this is a story that can only be told and understood through the recounting of personal histories. "Because he knew Lucas," the narrator tells us, as if answering a question that we are not aware of having asked. At the same time, the narration suggests that the current events not only must be viewed through the lens of history—a history of relationships—but also according to racial categories. Importantly, race emerges as a category that has clearly underwritten that first seemingly objective statement (in which not just the killing of a *man* but a *White man* was announced); the subsequent lines seem to refer to race as both an obvious and partially obscured part of the story (the narrator knows Lucas "as well that is as any white person knew him"). Lucas's

race, in these lines, is never explicitly identified, although it always seems to be placed in contrast to Whiteness—the Whiteness of the murder victim, the Whiteness of the narrator, the Whiteness of the gaze that knows Lucas. In sum, then, the opening line of the novel, if it begins like a newspaper report, a chronicle-like accounting of history, quickly bends into another kind of accounting. The reader is given more specific details: the specific place in which Lucas lives, the specific people who (claim to) know him. On my reading, the increasing “bias” that seems to mark these details does not suggest a descent into prejudice so much as it points to the prejudice that underlies even the pretense of objectivity.

The purportedly “unbiased” announcement of the beginning is thus quickly enmeshed in a far more localized (and racist) economy of relations and knowledge. The book that begins by highlighting an impending conflict quickly slips into flashback. The “whole town” may have “known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man.”¹⁵⁵ But there is, the still-unidentified speaker’s voice implies, more to the story—much more, and this *much more*, is what leads the narrator to transition into a retelling of the past. The reader is transported back in time to the moment in which the narrator (who, we will soon find out, is Chick Mallison) “had eaten a meal in Lucas’s house.”¹⁵⁶ The narrator says:

It was in the early winter four years ago; he had been only twelve then and it had happened this way: Edmonds was a friend of his uncle; they had been in school at the same time at the State University, where his uncle had gone after

¹⁵⁵ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3.

he came back from Harvard and Heidelberg to learn enough law to get himself chosen County Attorney, and the day before Edmonds had come in to town to see his uncle on some county business and had stayed the night with them and at supper that evening Edmonds had said to him:

‘Come out home with me tomorrow and go rabbit hunting;’ and then to his mother: ‘I’ll send him back in tomorrow afternoon. I’ll send a boy along with him while he’s out with his gun:’ and then to him again: ‘He’s got a good dog.’ ‘He’s got a boy,’ his uncle said and Edmonds said:

‘Does his boy run rabbits too?’ and his uncle said:

‘We’ll promise he wont interfere with yours.’

So the next morning he and Aleck Sanders went home with Edmonds.¹⁵⁷

What is worth noting about this passage, which takes place mere paragraphs into the book, isn’t so much that the narration provides *background* and *context* to the story of murder and mystery it seems about to tell, but the immersive mode in which it gives this context. The reader is, so to speak, unceremoniously dumped in the world of Chick Mallison: a world of hunting and neighborly and familial relations, which aren’t explained so much as posited to exist. One of the most striking things about the Chick’s world is the way the town’s hierarchy is treated as utterly *natural*. His uncle is the “County Lawyer,” a job he was able to win through his education at “Harvard and Heidelberg.” Chick is connected through his uncle to some of the town’s wealthiest members, including this Carothers Edmonds. Race is again made both an apparently obvious and nevertheless unspoken part of this order: as will become clear later in the

¹⁵⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 4.

novel (though implied from the start), the “boys” who are treated in this dialogue as little more than objects, treated as more akin to the dogs than the speakers, are both Black.

But if this recollected hunting trip serves to immerse the reader in the world in which the narrator is immersed—and imbricated—it is also the occasion in which the narrator begins to question that world—or perhaps more accurately, when the world begins to force him to question it. On the hunting trip, with “his” dogs and “his” boys, Chick falls through the icy surface of frozen creek that was not so solid as he had believed. Faulkner writes:

[Chick] didn't even know how it happened, something a girl might have been expected and even excused for doing but nobody else, halfway over the footlog and not even thinking about it who had walked the top rail of a fence many a time twice that far when all of a sudden the known familiar sun winter was upside down and flat on his face and still holding the gun he was rushing not away from the earth but away from the bright sky and he could still remember the thin bright tinkle of the breaking ice and how he didn't even feel the shock of the water but only of the air when he came up again.¹⁵⁸

Faulkner's long sentences, the way he stacks phrases upon phrases, dividing them only by commas, have a kind of disorienting effect here, one perhaps akin to the way the ground falls out from underneath Chick, something he thinks ought to only happen to a *girl*—not a young man such as himself. Chick's sense of his own manhood, and his

¹⁵⁸ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 6.

Whiteness, are to suffer further shock soon after he falls through the ice.¹⁵⁹ As his two companions attempt to help pull him out with a long pole, Chick hears a voice that belongs to a person that he does not immediately identify. The words “Get the pole out of his way so he can get out” are, to Chick, “just a voice, not because it couldn’t be anybody else but either Aleck Sander or Edmonds’ boy but because it didn’t matter whose.”¹⁶⁰

But if Chick’s consciousness attempts to render Lucas’s voice unworthy of notice, Lucas Beauchamp asserts himself in the scene anyway. The man’s spoken command is what enables Chick to crawl out of the water

with both hands among the willows, the skim ice crinkling and tinkling against his chest, his clothes like soft cold lead which he didn’t move in but seemed rather to mount into like a poncho or a tarpaulin: up the bank until he saw two feet in gum boots which were neither Edmonds’ boy’s nor Aleck Sander’s and then the legs, the overalls rising out of them and he climbed on and stood up and saw a Negro man with an axe on his shoulder, in a heavy sheep-lined coat and a broad pale felt hat such as his grandfather had used to wear, looking at him and that was when he saw Lucas Beauchamp for the first time that he remembered or rather for the first time because you didn’t forget Lucas Beauchamp;¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Thea J. Autry, “As Out of a Seer’s Crystal Ball’: The Racialized Gaze in William Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust*,” *The Faulkner Journal* 30, no. 2 (September 2016): 19, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A586902917/AONE?u=nysl_sc_cornl&sid=AONE&xid=8a249a2e.

¹⁶⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 6.

¹⁶¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 6.

The pace of the narrator's stream-of-consciousness realization is almost agonizingly slow; as Thea J. Autry writes of this scene, "Lucas Beauchamp appears on the creek bank in the early pages of William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* ... by degrees—his boots, his legs, his overalls incrementally brought into focus."¹⁶² Due to this halted tempo, along with the enormous degree of sensory detail, the reader experiences the narrator's growing consciousness intimately, feels it all through Chick's skin, hears each "crinkle" and "tinkle," is touched by the brush of the "willows." Even Lucas is glimpsed slowly, feet first. It is almost as if Faulkner is acclimating us into a whole new world, one the narrator has emerged into after an icy, accidental baptism. Autry, employing a similar metaphor, writes that Lucas appears as an "indifferent god-figure," to whom Chick Mallison, "soaked and chilled in the willows below" can only, slowly, lift his eyes.¹⁶³

Autry argues that the dynamics of this opening scene are crucial to understanding *Intruder* as a whole. Like Markell, she reads the novel as both "a work of detective fiction" and a coming-of-age tale, but her analysis specifies the *racial* element of the latter; she terms the book not just a "bildungsroman" but a "racial bildungsroman."¹⁶⁴ Faulkner's novel, she says, is "as much ... a work of detective fiction" as "the story of Chick's discovery of his own whiteness and his confrontation with the myth of its transcendence, or its sameness across and taxonomic authority over difference."¹⁶⁵ Autry understands Chick's initial encounter with Lucas as an

¹⁶² Autry 19.

¹⁶³ Autry 19.

¹⁶⁴ Autry 19.

¹⁶⁵ Autry 19.

event that fundamentally destabilizes the White teenager's place in the world, writing that

In the wake of his fall into the creek, Chick's waterlogged, almost feminized, limpness is counterpoised against the erect, provincial masculinity of his axe-wielding black redeemer, and that this particular Negro—the propertied and prideful bane of white Yoknapatawpha County—should be Chick's savior promises to be more than the boy's developing white manhood can bear.¹⁶⁶

Lucas takes Chick back to his home, where Chick first meets Lucas's wife, Molly. Lucas then proceeds to command Chick to "strip off," dries the boy's clothes, and gives him a meal.¹⁶⁷ Though Chick protests both offers initially, he eventually acquiesces, "stripped off the wet unionsuit" and, once dressed again, "sat down and ate in his turn what was clearly supposed to be Lucas's dinner—collard greens, a slice of sidemeat fried in flour, big flat pale heavy half-cooked biscuits, a glass of buttermilk."¹⁶⁸ The young White boy is made the object of Lucas's good will, something he seems to find unsettling.

After he has eaten, Chick makes one last attempt—one that will haunt him—to reestablish his power over Lucas by *paying* the man at the end of his visit, thus turning the man's acts on his behalf into service done to a paying employer, the equivalent of a half-dollar, a dime, and two nickels, which Chick holds out, "four shameful fragments of milled and minted dross."¹⁶⁹ In Autry's analysis, "Chick attempts to set

¹⁶⁶ Autry 19.

¹⁶⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 15.

the stage for a recreation of the scene by the creek, a reparative performance, this time with Lucas in the subservient role lately and unnaturally occupied by the boy himself.”¹⁷⁰ Chick’s attempt to reestablish the “natural” order does not work, however. Lucas refuses the money, ignores the boy’s command to “Pick ... up!” the coins that Chick finally, in frustration, throws on the floor, instructing instead Chick’s companions to “Pick up his money” and “Give it back to him.”¹⁷¹ Again: Lucas overpowers, outwills Chick, and though the boy tries several times, in the years after his almost-drowning and before Lucas’s arrest to “repay” the man (and thus rid himself of his sense of awkward indebtedness), he never manages this.

According to Autry, all of these actions flip a traditional hierarchy of the American South: a way of seeing and being that rendered White people *subjects* and Black people the *objects* of White-controlled power structures and the White gaze.¹⁷² Though Chick remains the narrator, Lucas is the one who watches, who commands, who seems to *author* the plot of the encounter. Other readers have interpreted Lucas’s role in *Intruder*, and in the other novel in which he appears as a major character, *Go Down, Moses*, somewhat differently.¹⁷³ Dimitri, for instance, argues that though Lucas “has the capacity for self-government, and perhaps more importantly, self-creation” such that he “creates his own distinct identity, serves his own personal authority,” Lucas’s very possession of these traits seems to depend upon his status as an *exception*.¹⁷⁴ Dimitri writes that,

¹⁷⁰ Autry 26.

¹⁷¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 15-6.

¹⁷² Autry 20.

¹⁷³ Autry 34; Dimitri 18.

¹⁷⁴ Dimitri 18.

In a way that indicates Faulkner's critical limitations, his inability to depict a more 'progressive' and organic mode of social behavior for black people, Lucas behaves in the one manner that is deemed admirable: as a Southern gentleman, proud and dignified and self-reliant. In itself, this shows that Faulkner was unable to envision a form of social behavior for black people that was independent of white norms and expectations.¹⁷⁵

On Dimitri's reading, Lucas's possession of "the capacity for self-government and, perhaps most importantly, self-creation," even "[m]ore than most of Faulkner's white characters" is still crucially dependent on old notions of White, masculine, capitalist notions of the "self."¹⁷⁶

Autry does not entirely dispute such readings; on the contrary, she writes that readings such as Dimitri's are "well founded."¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless and at the same time, she writes, "space exists for a reinterpretation."¹⁷⁸ Autry asserts that,

If it is true that Lucas's withdrawal from blackness contributes to his sense of self it is only insofar as the blackness away from which he moves is not an essence or an abstract collective, but a conscription that accosts his body from outside. As a property owner and subscriber to patrimony, he does indeed occupy a traditionally non-Negro subject position, but therein lies his ability to so trouble the South's neatly foreclosed racial classifications. He creates for

¹⁷⁵ Dimitri 18.

¹⁷⁶ Dimitri 18. In making this point, Dimitri cites the fact that, in moments in both *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*, Lucas professes himself prouder of his White ancestry (his grandfather, who is likewise an ancestor of Carothers Edmonds, was White and owned persons) than of being Black.

¹⁷⁷ Autry 34.

¹⁷⁸ Autry 34.

himself an identity that, though deeply entrenched in capitalism and consumerism, both resists precise demography and throws into confusion the racialized identities of the novel's white characters.¹⁷⁹

Lucas, Autry argues, “defies the stereotypes, discourses, and myths that clamor to define him.”¹⁸⁰

The “defiance” that Autry locates in the text is crucial to my reading of *Intruder* and to my understanding of Faulkner’s “chronicle.” *Intruder* opens with the language of a report. We could perhaps imagine this opening line turning easily into a mystery (propelled through the steady discovery of additional evidence), a coming-of-age tale (propelled through the steady development of the central protagonist), or a drama (propelled through the steady rhythm of the rising action). However, in bending back upon itself—in slipping into this particular flashback about Chick’s first encounter with the accused, in slipping into stream-of-consciousness—the conflict of the book becomes something *other* than the mere marshalling of evidence or plot points. Lucas *will* walk away unscathed (at least physically) at the end of the novel, and yet, this is not because a public trial, with a jury of his peers, vindicated him, nor because evidence was brought before the community that led them to acknowledge his innocence.

In fact, early in the novel, Chick, having met with Lucas and determined, out of his shamed sense of indebtedness to the man, to help him, expresses his plan to the old spinster Miss Habersham to go “Look at him [the body of the murder victim,

¹⁷⁹ Autry 34.

¹⁸⁰ Autry 34.

Vinson Gowrie] ... Go out there and dig him up and bring him to town where somebody that knows bullet holes can look at the bullet hole in him.”¹⁸¹ Chick, in other words, imagines bringing the *correct* knowledge—the correct sensory information—to the “correct” —i.e., traditional—town authorities. Yet Miss Habersham, though she acquiesces immediately to the plan, seems to consider the problem in an entirely different light. Faulkner describes the woman’s response this way:

‘Yes,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Of course. Naturally he wouldn’t tell your uncle. He’s a Negro and your uncle’s a man:’ ... Lucas knew it would take a child—or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence. Men like your uncle and Mr Hampton [the sheriff] have had to be men too long, busy too long.¹⁸²

But if *Intruder* does not operate according to the steady accumulation of obvious evidence, how does it operate? And how does this relate to Chick’s—and perhaps Faulkner’s—understanding of the “chronicle”?

(iii)

I have tried to suggest, in the section above, that *Intruder in the Dust* is structured around a kind of pervasive instability. We are submerged into Faulkner’s setting, into his plot, its elements too apparently obvious to be in need of any background explanation. Yet the narrator, Chick, too, is submerged in the opening pages of the novel, and in his frigid, faltering ascent, he finds he cannot quite see the

¹⁸¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 88.

¹⁸² Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 88. More on this passage, and Miss Habersham’s selection of terms, below.

world in the same way again. Modes of knowledge—modes of knowing—are neither stable nor certain in the universe of *Intruder in the Dust*; a different perspective can alter even what seemed the most inalterable of truths, of reality.

All this, I think, relates to Faulkner's notion of the "chronicle," a word he uses several times in the scenes referred to above. In fact, the word enters the novel at almost the same moment Lucas does. Chick has just arisen from the icy water to see the man whose voice saved his life not by any "effort whatsoever to help him up out of the creek" but by "order[ing] Aleck Sander to desist with the pole" so that Chick could pull himself up.¹⁸³ For a moment, Chick does not know who this man is. Then "Edmonds' boy" calls the man "something Mister Lucas" and then

[Chick] knew who the man was, remembering the story which was a piece, *a fragment of the county's chronicle*, which few if any knew better than his uncle, how the man was son of one of old Carothers McCaslin's, Edmonds' great grandfather's, slaves who had been not just old Carothers' slave but his son too: standing and shaking steadily now for what seemed to him another whole minute while the man stood looking at him with nothing whatever in his face.¹⁸⁴

There are several things to note here about this deployment of "chronicle." First: it is said to belong to the county, in a way that makes it the possession of the "whole town" and "whole county" that has already "known" since before the book's beginning that "Lucas had killed a white man."¹⁸⁵ That this *whole* is a *racialized* whole (and thus, not

¹⁸³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 7, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁵ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 3.

a real whole), that it is, in other words, a unity forged on the basis of White supremacy, is suggested by the reference to the “county,” which, in the time and place in which the novel is set, was run almost entirely by White men. Chronicle is also a thing that “few if any knew better than his uncle,” the county lawyer, and this connection, too, strengthens the sense that “chronicle” is possessed and controlled by the (White, patriarchal) legal authority. Finally, and as the last sentences quoted above suggest, the “chronicle” of the county is a historical one, for if there are at least seventy years between *Intruder* and the Fifteenth Amendment, Chick’s first recognition of Lucas, when he finally looks up at him, is that this is a son of enslaved persons.

And yet, if this reference to the “county’s chronicle” is in some ways Chick’s attempt to assimilate a new and uncomfortable fact—that a Black man’s authority has just saved his life—into an older order that he trusts, this passage is not without complications. Chick’s assimilation of this uncomfortable truth, that is to say, is not entirely successful. For one thing, it is to the “fragment” of a (possibly fragmented?) “county’s chronicle” to which Chick must refer, just as this “fragment” contains not only the information that Lucas was the *son* of enslaved persons but the grandson of a slaveowner—a slaveowner who is also Carothers’ great-grandfather. *These* elements of the “chronicle”—particularly as it is referred to in the boy’s thoughts as he stands at Lucas’s hearth, dripping wet from the creek—suggest that the truth the “whole town” and “whole county” might know *may not be the complete one*, may have secrets, layers.

But if there seems some awareness, on the crust of Chick's consciousness, that this chronicle is not the whole story, the ensuing narration shows that the White twelve-year-old continues to see his surroundings and those who surround him according to this story, according to the prevailing narrative structure of Southern society. Chick's encounter with Lucas, told in flashback in the book's first chapter, keeps testing his trust in what is for him a previously untested, utterly trusted version of reality. This is clearly seen in the passages in which Chick has been made to come back, with his two companions, to the house of Lucas and Molly to warm up and get something to eat. Having been commanded by Lucas to take off his wet things, Chick wraps himself up in a quilt by the fire.¹⁸⁶ He is, he thinks to himself, "enclosed completely now in that unmistakable odor of Negroes."¹⁸⁷ Chick is, for just a moment longer, "cocooned" in his White supremacist universe. But an em dash follows the "odor of Negroes," a sensory experience that Chick, for the first time, calls into question. The passage reads:

'Strip off,' [Lucas] said. So [Chick] stripped off the wet unionsuit to and then he was in the chair in front of the new bright and swirling fire, enveloped in the quilt like a cocoon, enclosed completely now in that unmistakable odor of Negroes—that smell which if it were not for something that was going to happen to him within a space of time measurable now in minutes he would have gone to his grave never once pondering speculating if perhaps that smell were really not the odor of a race nor even actually of poverty but perhaps of a

¹⁸⁶ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11.

¹⁸⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11.

condition: an idea: a belief: an acceptance, a passive acceptance by them themselves of the idea that being Negroes they were not supposed to have facilities to wash properly or often or even to wash bathe often even without the facilities to do it with; that in fact it was a little to be preferred that they did not.¹⁸⁸

Chick's experience in Lucas's and Molly's house—in being the object of their kindness—does not immediately explode prior conception or learned prejudice. As Chick thinks just after these lines, “the smell meant nothing now or yet; it was still an hour yet before the thing would happen and it would be four years more before he would realise the extent of its ramifications and what it had done to him and he would be a man grown before he would realise, admit that he had accepted it.”¹⁸⁹ Moreover, even here, in his narration of the not-yet-begun questioning of a link between an “odor” and a “race,” Chick places the burden of the “idea” on Black people themselves, relates it to a “passive acceptance of them themselves of the idea that being Negroes” meant they were supposed to have less.¹⁹⁰ There is no thought of White culpability, no explicit imagination of structural, organized racism.

But if this is not an unvarnished awakening to prejudice, what is significant about this scene, especially inasmuch as the realization is narrated *before it happens*, is Chick's expressed recognition that sensory experience—the elements of a world—do not simply undergird, provide the context for an “idea,” “belief” or “acceptance” —or, one might say, a story. Rather, an idea, belief, acceptance or *story* may *shape the way*

¹⁸⁸ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 11-2.

one experiences the world. For Chick, what he terms the “odor of Negroes” was “natural background”; “he just smelled it and then dismissed it because he was used to it, he had smelled it off and on for all his life and would continue to ... He had smelled it forever, he would smell it always; it was a part of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner.”¹⁹¹ These sentences narrate, in flashback, a time just before he had begun to question the economy into which he was born, just before the power structure he believed to be natural seems to him, perhaps for the first time, tinged with doubt.¹⁹² The “thing that would happen”—Lucas’s refusal of Chick’s coins—and four years later, Lucas’ unjust imprisonment for a murder he did not commit—force Chick to rethink, to begin to question, and this questioning unravels not just his present but also his past and *the* past. What seemed inescapably “natural,” he realizes, was not “natural” at all.

All this brings me to Faulkner’s second employment of the word “chronicle” in *Intruder*. Before the coins, after he has been warmed by the fire and replaced his newly-dry garments, Chick sits down to eat “in his turn of what obviously was to be Lucas’ dinner—collard greens, a slide of sidemeat, fried in flour, big flat pale heavy half-cooked biscuits, a glass of buttermilk:” (the reader can see, taste, this food; we are at this table and the sustenance of which Chick partakes seems to have an indisputable reality). The sentence continues; Chick thinks,

¹⁹¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 12.

¹⁹² Autry 26. In analyzing this scene, Autry writes that, “Chick attempts to set the stage for a recreation of the scene by the creek, a reparative performance, this time with Lucas in the subservient role lately and unnaturally occupied by the boy himself.”

buttermilk: n***** food too, accepted and then dismissed also because it was exactly what he had expected, it was what Negroes ate, obviously because it was what they liked, what they chose; not (at twelve: he would be a man grown before he experienced his first amazed dubiety at this) that *out of their long chronicle* this was all they had had a chance to learn to like except the ones who ate out of white folks' kitchens but that they had elected this out of all eating because this was their palates and their metabolism; afterward, ten minutes later and then for the next four years, he would be trying to tell himself that it was the food that had thrown him off. But he would know better; his initial error, misjudgment had been there all the time[.]¹⁹³

Chick identifies this food as the food of Black people, and in this designation, the White youth employs, with a kind of casual violence no less terrible for its casualness, a slur that is intended to mark this group as inferior. That this food is n***** food is intended to be as obvious as that it is food: something that has heft and weight in the world, the backdrop of any story he might enact into “man’s enduring chronicle.” And yet this reality is only wholly indisputable inasmuch as one accepts an Arendtian conception of the chronicle as mere *record*, as *backdrop and context*, as the space of nature and the world that undergirds the “space of appearance” into which individuals act. But the “long chronicle” that Chick considers here—the chronicle he both knows already and knows not yet—is a “chronicle” that is a set of *ideas* and

¹⁹³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 14.

practices that impact one's sense of what is: of what food is.¹⁹⁴ The "chronicle" no longer exists unperturbed to be enacted into. Instead, one's sense of *what* the "true" chronicle is might depend upon one's perception, one's place and time, and this is emphasized by the novel in its narration of this scene as flashback. Chick reflects on the experience of experiencing seemingly simple reality, now wondering, with an "amazed dubiety," if that reality is so simple, if it is even reality at all. Moreover, the scene not only narrates the past from the perspective of the present—when Chick is sixteen—but from the perspective of the far distant future, suggesting that, for Faulkner, "chronicle" is *not* some "enduring" or "ever-recurrent" background but rather a narrative that can be glimpsed not only from multiple perspectives but from myriad points in time, thus impelling multiple reconsiderations of old "truths."

Thus, the chronicle, in *Intruder in the Dust*, may be enduring but not because it is infallible, indisputable. The gaps—and the *violence*—of the chronicle is suggested in another passage, one already quoted in part above. In the scene in which Miss Habersham speaks to Chick about Lucas's willingness to confide his story to others, her words are interrupted by Chick's own thoughts. The passages states:

'Yes,' Miss Habersham said. 'Of course. Naturally he wouldn't tell your uncle. He's a Negro and your uncle's a man:' and now Miss Habersham in her turn repeating and paraphrasing and he thought how it was not really a paucity a meagreness of vocabulary, it was in the first place because the deliberate violent blotting out obliteration of a human life was itself so simple and so

¹⁹⁴ I am not seeking to emphasize the questioning of *reality* here so much as *what that reality is*, not so much whether this food exists (or existed) in the world Faulkner makes but how that food is named and narrated.

final that the verbiage which surround it enclosed it *insulated it intact into the chronicle of man* had of necessity to be simple and uncomplex too, repetitive, almost monotonous even; and in the second place, vaster than that, adumbrating that, because what Miss Habersham paraphrased was simple truth, not even fact and so there was not needed a great deal of diversification and originality to express it because truth was universal, it had to be universal to be truth and so there didn't need to be a great deal of it just to keep running something no bigger than one earth and so anybody could know truth; all they had to do was just to pause, just to stop, just to wait[.]”¹⁹⁵

What is happening here? How is the “chronicle” that Chick sees in these lines operating? First, Miss Habersham—old, rich, White—marks a distinction between a “Negro” (which is what Lucas is said to be) and a “man” (which is what Gavin Stevens is said to be). Chick calls this a “repetition,” a “paraphrase,” as if noting the way in which Miss Habersham’s words mimic prevailing narrative. Yet Chick associates this parroting not with “paucity” or “meagreness”—not with the widow’s *stupidity*, per se, but with the “violence” of prevailing narrative itself, which exacts its “violent blotting out” exactly through the “simpleness” of its “verbiage,” thus using its seeming “uncomplex[ity]” and “monotonous[ness]” to obliterate the possibility of seeing things otherwise. Or, this, in any case, seems to be Chick’s *first* set of reflections on Miss Habersham’s “repetitiveness,” for he goes on to say that “in the second place ... what Miss Habersham paraphrased was simple truth, not even fact.” What does he mean by this? On the one hand, he seems to say that Miss Habersham is

¹⁹⁵ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 88, emphasis added.

precisely right: Lucas is a “Negro”; his uncle is a “man.” On the other hand, *if* this is “universal truth,” which Chick says, neither needs “a great deal of diversification” or “a great deal of it just to keep running something”—then *why* does his own thought “keep running,” refuse “just to pause” or “just to stop” or “just to wait” — a refusal *to* stop running that Faulkner seems to model with his very repetitiveness? Monotony obliterates, suggesting *one* truth, and yet this truth is “not even fact,” such that the very denial of “diversification” and “originality” also seems to point to the inevitable existence of this “diversification” and “originality.”

Once again, then, the “chronicle of man,” which appears “simple” and incontestable is based on *one* mode of knowledge—a mode here that is associated with Gavin’s manhood—and yet *other modes of knowing and witness* are said to exist, too. And this, then, is perhaps one way to describe Faulkner’s “chronicle”: the positing of a unanimous tradition that, in its apparent unoriginality, its apparent repetition, its apparent reiteration and imitation simply of *what is*, undoes itself, keeps running.¹⁹⁶

(iv)

In concluding this chapter, I want to examine the final place in the novel in which the word “chronicle” appears. My exploration takes us to familiar ground; the final use of “chronicle” in *Intruder* is also the line that Arendt borrows for her “Concluding Remarks.” As I discussed in the previous chapter, in *Origins*, Arendt employs the line as a way of expressing what she takes to be a *human* aspiration: the desire of each and every individual person for one’s “own anonymous chance to

¹⁹⁶ These dual possibilities of repetition and mimicry (or *mimesis*) will be analyzed in greater depth in the final chapter.

perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle ... in gratitude for [one's] time in it."¹⁹⁷ Though she cites Faulkner, Arendt gives no other context for the line—not the character who speaks it, nor his story, nor even, indeed, the “passionate and brave and austere” act he performed “not just in but into man's enduring chronicle.”¹⁹⁸

Yet: when one reads the larger passage—a monster of a thing, really, more than three pages of a single sentence, nothing like a “condensed” phrase, nothing like an “aphorism”—one cannot but be struck by how much the meaning of the tiny fragment Arendt borrows changes.¹⁹⁹ The words come from a much larger internal monologue that runs through Chick's head soon after Lucas has been freed but not vindicated. A more expanded (but still incomplete) version of the passage that Arendt quotes from reads thus:

‘Yes,’ [Chick's] mother said. ‘Just left go:’ which was like telling a man dangling with one hand over a cliff to just hold on: who wanted nothing right now but a chance to let go and relinquish into the nothing of sleep what little of nothing he still had ... only he had forgotten how: or maybe that was it and he didn't dare relinquish into nothing what little he had left: which was nothing: no grief to be remembered nor pity nor even awareness of shame, no vindication of the deathless aspiration of man by man through the catharsis of pity and shame ... who had no more expected Lucas to be swept out of his cell shoulder high on a tide of expiation and set for his moment of

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

¹⁹⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 631; Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189.

¹⁹⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307.

vindication and triumph on the base say of the Confederate monument (or maybe better on the balcony of the post-office building beneath the pole where the national flag flew) than he had expected such for himself and Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham: who (himself) not only had not wanted that but could not have accepted it since it would have abrogated and made void the whole sum of what part he had done which had to be anonymous else it was valueless: who had wanted of course to leave his mark too on his time in man but only that, no more than that, some mark on his part in earth but humbly, waiting wanting humbly even, not really hoping even, nothing (which of course was everything) except that his own one anonymous chance too to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle worthy of a place in it (who knew? perhaps even adding even one anonymous jot to the austerity of the chronicle's brave passion) in gratitude for the gift of his time in it[.]²⁰⁰

Arendt excerpts this lengthy, lengthy reflection and turns it into a “condensed aphorism.” Her excerption renders the phrase into the expression of a triumph—or, at least, the “chance” of one. Read in context, however—read not as a declarative statement but as a snippet of a consciousness, a story—the line is not at all triumphant. Markell describes this passage by writing that “Faulkner gives us a long segment of indirect internal monologue in which Chick seems to be trying to come to terms with what he regards as a failure, his failure.”²⁰¹ As Markell suggests, despite the fact that

²⁰⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189.

²⁰¹ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 86.

Lucas has just been released from jail, Chick expresses a kind of hopelessness (he “wanted nothing right now but a chance to let go and relinquish into the nothing of sleep what little of nothing he still had ... only he had forgotten how: or maybe that was it and he didn’t dare relinquish into nothing what little he had left: which was nothing”).²⁰²

Moreover, reading the quotation in *Intruder* reveals that not only has Arendt left out the line’s beginning and its setting, but that her reproduction in *Origins* substitutes an ellipsis for a key part of its middle: the parenthetical in which Chick asks, “(who knew? perhaps even adding even one anonymous jot to the austerity of the chronicle’s brave passion).” In *Intruder*, the effect of Chick’s question, along with his posited answer, is to put emphasis upon the *uncertainty* of one’s capacity to influence the “chronicle” and the “jot” that is all one is likely, in any case, to “insert.” And yet even this state of mind was more hopeful than his present one, in which he is reflecting upon what he “had wanted,” not what he thinks it is still possible to have. That is, the line that Arendt borrows describes not a “chance” that Chick has made the most of or even a “chance” that remains open for him. Instead, the teenager’s flow of thoughts expresses his desire for an opportunity he now seems to realize was never really open, never really possible.

My claim here is not that Arendt’s employment of the words is “wrong,” *per se*. I am not insisting that in excerpting and alluding, she posits an *incorrect replication* of Faulkner’s text, for it is not clear to me that one can speak of an *incorrect* allusion or replication, so much as an incomplete one. What I wish to claim,

²⁰² Faulkner, *Intruder*, 188; Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 86-88.

then, is that in excerpting the sentence, Arendt essentially cuts from the concluding section of *Origins* Chick's sense of failure as well as the boy narrator's fraught relationship to the "chronicle" itself. After all: why does Chick feel such a pervasive sense of hopelessness here? Lucas has been let out of the jail; he, Chick, along with several others, have proven—at least to themselves—the man's innocence of the murder of which he was accused.

There are several answers to this question. First, I think, Chick's sense of hopelessness stems from the *private* nature of Lucas's acquittal. Uncle Gavin, the county lawyer, and Mr. Hampton, the county sheriff, have professed themselves to believe Chick's account of the matter; the crowd of White people who had assembled outside the jailhouse, presumably to lynch the Black man who was accused of killing a White man, has dispersed. Lucas has gone home, and if Chick is unhappy here, it is not on account of his fears for Lucas's future safety; this, he does not seem to doubt, even if the reader might.

Why does Chick feel this failure, then? It seems linked to that fact that there has been no trial for Lucas, and perhaps even more importantly, no public acknowledgement of the wrong he has suffered, no public acknowledgment—or even real attempt to find—the truth of the matter. Just before this monologue begins, Chick expresses his profound frustration with the dispersed White mob: "They ran," he cries to his mother. "They saved their consciences a good ten cents by not having to buy him a package of tobacco to show they had forgiven him."²⁰³ It is then that she tells him to "Just let go," and then that he thinks that letting go is perhaps all that is left to

²⁰³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 188.

him, “because” (to quote from a part of the monologue that has not yet been quoted here):

there was nothing anybody could do but hope Crawford Gowrie [Vinson’s brother and the actual murderer] would decide to come in and hunt up the sheriff and say All right I did it because all they had was Lucas who said that Vinson Gowrie wasn’t shot with a forty-one Colt or anyway his, Lucas’ forty-one Colt and Buddy McCallum to say or not say Yes I swapped Craw Gowrie a German pistol twenty-five years ago; not even Vinson Gowrie for somebody from the Memphis police to come and look at and say what bullet killed him because the sheriff had already let old Gowrie [Vinson’s father] take him [his son’s body] back home and wash the quicksand off and bury him again tomorrow: where this time Hampton and his uncle could go out there tomorrow night and dig him up[.]²⁰⁴

Lucas is no longer in jail. And yet, Chick seems to realize here, there has been no just, public accounting of the man’s innocence—the White mob could not even spare the ten-cent-price of a box of cigarettes, let alone actual reparation of any kind—and there *will* be no justice done. There is no way to prove, in the community, for the community, the *truth* of what occurred, unless the real murderer, the victim’s own brother, was to admit it, unless (possibly) another White man, Buddy McCallum, came forward to testify against Crawford. “[A]ll they had,” Chick reflects, “was Lucas who said that Vinson Gowrie wasn’t shot with a forty-one Colt or anyway his, Lucas’ forty-one,” and the

²⁰⁴ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 188.

testimony of a Black man is unlikely, in the world in which Chick is increasingly aware he occupies, to be good enough.

The lack of publicity in Lucas's acquittal does not bother Chick, he insists, because he had wished for public celebration of his own deeds. Chick had, as his run of thoughts emphasizes, "not only ... not wanted that but could not have accepted it since it would have abrogated and made void the whole sum of what part he had done which had to be anonymous else it was valueless."²⁰⁵ Chick had not even necessarily wanted Lucas to be heroized, had in no way "expected Lucas to be swept out of his cell shoulder high on a tide of expiation and set for his moment of vindication and triumph on the base say of the Confederate monument (or maybe better on the balcony of the post-office building beneath the pole where the national flag flew)."²⁰⁶ What then did Chick want? *Why* is it that he is so disappointed? It is, I think, because of how his own view of the "chronicle" has changed over the course of the book. The teenager did not necessarily wish for celebration, but he did wish to be recognized, to be part of the "county's chronicle." To him, this chronicle represents—or at least, represented—the honored traditions of his Mississippi community. It is a landscape that he associates with his uncle Gavin not only because, as he says, Gavin knew its best, but also, perhaps, because, as the county lawyer, Gavin possesses the place within this "county's chronicle" that, in the end of the book, Chick confesses to have once wanted.²⁰⁷

Why does Chick no longer want such a place? Why does he believe, it seems, that such a place *is no longer possible*? One aspect of the passage that might be worth

²⁰⁵ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189.

²⁰⁶ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189.

²⁰⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 7.

noting here is the shift from the “county’s chronicle” to “man’s enduring chronicle.” Such a transition might seem to indicate a move from *localized* modes of knowledge and knowing to more *universal* ones. And yet if this was true, then perhaps Chick *would* feel vindicated in this moment, for if he has not won the respect or recognition of the White mob, surely, one might think, he feels himself to have acted “in and into man’s enduring chronicle.”

But again, this is *not* how Chick feels, and in seeking to unpack how he does feel, what he *does* express, I want to quote at length again from his monologue, this time from the lines that come *after* the phrase Arendt borrows:

... in gratitude for the gift of his time in it, wanting only that and not even with hope really, willing to accept the fact that he had missed it because he wasn’t worthy, but certainly he hadn’t expected this ... austerity itself debased by what it had gained, courage and passion befouled by what they had to cope with:—a Face, the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own with whom it had been his joy and pride and hope to be found worthy to present one united unbreakable front to the dark abyss the night—a Face monstrous unravering omniverous and not even uninsatiate, not frustrated nor even thwarted, not biding or waiting and not even needing to be patient since yesterday and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One[.]²⁰⁸

Chick feels hopeless here because he sees, perhaps for the first time, how corrupt the prevailing narrative—a narrative rooted in hierarchy, in racism—is. (Though Faulkner may not have intended this, the reference to “Confederate monuments” only further

²⁰⁸ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189-90.

emphasizes this aspect of the passage, particularly when read in 2020.) Chick *cannot* perform “something passionate and brave and austere” for these very qualities have been “corrupted,” “debased” by “a Face,” a phrase previously employed to describe the White mob outside the courthouse.²⁰⁹ This earlier passage, which describes what Chick sees from the vantage point of his uncle’s car window as it drives by the courthouse, reports “not faces but a face, not a mass nor even a mosaic of them but a Face: not even ravening nor uninsatiate but just in motion, insensate, vacant of thought or even without passion.”²¹⁰ In the face of the Face, which can only acknowledge a world in which it is a Black man that shoots the White one—where even the exculpation of Lucas can only be allowed to happen through the dispersal of the Face, not the renunciation of it—there is no possibility for Chick to “perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle.”²¹¹ “Man’s enduring chronicle,” he seems to realize here, is ruled, at least in part, by that Face.

(v)

While I think we have begun to make sense of Chick’s sense of failure in the section above, I do not think we have yet come to a complete explanation, at least in the novel’s own terms, which, I want to claim, are *not* Arendt’s.

²⁰⁹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 178-80.

²¹⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 178-80.

²¹¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 178-80; Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 86-7. Markell makes a similar claim in his essay, writing that “And what had made [Chick’s] course of action a failure? Not that Chick wasn’t personally ‘worthy’ of his chance, but that, as he seems to realize, nothing much has changed; the crowd may have dispersed for the moment, but the racial order of Yoknapatawpha has hardly been transformed, even if Chick’s way of seeing it has, and even if the immediate threat to Lucas has receded” (86-7). Markell likewise calls attention to the novel’s earlier description of the “Face.”

Indeed, thus far, one could, I suppose, read all this according to an Arendtian lens. For there is a sense in which Chick's words, if pulled selectively, seem to fit all too well her conviction that action is *distinct* from world and from nature. Politics, on a traditional, "territorial" reading of Arendt, is not bodily. As she writes in *The Human Condition*, the modern tendency to "see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping" is simply errant, has led to "blurred" boundaries and obfuscations and entirely too indistinct "distinctions."²¹² And the Face could be seen here as a metaphor, an image, for a mode of familial politics, for a mode of community that organizes itself primarily according to the (distorted, wrongly understood) "facts" of bodies, according a certain way of seeing bodies. The political community of Yoknapatawpha, after all, naturally believes in the guilt of a Black man in a murder that it simply cannot accept was committed by the victim's own White brother.²¹³ In opposition to this, we have Chick, the White nephew of the White county lawyer, the narrator, the protagonist, who, in going out to the graveyard and in uncovering the body buried there, brings to light enough reality to let Lucas go. Chick *acts*, perhaps Arendt would say, and thus, his deed is properly political, even amidst a background that is anything but.²¹⁴

²¹² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 28.

²¹³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 196-7.

²¹⁴ Indeed, even Chick's assertion that, his act "had to be anonymous else it was valueless," that he wanted to leave his mark but *not* to receive celebrity, could seem perfectly in accordance with Arendt's view of goodness. See Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 86; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 74-8.

Or again: perhaps this isn't a *political act* on Arendtian lights at all but an act of goodness, which Arendt distinguishes from other kinds of acts in *The Human Condition*. Writing that "since [the rise of Christianity], we know of good works as one important variety of possible human action," she contends that "goodness obviously harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard. . . . it is manifest that the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness's sake."²¹⁵ Goodness, according to Arendt, is always anonymous, and so perhaps *this* is what Chick expresses here in stating that his act "had to be anonymous else it was valueless."²¹⁶

But neither of these accounts really seem attuned to what is at the core of Chick's monologue, his expression of thwarted desire. Moreover: neither of these accounts, I think, are capable of acknowledging the complications here: the distinctions that are not just distinctions, the oppositions that obscure the correspondences. "Why did it have to be anonymous?" asks Markell, when examining this passage from an Arendtian point of view. The theorist goes on, "Chick might have simply been heeding Jesus's admonition to 'do not your alms before men to be seen of them'"—and here, Markell provides a footnote to Arendt's citation of this same line—before writing "*but things are more complicated*, for [Chick] goes on to articulate anonymity not onto goodness or righteousness but onto the urge toward glory and immortality."²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 73-4.

²¹⁶ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189; Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 86-7.

²¹⁷ Markell, "Anonymous Glory," 86, emphasis added.

“Things are more complicated,” Markell writes. And they are: because Arendt’s distinctions, her tripartite differentiation of the human condition and all its accordant oppositions cannot really make sense in the world of this monologue, in the world of Chick’s consciousness. As Markell points out, “anonymity” and “glory”—two terms that Arendt seemingly attempts to keep steadfastly separate—are allied here.²¹⁸ So, too, are *individual action*—individual actor—and corporeal nature, man-made world. Chick despairs of the way in which the corruptions of his community prevent his action from *being* action, from *taking part in a public sphere*, even in an “anonymous,” less celebrity-like manner.²¹⁹ At the same time, his despair is tied to the fact that he desired—that he still, I think, desires—to act as a member “of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own with whom it had been is joy and pride and hope to be found worthy to present one united unbreakable front to the dark abyss the night.”²²⁰ In other words, Chick does not switch from a notion of the “county’s chronicle” to “man’s enduring chronicle,” because he shifts his faith from one to the other but because he is increasingly aware of both their sameness and their distinction: aware, that is, of the way subjectivity underwrites (purported) objectivity, but that subjectivity, if selective, if prejudiced, if built on White supremacy, can get things vastly, even violently, wrong.

This is not to say that Chick does not, to at least some degree, disavow, the Face, the mob. He does disavow it, to some extent, just as he disavows—or at least tries, struggles—to disavow its racism, its inherently prejudicial way of being and

²¹⁸ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 86.

²¹⁹ Markell, “Anonymous Glory,” 86.

²²⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 190.

knowing. But I do not think he disavows the notion of a political body that is, at least in some sense, a body, a *family*. He does not embrace a conception akin to Arendt's notion of "natality," which she associates with a "second birth" in which the individual splits off from the mother's body, splits off from material and contingency, and acts *into* the universe. Unlike Arendt, in wishing to combine individual action with glory among "his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own," Chick thinks natality somewhat differently. Arendt's notion of the subject is one who *acts*, such that identity is tied to deed and the story that is told of it, such that the question of *who* somebody is can easily be answered by one's biographer, who acts as witness to what one does—such that we know Socrates's story perfectly, intimately, simply because we know Plato's story. This is not Faulkner's subject and it is not Faulkner's story, for in the world of *Intruder*, neither the subject or the story is as straightforward or singular as Arendt suggests them to be.

Another passage in *Intruder in the Dust* is illustrative of this. It comes at the beginning of the tenth and final chapter, at the end of the long day upon which Lucas is let go. Chick, back at home, eats, and as he does, he remembers

How his uncle (sitting across the table drinking coffee) had said that man didn't necessarily eat his way through the world but by the act of eating and maybe only that did he actually enter the world, get himself into the world: not through it but into it, burrowing into the world's teeming solidarity like a moth into wool by the physical act of chewing and swallowing the substance of its warp and woof and so making, translating a part of himself and his memory, the whole history of man or maybe even relinquishing by mastication,

abandoning, eating it into to be annealed, the proud vainglorious minuscule which he called his memory and his self and his I-Am into that vast teeming anonymous solidarity of the world[.]

On the one hand, this passage seems to make Chick into a part of the “omniverous” Face that seems continually associated with matters of eating and thus with the “monstrous” Face associated with the anonymity of the masses. At the same time, even as Chick seems to renounce the “self” and the “I-Am,” thus renouncing the political act for the digestive process, the articulation of his eating, the run of his thoughts here, asserts the very fact of himself. After all, the passage is not just a self-renunciation but also slides into a reflection of the fact that he is eating too fast, as he has been “hearing” from his mother “for sixteen years.” In other words: he is at one and the same moment both part of the “warp and woof” of the world and also, his individual surly teenage self.

What I am trying to suggest is that Faulkner’s notion of the “self”—and the “story,” the “chronicle”—are not as separate from matters of body and nature and other as Arendt’s notion of the acting self purports to be. Significantly, here, the passage above contains both Chick’s own run of thoughts and those of his uncle, whose thoughts he takes and runs with, just as he does in the last part of the “man’s enduring chronicle” monologue I will quote in this essay—the part that reveals it to be, perhaps, not a monologue at all:

—a Face monstrous unravering omniverous and not even unisatiate, not frustrated nor even thwarted, not biding not waiting and not even need to be patient since yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One (his uncle

for this too, anticipating this too two or three or four years ago as his uncle had everything else which as he himself became more and more a man he had found to be true: ‘It’s all *now* you see. Yesterday wont be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when its still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up at the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it’s all in the balance, if hasn’t happened yet, it hasn’t even begun yet[.]’²²¹

Chick slips into his uncle’s voice; his monologue shifts into a kind of dialogue, the teenager’s consciousness imitating the lawyer’s. He has just—seemingly—condemned the mindset of the “Face of his native kind his native land” who has hopelessly “debated” and “befouled” the “enduring chronicle” into which he might act. Does he quote his uncle’s words here as a way of *demonstrating* this corrupted mode of history, this debased chronicle? It is too hard to know where the uncle’s perspective ends and the boy’s begins, near impossible, I think, to disassociate the failure Chick feels from the failure that Gavin invokes. And what is the failure that Gavin (and Gavin-through-Chick) invokes? It is the failure “of every Southern boy fourteen years old” who wishes—like Chick wishes—to add “even one brave anonymous jot to the austerity of the chronicle’s brave passion.” But in the case of the

²²¹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 190.

boy that Gavin invokes, this is a desire to rewrite the “chronicle” so as to redo the Civil War, stop the South from losing. And so there is an odd blending of desires here: the desire of the boy to have won public vindication for Lucas is tangled up with the wish for the South to win the war it waged for “state’s rights,” purportedly, for the right of states to sanction the ownership of human bodies, really. And if Chick, like his audience, might be able to disarticulate these desires, this disarticulation would be not so much a matter of pulling apart act from world and nature than of pulling apart one way of making sense of the world (and the actions within it) from another way of making sense (or failing to make sense) of the world. And so: the Chick who voices the line Arendt quotes is not a paradigm for a hero as much as he is representative of the complications that inhere in any struggle to act heroically—or, to employ a word that perhaps breaks from both Faulkner’s and Arendt’s accounts of action—more truly *justly*.

In conclusion, then: in *Intruder in the Dust*, the word “chronicle” is used to designate not an accounting of facts, a list of realities, but a story that is linked to specific time and traditions, a story rooted in specific ways of seeing and knowing, ways that are often snugly tied up in prestige and privilege and prejudice. The “chronicle” may give an account of actions, but it also *influences* action, influences the way actors see themselves. Faulkner’s “chronicle” is history, but not as chronological—not as inevitable, straightforward plot, but as something that has both already happened and is still happening. The chronicle is thus that which seeks to represent reality and that which impedes reality in this very representation. As David Minter writes,

The great complexity of [Faulkner's] novels ... derives in part from this dual presence of history—its force as actual event, as actions and reactions within a long continuum of actions and reaction 'all mixed up with' one another (*Absalom, Absalom!* 100-101); and its force as recorded events, as letters and ledgers, or as remembered events or remembered 'shades[s] who in life had acted and reacted' (224-5). In both of these modes, moreover, as event and as story or myth, history shapes four interrelated stories—stories of humans separately and collectively, stories of regions, stories of families, and stories of single solitary selves.²²²

While Minter—as suggested by the citations—is speaking of two particular Faulknerian novels here (namely, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*), the “presence of history” that he finds in these works can also be located in *Intruder in the Dust*, for this “presence of history” is, I think, is analogous to the “presence” of what I have termed the “chronicle.” Arendt, in quoting Faulkner, suggests that one may “perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle ... in gratitude of [one's] time in it.”²²³ For Faulkner, however, to act into the chronicle is already to have been acted upon by it. Chick's monologue (which is not really *only* a monologue) expresses both a desire to have entered in the chronicle and a hopelessness about the very possibility. In expressing this wish, Chick (and perhaps Faulkner?) speaks both within and outside the chronicle, struggles to extricate himself even as he is entrenched within it, still reliant on its voice(s),

²²² Minter 57.

²²³ Arendt, *Origins*, 631; Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189.

entranced by its image(s). For Faulkner's stories are not, perhaps, as full of allusions as they are of allusive *elusions*.

CHAPTER III
THE RACISM OF ARENDT AND FAULKNER

In the preceding chapters, I have contrasted Arendt's view of the story with that of Faulkner. While Arendt's notion of story fails to consider it as layered and reliant on *perspective*—reliant not just on how we act into the world, but on how we understand the world into which we act—all of these elements play an enormous role in the way that Faulkner seems to “think” the chronicle. This is true both in the world of his characters and in the very structures of his novels themselves. While Arendt insists (or, at least, seems to insist, to some degree insists) on distinctions and definitions, Faulkner's fictions are filled with conflicting versions, contradicting tales. As David Minter writes in *Faulkner's Questioning Narratives*, the “task” of Faulkner's reader is “often at least double: we must attend to the dialogues we hear, yet we must remain mindful of the tensions within as well as between the voices of which they are constituted.”²²⁴

Minter's work speaks to the narrative distinction between Arendt and Faulkner and is also, in a slightly different way, demonstrative of it. That is, this essential and apparent *opposition* between Arendt and Faulkner on the matter of the story is illustrated (if unintentionally) by Minter's analysis of Arendt's reference to Faulkner's novels in *On Revolution*. Though Minter's monograph focuses on Faulkner, not Arendt, it is one of the only books that, to my knowledge, discusses Arendt in conversation with the fiction writer at any great length. Minter's book even uses

²²⁴ Minter 22.

Arendt's citation of Faulkner in *On Revolution* as an epigraph; the opening quotation that the writer references begins with Arendt's assertion that "if it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptional notions within which it can further exercise" and ends with her own reference to Faulkner's "literary procedure" as being "highly political," inasmuch as it demonstrates "How such guideposts for future reference and remembrance arise out of this incessant talk."²²⁵

Minter returns to this epigraph in the first chapter of his book, where he writes that

If, as Hannah Arendt suggests, thought begins with remembrance, as it often does in Faulkner's fiction, and if all remembrances remain insecure until they find expression in language and then are 'talked about over and over again,' and if, in addition, as Arendt also suggests, such ongoing incessant talk is constitutive of culture and also, at least implicitly, 'highly political' ... it redefines or recasts the role of the solitary writer who sits at a desk writing, in one way, and the role of the solitary reader who sits reading, with a mediating text in hand, in another way. And it invites us to see these acts as interactive parts of a collaborative process that has no discernible beginning and no clear ending, and that is always already, at one and the same time, political and cultural, communal and individual.²²⁶

Minter suggests that Arendt's reference to Faulkner enables us to see the latter's work as participating in a kind of eternal collaboration in which there is no

²²⁵ Minter; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212, 307.

²²⁶ Minter 4.

easily definable start, no easily distinguishable finale. This is, I think, not exactly what Arendt means in *On Revolution*; for her, as I have previously suggested, the incessantness of talk *preserves* meaning for politics, rather than turning politics into a kind of unending conversation. In this vein, it is worth noting what Minter *deletes* from his quotation of Arendt's allusion; as quoted in full in the first chapter of this thesis, the line reads, "How such guideposts for future reference and remembrance arise out of this incessant talk, not, to be sure, in the form of concepts *but as single brief sentences and condensed aphorisms*, may best be seen in the novels of William Faulkner."²²⁷ Perhaps Minter deleted this to prevent the reproduction of a misreading—also as previously noted, "single brief sentences" and "condensed aphorisms" are not really what Faulkner is known for—but if this was Minter's reasoning, the result is the creation of a new kind of misreading.

Minter goes on to argue that "In *Absalom, Absalom!*—as in the statements of Arendt quoted earlier—remembering and talking play a powerful, even an indispensable social role that is, in a broad sense always already political."²²⁸ Here, too, Minter employs Arendt's words to support a conflation of the "social" and the "always already political" that might have given the writer of *The Human Condition* something of a conniption. (After all, as Hanna Pitkin puts it, "Arendt writes about the social as if an evil monster from outer space, entirely external to and separate from us,

²²⁷ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 307, emphasis added.

²²⁸ Minter 76.

had fallen upon us intent on debilitating, absorbing, and ultimately destroying us, gobbling up our distinct individuality.”²²⁹)

Of course, Minter’s book does not purport to discuss political theory, and he even states at one point that “Arendt’s subject ... should concern us, but it need not detain us here.”²³⁰ In any case, my own objective isn’t to criticize a writer for using the words of Arendt without fully attending to or representing the word’s “original” context; the political theorist herself, as has been discussed, repeatedly does precisely this. Instead, what I think this chain of quotations demonstrates is that one *cannot* read Arendt-through-Faulkner (or Faulkner-through-Arendt) without *risking* a slip into misreading and even mistake, in-equivalencies and contradictions in terms. Thus, to study Arendt’s allusions to Faulkner is to be confronted not just with a question of two near-contemporary authors who overlap in their words and *perhaps* their ideas, but a question of *how we read*, and, moreover, how we relate to the writers, readers, and *texts* that have come before us.

It is this question—how we read, how we relate—that comes now to the fore, particularly in light of the ways (soon to be made more apparent) that *both* Faulkner’s and Arendt’s reading practices, despite their striking differences, converge in a way that buttresses and even re-inscribes racist ways of knowing and being—and also, of narrating.

(i)

²²⁹ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 4.

²³⁰ Minter 74.

What confronts us is, in a way, a question of literary theory. And while neither Faulkner nor Arendt *was* a literary theorist proper (at least according to the way “literary theory” is ordinarily thought), both *were* certainly invested and interested in thinking about the operations of the story. Indeed, the opposition I have suggested between Arendt’s and Faulkner’s modes of thinking the story parallels—if imperfectly—a debate in late twentieth century literary theory. To be clear, my claim here is not that this debate *influenced* (to employ a term that will become more fraught momentarily) either figure. Faulkner, who died in 1962, and Arendt, who died in 1975, both largely missed the “heyday” of theory that emerged in the 1970s and 80s, and thus, were gone before the full emergence of the intellectual argument that Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein describe in their introduction to a 1991 book on the subject called *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*.²³¹ Still, the correspondence helpfully illustrates the *readerly* question that I want to stress here: a question of how Arendt and Faulkner understand *story*—and moreover, how one ought to.

According to Clayton and Rothstein, “Over the last two decades, the concepts of influence and intertextuality have been sites of generational conflict” regarding the way one understands the transmission of a story, the relation between one writer and another, or depending on one’s point of view, one text and another.²³² “Strictly,” the co-editors state, “influence should refer to relations built on dyads of transmission from one unity (author, work, tradition) to another” while a concept of intertextuality,

²³¹ Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influences and Intertextuality,” in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, edited by Clayton and Rothstein (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3-36.

²³² Clayton and Rothstein 3.

at its most radical, “might be used to oust and replace the kinds of issues that influence addresses, and in particular its central concern with the author and more or less conscious authorial intentions and skills.”²³³ Influence dominated literary study since at least the mid-eighteenth century (and seems, as Clayton and Rothstein write, like “an ancient given”), while intertextuality is a concept that is associated most strongly with the latter part of the twentieth century (and particularly with the psychoanalytic work of Julia Kristeva).²³⁴ While Clayton and Rothstein suggest that both “influence” and “intertextuality” have “too many operative definitions for us to fix on one for each,” they suggest “the generalization that influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts.”²³⁵

How do these terms map on to the literary (or not-so-literary) ways of Arendt and Faulkner? The former’s mode of thinking the story, as developed in *Origins*, *The Human Condition*, and *On Revolution*, conducts itself according to a notion of “influence.” After all, “influence studies,” which Clayton and Rothstein argue arose with “mid-eighteenth-century interest in originality and genius,” studies the way in which one author might exert an impact on another author’s *story*. To quote from *Influence and Intertextuality* once more:

To see historical change working through influence has been to envision tradition not as smooth but as disjunctive, progress by the fiat of charismatic figures and works ... [a] high value ... comes to be placed on originality as a

²³³ Clayton and Rothstein 3.

²³⁴ Clayton and Rothstein 4.

²³⁵ Clayton and Rothstein 4.

means of altering the status quo and, correspondingly, the lower value that is assigned to the unoriginal, the influenced.²³⁶

Thus, while influence studies has focused upon two *written* works, on two *authors*, rather than an enacted story of a hero and the recorded story of a biographer, we can easily, I think, see the parallels between this way of thinking relationships between *heroism* (and heroic/innovative authorship) and its devalued imitation, on the one hand, and Arendt's mode of considering action and the word that records it, on the other.

Likewise, Faulkner's conception of the chronicle accords with a concept of *intertextuality*, which, to quote Clayton and Rothstein again, "has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts."²³⁷ One can no longer think of works of literature as the productions of a singular, heroic artist, for to think of works as *intertextual* is to consider the overlapping and multidirectional "influences" (which are no longer singular) that are ever at work on the author, such that it is no longer possible to speak of discrete "individuals" who insert themselves, to use the language of both Arendt and Faulkner, *into* an "enduring chronicle." Everything is, in a sense, already chronicle in the first place. As twentieth century theorist Roland Barthes puts this notion in *From Work to Text*, "Text should itself be only text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that *social* space which leaves no language safe, outside, and

²³⁶ Clayton and Rothstein 13.

²³⁷ Clayton and Rothstein 4.

no subject of the speech-act in the situation of judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder: the theory of the Text can coincide only with a practice of writing.”²³⁸

In a sense, then, Chick’s hopelessness in *Intruder* might be his sudden realization that he has never lived in a universe ruled by *influence* but an *intertextual* web from which he can never, will never, extricate himself fully. More pointedly, perhaps, Chick’s hopelessness regarding the impossibility of extricating himself is perhaps also that of Faulkner’s reader. Minter suggests, as previously quoted, that Faulkner’s novels turn fiction writing and fiction reading into a “collaborative process that has no discernible beginning and no clear ending and that is always already, at one and the same time, political and cultural, communal and individual.”²³⁹ And if this is not—Minter’s attribution notwithstanding—how Arendt thinks the story, it is how Faulkner does.

For the novelist, Minter speculates, the whole process of reading is one that configures the entire relation between writer and reader, writer and world, into one of *text*.²⁴⁰ Minter also notes that this kind of readerly compulsion into *text* can be understood as the complicity that Faulkner requires of his audience. In his discussion of Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*, for instance, Minter argues that Faulkner’s use of *gaps* in his writing is part of what secures the readers’ imbrication in the world of his text. “By leaving completion of [a] scene—that is, the act of providing the terrible details of it—to us as his readers, to our culturally prepared minds and our educated imaginations,

²³⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 64.

²³⁹ Minter 4.

²⁴⁰ Minter 4.

Faulkner aggressively assumes that in one way or another we share his knowledge of popular culture.”²⁴¹

As Minter begins to suggest, then, stories—chronicles—have ethical and political implications. Thus, the way we read, the way we understand narrative, is a literary theoretical question *as well as* one of history, politics, and even ethics. Another way of putting this is to ask a question: When we read Arendt, when we read Faulkner—particularly when we only read *with* one or the other—what do we risk accepting? To what do we acquiesce? For how we understand the story—whether we follow Arendt or follow Faulkner, subscribe to “influence” or to “intertextuality”—impacts the way we understand not just the stories we read but the stories that we ourselves are a part. And yet, in the two chapters that remain, I am less interested in subscribing to one writer or theory over another than I am in tracing the way in which Arendt’s and Faulkner’s ways of thinking the story *diverge*, even as their commitments to maintaining a certain story of the (White) American citizen *converge*. I am suggesting, in other words, that to study the “story of Arendt” or the “chronicle of Faulkner” *must also be* to confront and critique the racism of both.

(ii)

Arendt was born in what is now Hanover, Germany, in 1906, while Faulkner was born nine years before, in New Albany, Mississippi, in 1897. Still, by the 1940s, both were living in the United States. Arendt, who was Jewish, fled Germany in 1933 in the wake of the rise of the Nazi Party and its murderous anti-Semitism, first moving

²⁴¹ Minter 107.

to France before relocating to New York City in 1941.²⁴² Both writers, the political theorist and the novelist, were well-known figures in the American cultural scene by the mid-1950s, the period in which agitation arose across the country in response to the continued injustice of segregation, particularly as practiced in the Southern states.²⁴³ Both Arendt and Faulkner, too, made public statements on this issue, ones that seemed at best ambivalent and at worst hostile toward the cause of civil rights and racial justice in America.

For instance: in 1958, in the wake of U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's decision to send federal troops to oversee the effort to let several young Black students enroll in the Little Rock public schools, Arendt penned a response to the controversy entitled, "Reflections on Little Rock." In the essay, which was not published until a year after Arendt initially wrote in, in the Winter 1959 edition of *Dissent* magazine, Arendt critiqued the "Federal decision to start integration in, of all places, the public schools."²⁴⁴ While claiming to be opposed to the perpetuation of political inequality in the United States, Arendt marked a distinction between political inequality and social inequality, a distinction that she had also marked, if in a more abstract form, in her 1958 book, *The Human Condition*. "Segregation," she writes in "Reflections on Little Rock,"

is discrimination enforced by law, and desegregation can do no more than
abolish the laws enforcing discrimination; it cannot abolish discrimination and

²⁴² Pitkin 39-41.

²⁴³ King 106-124, 171. This is not to say that there was not also racial discrimination in the American North; however, Faulkner's biography and Arendt's (in)famous essay make the South the focus on this section.

²⁴⁴ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent* 6, no. 1 (January 1959): 50.

force equality upon society, but it can, and indeed, must, enforce equality within the body politic. For equality not only has its origin in the body politic; its validity is clearly restricted to the political realm. Only there are we all equals.²⁴⁵

In the passage, Arendt insists upon one of the very “territorial” distinctions for which her philosophy has been critiqued. In earlier chapters, I described Arendt’s insistence that a story is *inserted into* the world or nature, but is not acted upon it, so that she discounts how the ways we understand the world influence the ways we act, the chronicles we tell. Here, she stresses a distinction between law and the social, the “political realm” and the “social” one, as if unable to see the ways these realms are *not* separate or even entirely separable, but dually form and influence one another. (Indeed, Arendt’s application of her own theory here emphasizes the extent to which a stark political/social distinction fails to make real-world sense: why isn’t access to public schools a political right, a political *matter*?)

Arendt was not alone in her stance; Faulkner shared many of her “misgivings.” In fact, the three allusions that Arendt makes to Faulkner and his works in *The Human Condition*, *On Revolution*, and *Origins* are not the only times that she mentions the author in her writings. His name, and his words, appear not just once but twice in “Reflections on Little Rock.” The first mention comes in a section in which Arendt discusses the fact that, in contrast to the rest of the American states, the people of the South are

²⁴⁵ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 50.

more homogeneous and more rooted in the past than of any other part of the country. When William Faulkner recently declared that in a conflict between the South and Washington, he would ultimately have to act as a citizen of Mississippi, he sounded more like a member of a European nation-state than a citizen of this Republic.²⁴⁶

A few pages later, Faulkner is invoked again: “It has been said, I think again by Mr. Faulkner, that enforced integration is no better than enforced segregation, and this is perfectly true.”²⁴⁷

And so, if there are an abundance of differences between Arendt’s writings and Faulkner’s on the matter of the operation of the story, there is nonetheless a correspondence between their views on race in America in the mid-1900s. These views—this racism—has been critiqued by some of the thinkers who have written on and studied them. As earlier mentioned, Kautzer argues that, “Any contemporary analysis that incorporates Arendt’s critique of violence is ... susceptible to also reproducing her pernicious racial politics, which neglect state (and white vigilante) violence while charging those who resist it with breaching the peace.”²⁴⁸

The same could be said—has been said—of the work of Faulkner, whose main characters are mostly, especially in his most celebrated works, White, who used racial epithets repeatedly across his texts, who once said, in a line that Arendt paraphrases, that: “As long as there's a middle road, all right, I'll be on it. But if it came to fighting[,] I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out

²⁴⁶ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 47.

²⁴⁷ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 49. It is, of course, by no means perfectly true.

²⁴⁸ Kautzer 2.

into the street and shooting Negroes.”²⁴⁹ Faulkner similarly wrote an appeal to the NAACP in 1956 that asked the group, and “all others who sought ‘immediate and unconditional integration’ through the courts” to “Go slow now. Stop for a time, a moment.”²⁵⁰ While lacking Arendt’s theoretical distinctions of political versus social, there is a similarity here in the pair’s dual insistence that politics—and law—not be allowed to intervene in the South, or, at least, they take the pains to add, not too quickly.

One could claim that such statements are neither reflective of these thinkers at their best or, at least, of what is best, most insightful, or striking, about their written works. Carol Polsgrove notes, for instance, that Faulkner made the declaration about siding “with Mississippi” in a 1956 radio interview with Russell Warren Howe during a period in which he had been “drinking heavily, as he did under pressure.”²⁵¹ Faulkner, Polsgrove writes, “spoke ... words that would cause him no end of trouble and undercut the stand he had taken in more sober moments.”²⁵² Similarly, Sean Kim Butorac suggests that Arendt came to change her mind, at least to some degree, on the position she had taken in “Reflections on Little Rock,” in part, Butorac suggests, because of the influence of James Baldwin.²⁵³ However, neither Polsgrove nor Butorac argue—or even imply—that such “backsliding” on the part of Faulkner or Arendt meant that either they, or their work, were not tied in some way to racist convictions

²⁴⁹ Polsgrove 98.

²⁵⁰ Polsgrove 97.

²⁵¹ Polsgrove 97.

²⁵² Polsgrove 98.

²⁵³ Sean Kim Butorac, “Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, and the Politics of Love,” *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (September 2018): 712, doi:10.1177/1065912918760730.

and ways of seeing.²⁵⁴ (Indeed, Polsgrove titles her article: “William Faulkner: No Friend of *Board v. Board of Education*.”)²⁵⁵ This, I think, is correct: we cannot simply excise these statements from our understanding of these figures. As I shall argue in this chapter, despite the differences in Arendt’s and Faulkner’s “narrative theories”—so to speak—the modes of storytelling practiced and proliferated by *both* can be understood as perpetuating, rather than inhibiting, forms of prejudice and oppression, most notably, anti-Black racism.

(iii)

The claim that Arendt’s work is underwritten by certain prejudices is hardly new. In the first chapter, I quoted Villa’s statement that to one “brought up in ... the social democratic tradition (with its focus on social justice), Arendt’s insistence on the inherent value of political action will look both strange and beside the point.”²⁵⁶ And it is true that Arendt’s over-emphasis upon “the political” as opposed to “the social” is crucial to what seems to lead her to *defend* the position of White Southerners who protested federal and anti-racist interventions. Moreover, and as we have seen, Kautzer argues that anti-Black prejudice undergirds Arendt’s writings, not just in her more essayistic engagements with contemporary events, but the very theoretical framework of her most philosophical work, *The Human Condition*.²⁵⁷ Patricia Owen’s 2017 critique of Arendt’s work for its complicity and perpetuation of anti-Blackness is

²⁵⁴ Polsgrove 93-9; Butorac 711.

²⁵⁵ Polsgrove 93.

²⁵⁶ Villa 30.

²⁵⁷ Kautzer 2.

perhaps even more nuanced and sweeping than Kautzer's—and for that reason, arguably even more damning. Owens contends early in her essay that

Hannah Arendt would thus seem to be a crucial, even irreplaceable, resource for analysing what she called 'the nation-destroying and humanity-annihilating power of racism' in world politics. In fact, the opposite may be true. Arendt harboured her own deep racial prejudices, especially when writing about Africans and people of African descent.²⁵⁸

In her essay, Owens examines Arendt's statements in "Reflections on Little Rock," as well as the theorist's discussion of European colonialism in Africa in *Origins*, to call attention the racism that inflects Arendt's thinking.

So again, these critiques of Arendt are not new; other and better thinkers have already noted them before me. What I wish to suggest in this chapter is the *relationship* between Arendt's (and Faulkner's) "narrative theories" and their racism; in other words, these two opposing reading practices are nevertheless *dually* implicated and instrumental to the way in which both writers' works perpetuate certain racist practices, structures, and ways of seeing and being.

For instance: in the essay in which he critiques Arendt, Kautzer writes that "It is not clear where to situate" such things as "song, dance, theater, and storytelling" in "Arendt's *vita activa* model."²⁵⁹ In the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that this is not entirely true, suggesting that story *does* have a place in Arendtian thought.

However, if it has a place, this place is a deeply uncertain one; that is, Arendt herself

²⁵⁸ Owens, "Racism in the Theory Canon," 405.

²⁵⁹ Kautzer 8.

sometimes seems uncertain where the story belongs, and this, I suggested, leads her to treat the story in a distinctly *unliterary* manner—one that also, as we shall see, leads her to treat it in a distinctly *racist* one.

This is illustrated by Arendt's "Little Rock" essay. In the version that was finally published a year after it had been drafted, Arendt included an opening note, which ended with the following:

Finally, I should like to remind the reader that I am writing as an outsider. I have never lived in the South and have even avoided occasional trips to Southern states because they would have brought me into a situation that I personally would find unbearable. Like most people of European origin, I have difficulty in understanding, let alone sharing, the common prejudices of Americans in this area. Since what I wrote may shock good people and be misused by bad ones, I should like to make it clear that as a Jew I take my sympathy for the cause of the Negroes as for all oppressed or underprivileged peoples for granted and should appreciate it if the reader did likewise.

Here, Arendt claims to take up the perspective of an "outsider" to Southern society—and, the implication seems, Southern prejudice—while likewise insisting upon the fact that "as a Jew I take my sympathy for the cause of the Negroes as for all oppressed or underprivileged peoples for granted and should appreciate it if the reader did likewise."²⁶⁰ While this statement might seem to be simply a rather infuriating cop-out to the reader, particularly one who disagrees with her pro-segregation stance, it is also

²⁶⁰ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," 45. Arendt makes these statements regarding her objectivity and point of view in the "Preliminary Remarks" to the article.

suggestive of the way in which Arendt's notion of the story fails to interrogate and even re-inscribes certain kinds of oppression, including racism. In the passage, she claims both a position of objectivity ("outsider"-ness) and subjectivity (empathy-ness), seemingly unaware of how her designation of her subjectivity as a kind of indisputable "objectivity" blinds her to alternative perspectives, leaving her neither truly an "outsider" nor genuinely empathetic.

As I have suggested, the perspective-claiming of the "Little Rock" essay is not a strategy unique to this article or even simply Arendt's political commentary; her theoretical work contains a similar failure to interrogate matters of perspective robustly. We have already noted the way in which, in *Origins*, Arendt collapses Chick's interior monologue into "Faulkner's words," thus turning a snippet of an (admittedly *very* lengthy) sentence into a kind of "aphorism." In this case, her account of what she terms "Faulkner's words" leaves out Chick's newfound *hopelessness* of entering "man's enduring chronicle." It also leaves out a part of the reason for that hopelessness: the racism that infects and underwrites his community's way of writing and recording their "chronicle" and perhaps even his first real reckoning with his own complicity within it.

In other writings, Arendt's way of employing and understanding narrative leads her not just to discount racism but also to repeat it. In the "Race and Bureaucracy" chapter of *Origins*, for instance, Arendt quotes and alludes to Joseph Conrad's 1902 novella, "Heart of Darkness." Arendt begins the chapter by stating that:

Two new devices for political organization and rule over foreign peoples were discovered during the first decades of imperialism. One was race as a principle

for the body politic, and the other bureaucracy as a principle of foreign domination. Without race as a substitute for the nation, the scramble for Africa and the investment fever might well have remained the purposeless ‘dance of death and trade’ (Joseph Conrad) of all gold rushes.

A footnote to the line indicates that the reference is not to a statement of Conrad’s but to his story, “Heart of Darkness,” which Arendt calls, “the most illuminating work on actual race experience in Africa.”²⁶¹ Arendt thus treats Conrad’s story as a chronicle according to the OED definition, as a *recording* of events or facts, and not as the kind of chronicle that Faulkner’s protagonist invokes throughout *Intruder in the Dust*.

Throughout the chapter, Arendt employs quotes from Conrad’s fiction several times, always as if she was excerpting lines from a history textbook, as if these lines provide a straightforward recounting simply of what was. Often, Conrad is cited only parenthetically. In one such passage in “Race and Bureaucracy,” Arendt writes,

The world of native savages was a perfect setting for men who had escaped the reality of civilization. Under a merciless sun, surrounded by an entirely hostile nature, they were confronted with human beings who, living without the future of a purpose and the past of an accomplishment, were as incomprehensible as the inmates of a mad house. ‘The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? ... The earth seemed unearthly, ... and the men ... No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They

²⁶¹ Arendt, *Origins*, 242. Arendt cites the 1902 edition of “Heart of Darkness,” included in *Youth and Other Tales*.

howled and leaped, and spun and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar” (“Heart of Darkness”).²⁶²

Arendt’s voice slips into Conrad’s (in fact, not just here but throughout *Origins*, it is sometimes hard to know where Arendt’s analysis begins and her sources end). The only note that the quoted text is a line from *fiction* is the parenthetical citation. As in *Intruder*, Arendt makes no mention of the fact that it is a fictional narrator who speaks, here, that it is the figure of Marlow who travels to the Congo in the beginning of “Heart of Darkness” for a job with a European trading company.²⁶³

In some ways, the thrust of the “Race and Bureaucracy” chapter might be seen as *anti-racist*, inasmuch as it seeks to expose the way in which the “race thinking” (Arendt’s term) that underwrote European colonization of Africa “rebounded” upon the former continent itself, thus fueling the racism of totalitarian movements. After discussing European colonization of Africa and the Boer regime in modern-day South Africa specifically, Arendt concludes that, “What the European ‘movements’ consciously aimed at, the transformation of the people into a horde, can be watched like a laboratory test in the Boers’ early and sad attempt.”²⁶⁴ Moreover, Arendt explicitly identifies these European colonial outposts as racist, describing, for instance, “Boer racism” and writing that, “Racism as a ruling device was used in this [Boer]

²⁶² Arendt, *Origins*, 249. The first ellipsis in the quoted passage is mine; the subsequent two are from Arendt’s text.

²⁶³ Joseph Conrad and Cedric Thomas Watts. *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 144-6, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=56519&site=ehost-live>.

²⁶⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 256.

society of whites and blacks before imperialism exploited it as a major political idea.”²⁶⁵ Indeed, Owens, who, as stated above, critiques Arendt’s work for its racism, nonetheless credits her as “the central theorist of the ‘boomerang effect’, the unintended consequences of imperial blowback, decades before Michel Foucault. ... [In *Origins*] Arendt placed race thinking and racism at the core of the destruction of the European system of states.”²⁶⁶

Yet despite the way that “Race and Bureaucracy” *critiques* certain forms of “race thinking” in late nineteenth century Africa, it also *perpetuates* other forms of “race thinking,” and the way it does so is linked to the way Arendt thinks the story, the way she too quickly assimilates *some* fictions to fact, *some* perspectives to *the* perspective of her theory as a whole. Owens, for instances, notes that the chapter is written from a primarily *European* point of view and concludes that while “Hannah Arendt was not seeking to justify extermination or massacres ... in her effort to ‘understand the experiential basis’ of the Boers’ moral failings she came too close to apologetics.”²⁶⁷ One of the passages that Owens cites in making this argument is Arendt’s statement that “Boer racism, unlike the other brands, has a touch of authenticity and, so to speak, of innocence.”²⁶⁸ Likewise, just after Arendt’s argument that the “ruling device” of racism was used first by the Boers and later by the European imperialists, the theorist writes that the “basis” and the “excuse” for this device

²⁶⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 254.

²⁶⁶ Owens, “Racism in the Theory Canon,” 404.

²⁶⁷ Owens, “Racism in the Theory Canon,” 410-1.

²⁶⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 255; Owens, “Racism in the Theory Canon,” 411.

were still experience itself, a horrifying experience of something alien beyond imagination or comprehension; it was tempting indeed simply to declare that these were not human beings. Since, however, despite all ideological explanations the black men stubbornly insisted on retaining their human features, the ‘white men’ could not but reconsider their own humanity and decide that they themselves were more than human and obviously chosen by God to be the gods of black men. This conclusion was logical and unavoidable if one wanted to deny radically all common bonds with savages.²⁶⁹

We should mark here—as Owens does of similar Arendtian claims—the close correspondence between Arendt’s purportedly historical claims *and* Conrad’s narrator’s statements in “Heart of Darkness”; indeed, one can easily see a strong resemblance between the observations here and those of Marlow in the passage from Conrad quoted in Arendt’s work, not least in the final term she uses to describe Africans (a subjective, not objective one): “savages.”

Why is it a *problem* that Arendt so liberally makes use of Conrad’s text? One rather obvious reason is that “Heart of Darkness” itself has been critiqued for the racism of the perspective upon which it pivots. As Chinua Achebe observes in an essay on the novella, Conrad, through Marlow, only ever gives the perspective of the Englishman; he never writes the African characters in the novel as full characters, with viewpoints, with perspectives, of their own.²⁷⁰ Conrad’s use of “Africa as setting and

²⁶⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 254; Owens, “Racism in the Theory Canon,” 411-3.

²⁷⁰ Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa,” *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 785, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088813>.

backdrop ... eliminates the African as a human factor.”²⁷¹ Of course, one could claim—as contemporary political theorist Seyla Benhabib does—that the reason Arendt focuses on the European perspective (including Conrad’s) is “simply” because Arendt analyzed the ‘scramble for Africa’ from the standpoint of its influence upon the perversion of European morals, manners, and customs; she was concerned to explore how the experience of lawlessness, of civilization regression, the threat of identity posed by others, all return back home from the ‘Dark Continent’ to create the heart of darkness within Europe. Given that her topic is European racism ... it is perfectly understandable that her methodological emphasis would lie on the one rather than the other perspective.²⁷²

Indeed, one could even claim that Conrad’s text is not aimed at *perpetuating* European stereotypes and prejudicial modes of thinking but rather at *exposing it*, in part *through* the highlighting of its protagonist’s narrative, in all its complications.²⁷³

There is perhaps something to these exculpatory arguments on behalf of Arendt; to be sure, when she *writes* that the conclusion that Boers reached “was logical and unavoidable,” she does not really mean that *she* considers these systems of rule *logical*—or, anyway, the reader does not think she does. And yet this, perhaps, is part of the problem—a problem that, in fact, Benhabib’s statement above also presses upon, even as she attempts to suggest it as an *explanation*: Arendt never really theorizes, considers, or even really acknowledges *matters of perspective*. If Conrad’s

²⁷¹ Achebe 788.

²⁷² Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 86.

²⁷³ Conrad and Thomas 135-8.

book can be read as a critique of European colonialism, one thing that would lend support for this view is the fact that the book is structured as a story-within-a-story; a narrator introduces Marlow and several of his companions, all of whom are aboard a ship upon the River Thames, long after Marlow, the protagonist of the embedded story, has returned from the Congo. In other words, Conrad's readers are immediately reminded, upon opening the book, that what they are consuming is a *subjective* narrative, one person's story.²⁷⁴ Yet if Conrad's novel is meant to be read this way, one could never know it from Arendt's text, which treats it, as has been said, not as first-person, fictive narration but as a kind of historical chronicle, in the most Arendtian sense of the word.

Here, again, then, we encounter Arendt's unwillingness to consider the "chronicle" as anything other than a statement of "record." Admittedly, in *Origins*, Arendt *does also* discuss the role of "legends" in underwriting European imperialism and writes that, "Legends have *always* played a powerful role in the making of history."²⁷⁵ She even goes so far as to claim that, "Man, who has not been granted the gift of undoing, who is always an unconsulted heir of other men's deeds, and who is always burdened with a responsibility that appears to be the consequences of an unending chain of events rather than conscious acts, demands an explanation and interpretation of the past in which the mysterious key to his future destiny seems concealed."²⁷⁶ Such a line would seem almost in accord with Chick's feelings at the close of *Intruder*, when he feels his action "into man's enduring chronicle," impeded

²⁷⁴ Conrad and Thomas 135-8.

²⁷⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 270, emphasis added.

²⁷⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 270.

by “a Face, the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood.”²⁷⁷ But if Faulkner’s novel seems to invoke the humankind’s constant *failure* to get at “reality,” legend for Arendt functions more like a heuristic; a way of “summarizing” the world one acts *into*, rather than something that both shapes and impedes one’s ability to know into what one acts. “Legends” are, like other stories, merely a way of recording. Since ancient times, Arendt says, “Legends made [man] master of what he had not done, and capable of dealing with what he could not undo. In this sense, legends are not only among the first memories of mankind, but actually the true beginning of human history.”²⁷⁸

Arendt’s way of thinking the chronicle marks not just her political theory but her political commentary—something we can also see in her “Reflections on Little Rock.” There, she casts herself as “an outsider,” a kind of recorder (or, one might say, to use the word from *Human Condition*, “biographer”) of events there.²⁷⁹ Although she *does* (and perhaps oddly) invoke her own ancestry (“Like most people of European origin,” she writes, “I have difficulty in understanding, let alone sharing, the common prejudices of Americans in this area”), she nonetheless insists that she is

²⁷⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 189-90.

²⁷⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 270. Arendt does write that, “The author of the imperialist legend is Rudyard Kipling, its topic is the British Empire, its result the imperialist character (imperialism was the only school of character in modern politics). And while the legend of the British Empire has little to do with the realities of British imperialism, it forced or deluded into its services the best sons of England. For legends attract the very best in our times, just as ideologies attract the average, and the whispered tales of gruesome secret powers behind the scenes attract the very worst. No doubt, no political structure could have been more evocative of legendary tales and justifications than the British Empire, than the British people’s drifting from the conscious founding of colonies into the ruling and dominating foreign peoples around the world” (271). Here, Arendt seems to acknowledge something she ignores in most of her theoretical work: that the story we tell can *fail* us, can lead us to misunderstand the world we are “given,” even while allowing for the perpetuation of unjust visions based on an unreality (or at least, incomplete reality).

²⁷⁹ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 46.

unbiased. In fact, she invokes her ancestry and her identity as a Jew in a way that precisely inverts Chick's invocation of *his* bloodline in *Intruder*: not a limit to her potential "objectivity" but as a facilitator of it.²⁸⁰ "I should like to make it clear," Arendt writes, that, "as a Jew I take my sympathy of the cause of the Negroes as for all oppressed or underprivileged peoples *for granted* and should appreciate if the reader did likewise."²⁸¹

Arendt takes her sympathy "for granted," a line that echoes a phrase from the line she excerpts from *Intruder* and recontextualizes in *Origins*; she uses Faulkner's line to encompass the feeling of *gratitude*, a *gratitude* that is opposed to the nihilism of totalitarianism, a gratitude that underwrites one's ability to "perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle."²⁸² But Arendt, I think, takes *too much*—far too much—for granted. In "Reflections on Little Rock," for instance, she writes that,

In all parts of the country [of the United States], the Negroes stand out because of their 'visibility.' They are not the only 'visible minority,' but they are the most visible one. ... This is not a trivial matter. In the public realm, where nothing counts that cannot make itself seen and heard, visibility and audibility are of prime importance. To argue that they are merely exterior appearances is to beg the question.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," 46.

²⁸¹ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," 46, emphasis added.

²⁸² Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

²⁸³ Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," 47.

But it is Arendt, and not her projected interlocuter, who begs the question: or maybe, it is both, if both accept by “appearances” one *singular* way of seeing, of perceiving, of narrativizing. Arendt asks her readers to take her sympathy *for granted*, the way she believes that she herself can take the meaning of the words she borrows *for granted*, not unpacking them in relation to their context, their grounding, or the space or silence that enfolds them, thus disallowing without ever considering alternative voices, readings, ways of seeing.

Of course: there is a reason that Arendt stresses *givenness, gratitude, granted*; there is even a reason, perhaps, that she is so adamant about distinguishing the “real” story from the “fictional” one in *The Human Condition*, even as she continues to draw on literary and theatrical examples. “Fiction” is the word that Arendt associates with the totalitarian perspective, with totalitarian rule. As she states in *Origins*, and as I quoted in the first chapter of this work, “totalitarian leaders are convinced that they must follow consistently the fiction and the rules of the fictitious world which were laid down during their struggle for power” though these same rulers “discover only gradually the full implications of this fictitious world and its rules.”²⁸⁴ For Arendt, the “fiction” of totalitarianism is entwined with the totalitarian rulers’ sense that “everything is possible.”²⁸⁵ As she writes in the “Concluding Remarks,” to *Origins*, in the paragraph just before the one that contains the allusion to *Intruder*,

the first disastrous result of man’s coming of age is that modern man has come to resent everything given, even his own existence—to resent the very fact that

²⁸⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 528-30, 563.

²⁸⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, 563.

he is the creator of the universe and himself. In this fundamental resentment, he refuses to see rhyme or reason in the given world. In his resentment of all laws merely given to him, he proclaims openly that everything is permitted and believes secretly that everything is possible.²⁸⁶

The author of a fiction makes things up—can make anything and everything up. And so Arendt contends that we cannot think of our world—of our politics—in this way. Indeed, this conviction seems at the core of some of the assertions she makes in *The Human Condition*, among them, her claim in the “Action” chapter that “the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words,” as well as her profession in the “Prologue,” that “The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition.”²⁸⁷

The irony of Arendt’s commitment to the *given*, however, is that in order to escape from the fictiveness of totalitarianism, in all its very real horror, its terror, is that her theory ends up endorsing a kind of narrative thinking that understands the “real story” as singular, uncomplicated in its meaning and easily recordable. She thus endows a certain *version* of reality with a kind of “givenness” that creates its own kind of tyranny.

(iv)

We can see this, in fact, in *Intruder*—and indeed, the extent to which we can trace this effect in the novel is suggestive of the way in which neither Arendt’s nor

²⁸⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, 630.

²⁸⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2, 182-3.

Faulkner's "narrative theory" gives us a story that seems capable of representing, much less being responsive to, concerns about justice, and particularly, racial justice in America. Arendt, as has been said already, uses the line in which Chick invokes a desire to "perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle" in order to exemplify the *anti*-totalitarian way of being and relating to the world.²⁸⁸ However, as has also been shown, Chick's statement in *Origins* professes precisely his *inability* to pull off this "performance." Previously, I have simply argued that the sense of failure and hopelessness is indicative of the different ways in which Arendt and Faulkner think the chronicle, indicative of the fact that these writers have different "narrative theories." Yet another possible—if not perhaps entirely plausible, as I shall come to in a moment—way of considering this scene would be to say that Chick's line *does* fit with Arendt's theory, except that rather than speaking in the space of *politics*, of words and deed, he speaks within a totalitarian state, in which "everything is permitted" and "everything is possible," and yet, in another sense, no *free* action, no *real* story, is.

To be clear: Mississippi in the 1940s was not a totalitarian state, not in the sense in which the areas controlled by Germany in the same decade were, and Chick, a White teenager, is not even a fictional "victim" of totalitarianism. Nonetheless, there are several references to the specter of totalitarianism in Faulkner's novel. In a long speech delivered to his nephew on the journey to the burial site of Vinson Gowrie, Chick's uncle Gavin states that,

²⁸⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, 631.

the ones named Sambo ... they can stand anything ... Not all white people can endure slavery and apparently no man can stand freedom (which incidentally—the premise that man really wants peace and freedom—is the trouble with out [sic] relations with Europe right now, whose people not only dont know what peace is but—except for Anglo Saxons—actively fear and distrust personal liberty; we are hoping without really any hope that our atom bombs will be enough to defend an idea as obsolete as Noah’s Ark.)²⁸⁹

In an even more explicit reference to totalitarianism in the closing pages of the book, Chick recalls another speech of his uncle’s. In this monologue, Gavin insists that the South must

defend not Lucas nor even the union of the United States but the United States from the outlanders North East and West who with the highest of motives and intentions (let us say) are essaying to divide it at a time when no people dare risk division by using federal laws and federal police

and further states that,

*we are in the position of the German after 1933 who had no other alternative between being either a Nazi or a Jew or the present Russian (European too for that matter) who hasn’t even that but must either be a Communist or dead.*²⁹⁰

As these passages suggest, Arendt and Faulkner were both residents of America in the 1940s, and they were both, if in different ways and almost certainly to different degrees, concerned with totalitarianism, which both saw as a threat to

²⁸⁹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 146-7.

²⁹⁰ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 210-1. Emphasis original.

freedom. And yet what is so significant—so striking—about these excerpts from *Intruder* is the degree to which Chick’s Uncle Gavin is able to transfigure a stance against totalitarianism into a stance against “Northern interventionism,” which we could also, and more accurately, call a movement for racial justice. (Indeed: if there was a version of totalitarian rule in 1940s Mississippi, it was not one in which White people were threatened, but one they themselves ruled.) Gavin is able to make such a move, not because he accords with an idea that “everything is possible,” but rather because he insists upon a universe where the order that was given to him—an order in which only certain humans are subjects, are citizens—an order in which Black people are simply “Sambos”—is endowed with a givenness that an outsider has no right to destroy. Gavin himself seems to note the tenuousness of his own position, know how closely he skirts the line between professing his opposition to totalitarianism and practicing certain of its elements: “*we are in the position*,” he says, referring to the White people of the South, “*of the German after 1933 who had no other alternative between being either a Nazi or a Jew*”: as if the distinction was one of choice, and not of history, not of power.

(v)

And so if Arendt’s mode of the story does not seem up to the task of eradicating or even really critiquing the “given” of racism in America, neither does Faulkner’s—even the kind of Faulkner that is not just his characters’ statements turned into Arendtian ideas.

Arendt’s work, after all, perpetuates forms of oppression *even in spite* and, as I have tried to show, *because of* her reliance upon a notion of a “new story” that bursts

forth to constitute a break and to be recorded, and yet even this way of thinking ends up relying on a certain way of perceiving what is “given,” thus taken for granted what, in my opinion, cannot be so taken.

In contrast and on the other hand, Faulkner’s work perpetuates racism because of what is arguably a stalwart obsession with the “given” or perhaps more aptly the “gone.” After all, Faulkner’s mode of storytelling, his notion of narrative, seems to have little to do with newness. The author has, of course, long been associated with the profession that Gavin makes in *Requiem for a Nun*—I myself quoted it in the opening chapter—that “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”²⁹¹ *Intruder in the Dust*, too, suggests the great pull of the past in Faulkner’s book. In *Intruder*, Chick realizes how caught he is in the past—the past that is not just historical events but consists in ways of seeing, perceiving, sorting, understanding, and storytelling. It is no coincidence that Chick’s realization that he has not been able to *perform* a great deed into “man’s enduring chronicle” quickly slips into a memory of his uncle speaking of the Civil War—and its effect on the Southern White men in the generations after it. “For every Southern boy fourteen years old,” Chick recalls his uncle saying, “not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when its still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence ... and it’s all in the balance, if hasn’t happened yet, it hasn’t even begun yet[.]”²⁹²

Chick feels caught in a failure to act, a failure that is linked to a *desire*, not just rooted in himself, but in his people, his world, to go back, to re-do a past failure “not

²⁹¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18; Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 73.

²⁹² Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 190.

once but whenever he wants it.”²⁹³ And if we cannot simply assume Chick speaks for Faulkner (indeed, it is not even *Chick* who speaks here, but Gavin’s words recapitulated through Chick’s run of thoughts), I think we *can* see a parallel here between the structure of Chick’s desire and the structure of many of Faulkner’s novels: a drive to go backward, to recapitulate, to repeat.

Thus, rather than giving us the kind of “new story, never known or told before” that Arendt associates action and revolution, Faulkner gives us something like *an old story*, over and over again. To quote again a line from Minter’s analysis, a line with which this chapter opened, Faulkner’s work suggests that the chronicle, the act of narrative-making is a “collaborative process that has no discernible beginning and no clear ending, and that is always already, at one and the same time, political and cultural, communal and individual.”²⁹⁴ Minter’s analysis calls attention to role that “Family, region, and myth” play in Faulkner’s prose, as well as the structural role that repetitions and retellings play in many of the author’s novels.²⁹⁵ Minter argues that the author’s first celebrated work, *The Sound and the Fury*, emerged in the wake of “Faulkner’s discovery of repetition as a technical principle.”²⁹⁶ As Faulkner himself said of the book, “I wrote the same story four times I was still trying to tell one story which moved me very much and each time I failed.”²⁹⁷ One can find a similar structure of repetition in *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which the same story is narrated and

²⁹³ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 190.

²⁹⁴ Minter 4.

²⁹⁵ Minter 71-3.

²⁹⁶ Minter 4

²⁹⁷ Minter 42-3.

re-narrated.²⁹⁸ Everywhere, it seems, Faulkner's reader is made to revisit that desire of "every Southern boy" to feel himself on the cusp of the moment the South hasn't lost yet.²⁹⁹

And the South is always already losing and still has not lost, whether one reads Arendt-through-Faulkner or Faulkner-through-Arendt. Though the two think the story *utterly differently*, both seem to ever end up in the same stuck perspective—to end up, moreover, on the side of the South, whether this position comes from a sense that one is *an outsider*, an *uninfluenced* perspective, or whether one insists that one cannot but repeat, cannot but fail to repeat.

²⁹⁸ Minter 15-6.

²⁹⁹ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 190.

CHAPTER IV
THE MIRROR OF MIMESIS, OR
HOW (NOT) TO READ

The word *allusion* comes from the Latin word for *play*.³⁰⁰ While the contemporary sense of the term aligns it more neatly with “reference” than “pun,” the etymology suggests something important. As children, we often longed to play *with others*; our very concept of play includes a sense of *reaching outside* of one’s self, of discovering one’s friends, companions, and, perhaps, antagonists. To allude is to gesture toward and incorporate a kind of otherness, to reach out and join another’s words, and works, to one’s own. Arendt’s allusiveness, then, ought to be understood as a version of Faulkner’s elusiveness, inasmuch as both of these modes are ways of bringing in other perspectives, of telling stories that are not a matter of speakers and actors only but also of audiences and witnesses, readers and (potential) re-tellers.

But one can allude incompletely and inconsiderately and unjustly. When Arendt alludes to Faulkner, she does so without fully examining the context and meaning of the lines she cites. Moreover, and as discussed in the previous chapter, *both* Arendt’s “story” and Faulkner’s “chronicle”—Arendt’s “newness” and Faulkner’s “oldness”—run aground on similar prejudices, as seen, for instance, in their shared opposition to mid-twentieth century efforts to desegregate public schools in the American South.

³⁰⁰ “allusion, n.,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press (June 2020), <https://www-oed-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/view/Entry/5520?redirectedFrom=allusion>.

In this fourth and final chapter of my thesis, I want to continue to examine why it is that Arendt's and Faulkner's views come to converge in this way. One explanation for this convergence is "simply" a shared racism, a shared commitment, admitted or not, to maintaining structures of White supremacy. While this explanation is not incorrect, what I wish to investigate in this chapter is the way that racism is both enabled and obscured by the narrative practices and methodologies that are employed in their works. In other words, in the previous chapter, I suggested that the racist aspects of Arendt's and Faulkner's manifestly political statements and commentaries cannot be divorced from their more theoretical and literary works; in this chapter, I want to continue to interrogate why this is so, *despite* the fact that, as I have also argued in this thesis, their ways of thinking and imagining the "story" are strikingly different in several key ways.

In short, then, what I am seeking to analyze is how it is that the disparate narrative practices of Arendt and Faulkner come to meet at the prejudicial point they do. And for this reason, while I will not linger on *Intruder* in this chapter, I will begin with a brief discussion of the character Chick Mallison, positioned as he is at the intersection of Arendt's theory and Faulkner's fiction. Though Arendt's allusion lends Faulkner's words—Chick's voice—quite a different valence than their context in *Intruder*, Chick is able to serve as a figure for both, not just in terms of the way each thinks the "story" or "chronicle," but, in fact, how each understands the "narrative" of race in America.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Arendt, of course, never discusses the character of Chick directly; still, she uses his words to outline a political position, as suggested further below.

When Chick speaks of his thwarted desire to “perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle,” he expresses a sentiment that is crucial to both Arendt’s and Faulkner’s ways of thinking. Arendt stresses the capacity for individual action seemingly announced by this sentiment; when read in context, Faulkner’s Chick is neither obviously successful in his attempt to act nor, as we have seen, obviously *individual*. Still, there is a common thread here. Chick stands as a protagonist struggling to act within the world *against* the corruptions of society. Again, in Faulkner’s novel, Chick is not positioned as entirely individual or entirely against society; he never fully disarticulates himself from “the Face,” a fact that Faulkner’s prose emphasizes and Arendt’s obscures. Still: Chick’s *attempt to act*, as a heroic-like figure (if, perhaps, a tragic one), is placed at the center of the “political narrative,” if in different senses, spun by both.

The underlying oddness here, of course, is that Chick seems to endorse a political vision that is resisted by both Arendt and Faulkner, inasmuch as his character strives to some degree toward a fuller realization of racial justice.³⁰² But this complication is not perhaps the contradiction it might seem. Neither Arendt nor Faulkner, after all, oppose—or at least express themselves to oppose—desegregation as such. Rather, what each at least professes to protest is an incursion upon the “proper” sphere of politics in the South. In her “Reflections on Little Rock,” Arendt

³⁰² I do not mean to characterize Chick as an unvarnished *hero* of *Intruder*; on my reading, as I have tried to emphasize, the story is more about his struggles than his triumphs. Moreover, as I shall discuss later in this chapter, Chick’s story centers his own—White—perspective in a story about racial injustice, while Lucas’s voice is pushed to the margins of the novel, particularly after the book’s beginning. *Intruder*—like others of Faulkner’s novels—is a book one must read both carefully and critically to avoid re-inscribing the privileging of White perspective in Faulkner’s novels, many of which center on questions of race and racism.

argues that schools are a matter of “the social,” not the “political,” and so ought not be within the purview of political debate.³⁰³ Faulkner (as Gavin does in *Intruder*) argues against the federal government’s right to “intervene” in Southern politics, an intervention that Gavin suggests is akin to totalitarianism.³⁰⁴

Thus, while Chick’s story of a young boy’s attempt to buck the biases of his own upbringing and work—if imperfectly—against certain forms of racism in his own community, this story *does not* work against the framing according to which Arendt and Faulkner understand race. Chick’s status as both a White Mississippian, in fact, make him *precisely* fitting to the narratives and politics of both. However, this does not mean that the racism expressed by Arendt and Faulkner at various points in their published works and public statements is easily convertible to anti-racist efforts, if channeled rightly (in this case, through a *White* character). On the contrary: it suggests that both writers are only able to see, imagine, and narrate matters of race and racism *from a perspective of Whiteness*.

And so: Arendt’s political community is oriented around the new story, Faulkner’s, around an *old* one. But when one is speaking of the White political subject—particularly when one is speaking of and in *America*—this might come to the same thing. In this final chapter, I will discuss a novel of Faulkner’s—not *Intruder*, this time, but *Absalom, Absalom!*—that illuminates the problematic I have just suggested. And then, in my conclusion to this project, I will return to the question that I posed at the beginning of this thesis: how are we to read, if we are to be just? How

³⁰³ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 50.

³⁰⁴ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 210-1.

are we to write, to allude, to understand our stories in relation to one another, if we are to imagine and enact *just* communities? For if Arendt and Faulkner cannot teach us how to read, perhaps they can teach us how not to.

(i)

Like the “chronicle” of *Intruder*, and unlike the Arendtian revolution, *Absalom, Absalom!* is not a new story. On the contrary: its oldness is apparent—even emphasized—in the way Faulkner structures the novel, in terms of its genre, framing, and use of allusion. As Cynthia Scarpino notes, the book, unlike many of Faulkner’s other novels, is one of “historical fiction.”³⁰⁵ First published in 1936, its opening scene is set in 1909 on a September afternoon on which twenty-year-old Quentin Compson is preparing to depart for his first semester at Harvard.³⁰⁶ The fact that Quentin is the protagonist further calls attention to the book’s “historical” nature, for Quentin, though fictional, is in another sense, already dead. At the time he published *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner had already detailed Compson’s suicide during the character’s time in Cambridge in *The Sound and the Fury*, first published in 1929.³⁰⁷

Nor does the novel only transport the reader a few decades back: time keeps receding. Quentin’s narration is the framing device for an even more historical tale; the “September afternoon” on which *Absalom, Absalom!* opens is the afternoon upon which Quentin is summoned by Rosa Coldfield, a woman “three times his age,” who

³⁰⁵ Cinzia Scarpino, “Chronotopes of Law in William Faulkner’s Novels, 1930-1939,” *Altre Modernità*, no. 15 (May 2016): 97, <https://doi.org/10.13130/2035-7680/7179>.

³⁰⁶ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 4,7.

³⁰⁷ Peter Ramos, “Beyond Silence and Realism: Trauma and the Function of Ghosts in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*.” *The Faulkner Journal* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 57-8, <https://doi.org/10.1353/fau.2008.0011>.

asks him to “call and see her” in order to hear a story.³⁰⁸ As Quentin narrates the opening scene:

From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that the dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old fried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them.³⁰⁹

Readers are pulled here—perhaps, like Quentin, less *invited* than *summoned*—into the old world of Rosa Coldfield’s house, in which the air is “long still hot weary dead”—a phrase that bespeaks such inescapable monotony that Faulkner cannot break it up with commas or coordinating conjunctions. The rooms are still referred to by the names given to them by the deceased; the blinds are still closed because another ghost had commanded that it be thus. The whole atmosphere is one of *stuckness*. Indeed, Rosa’s story will take up the rest of the book (some three hundred-odd pages, in my Vintage International edition), so that the reader is enmeshed, like Quentin, in the story of Thomas Sutpen, Rosa’s brother-in-law, who entered the town of Jefferson, Mississippi, with a gang of enslaved Haitians, built a plantation, married Rosa’s sister,

³⁰⁸ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 5.

³⁰⁹ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 3.

and—in Rosa’s telling, anyway—condemned the whole family, himself included, to damnation. While several narrators take turns telling and retelling Sutpen’s story (Rosa, Quentin’s father, Quentin, and, finally, Quentin’s Harvard roommate, Shreve) and several mysteries are unveiled, the action has *always already happened* by the time it is described.

Absalom, Absalom! is thus a historical novel that frames itself around an even more “historical” narrative, one that tells of the already-dead and the already-damned. This is an *old story*, in genre and framing, and Faulkner makes it even older (even ancient) through his use of allusion. Rosa’s story starts with “that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he [Sutpen] first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land and no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot two children” and ends with the death of all but one descendent of the Sutpen line in the fall of 1909.³¹⁰ In this interim period, there is a great deal of drama (albeit of the foregone-ly concluded sort): Sutpen’s two children by Ellen, Henry and Judith, grow up alongside their half-sister, Clytemnestra, the daughter of one of Sutpen’s slaves.³¹¹ When Henry goes to college, he meets (unknowingly) another of his father’s sons: Charles Bon, Sutpen’s son by his first wife, whom Sutpen deserted after learning she might have Black ancestry.³¹² Charles and Henry become friends; Charles is invited to the Sutpens’ house, where he meets and becomes engaged to Judith—his own sister. When Henry learns that Charles is both his half-brother and (possibly) part-Black, he kills Charles in the

³¹⁰ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 7.

³¹¹ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 48.

³¹² Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 279-87.

family manor, witnessed by Judith, and flees, never to return in his father's lifetime.³¹³ Despite Sutpen's attempts to replace Henry and propagate his line through the birth of a White son, he fails. Henry is gone; Ellen dies; Rosa refuses Sutpen's advances. Sutpen finally seduces the teenage granddaughter of his overseer, but the girl "fails" him by giving birth to a baby girl. It is this rape, this final violence, that leads to Sutpen's own downfall, for when the overseer discovers what his boss has done, he kills Sutpen, who perishes heirless.³¹⁴

As may be evident from this brief outline, there are numerous comparisons to draw between the novel and pre-modern narratives, both classical and Biblical. Many critics have called attention to these similarities.³¹⁵ The most obvious allusion, suggested by the title itself, is to the story of King David and his son Absalom in the Book of Samuel.³¹⁶ As John V. Hagopian points out, "In both, the eldest son of a vital and forceful patriarch seeks an incestuous relationship with his half sister."³¹⁷ The incestuous lust and violence of Sutpen's tale has also led critics to associate the family with Sophocles' *Oedipus cycle* and Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.³¹⁸ Lennart Björk focuses particularly on the latter, writing that "The drama of Aeschylus is constantly referred

³¹³ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 106.

³¹⁴ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 132-6, 234.

³¹⁵ See, for instance: Lennart Björk, "Ancient Myths and the Moral Framework of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *American Literature* 35, no. 2 (May 1963): 196-204, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2923423>; Cleanth Brooks, "*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Definition of Innocence," *Sewanee Review* 59, no. 4 (Autumn 1951): 543-558, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27538093>; Elizabeth Eshelman, "The Use of Spartan in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Explicator* 74, no. 1 (March 2016): 15-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.2015.1133549>; John V. Hagopian, "The Biblical Background of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *CEA Critic* 26, no. 2 (Jan. 1974): 22-4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44375822>; and Richard Sewall, "The Vision of Tragedy," *The Review of Metaphysics* 10, no. 2 (Dec. 1956): 193-200, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20123565>.

³¹⁶ Hagopian 24.

³¹⁷ Hagopian 24.

³¹⁸ Björk 197-9; Brooks 546.

to throughout the novel,” while other critics have pointed to the figure of Clytemnestra, nicknamed Clytie, as one of the most obvious references to the tale of the House of Atreus.³¹⁹ Peter Ramos argues that Clytemnestra’s naming “implicitly reinforce[s] the novel’s allusions to the Eumenides” (as well as to “other ghosts in the western literary tradition”).³²⁰

However, allusion does not just appear in Faulkner’s novel merely in terms of direct mythic references but in terms of the content of the characters’ actions and desires themselves. That is, Faulkner does not simply refer to stories of the past; his characters restage them. Thus, in the book, allusion is not only employed as a stylistic flourish or even a mere writerly tool; rather, allusion is a problem that is itself thematized in the novel. In this sense, I think it is helpful to discuss not just “allusion” here but also “mimesis.” While the terms are similar, they are not quite the same; as just suggested, the former suggests a *reference*—it *refers*—and the latter *duplicates*, *restages*. Later in this chapter, I will discuss a more complicated (and, in my view, comprehensive) understanding of the mechanism of “mimesis”; however, here, I am primarily drawing on the concept of “mimesis” and “mimetic desire” as developed by René Girard’s in *Violence and the Sacred*.³²¹

Girard’s work relates *want* with a quest for *sameness* and *imitation*, suggesting that “desire” describes not just a relation between “only a subject and an object but a third presence as well: the rival.”³²² Rivalry,” he writes, “does not arise because of the

³¹⁹ Björk 199.

³²⁰ Ramos 50; Björk 197; Eshelman 15-6.

³²¹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

³²² Girard 145.

fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it.”³²³ This desire—rooted not just in some individualized wanting of an object but a rivalry, a striving for *the same*—leads to violence; “[t]wo desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict.”³²⁴

How does a concept of “mimesis” and “mimetic desire” relate to an unpacking of Faulkner’s novel? In short, the answer is that “mimetic desire” is what dooms Sutpen. That is, the character’s downfall in *Absalom, Absalom!* is linked to his commitment to a purely imitative version of mimesis and a concomitant inability to cast forth a story *other than* according to these (imitated) terms. This is particularly clear when one considers the account given of the early life of Sutpen. In the novel, Sutpen is born into a White family from the Appalachian region. When Sutpen’s mother leaves his father, the latter takes Sutpen and his siblings “into the slack lowlands about the mouth of the James River.”³²⁵ According to Quentin’s grandfather (who told Quentin’s father, who tells Shreve), Sutpen was “innocent” as a child. Quentin says that:

He knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why. He was just there, surrounded by the faces, almost all the faces he had ever known (though the number of them, decreasing, thinning out, because of the climate, the warmth, the dampness) living in a cabin that was almost a replica of the mountain one except that it didn’t sit up in the bright wind but sat instead

³²³ Girard 145.

³²⁴ Girard 146.

³²⁵ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 181.

beside a big flat river that sometimes showed no current at all and even sometimes ran backward, where his sisters and brothers seemed to take sick after supper and die before the next meal.³²⁶

Sutpen's family is quite poor; at the same time, the fact that they are White affords them some degree of privilege in an early nineteenth century America in which slavery is still legal and practiced. However, in his youth, according to Quentin, Sutpen is "innocent" of all this (one might compare this statement to Arendt's contention that the Boers are "innocent"); "he still didn't envy" the wealthy White man who was his father's boss, the symbol of the ruling class.³²⁷

This changes when Sutpen is "thirteen or fourteen," and his father sends him to the plantation to deliver a message.³²⁸ Quentin does not share what the message was—Sutpen apparently did not remember by the time he told it. But Sutpen always remembers what happened when he knocked on the front door: a well-dressed Black—Sutpen/Quentin/Faulkner employs a much more violent word—butler answered and "even before he had had time to say what he came for, [told him to] never to come to the front door again but to go around the back."³²⁹ In the novel, this is the first time that Sutpen realizes how much he lacks, becomes aware of the implicit structures of racism, slavery, and poverty that have structured his life. His response, however, is not to wish to topple the system, but to strive to sit atop it. He does not aim to overthrow the White plantation owner but to become him.

³²⁶ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 184.

³²⁷ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 184.

³²⁸ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 184.

³²⁹ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 188.

Allusion, then, is not just something that Faulkner-the-writer employs but something that his characters *enact*, driven by what Girard calls “mimetic desire.” The book becomes not just a gesture to the stories of the *Oresteia* or the Bible, but an act of “mimesis” that repeats them. This means that the sense of repeated, dead history that permeates the book, structured as it is around tellings and retellings, folkloric histories and ancient allusions, is problematized in the figure of Sutpen himself. That is, Sutpen’s story represents on a literal level what the story as a whole does on a more figurative one: a complicated relation between one’s own story and identity and an old story—old symbols—of ones who have come before. We have already examined Chick’s failed and partially ambivalent struggle to extricate himself from “the Face.” Sutpen—whose aims have none of the partial, if naïve and self-interested, worthiness of Chick’s—similarly fails. His attempt to access the objects of wealth and power—the land, the “slaves,” the son—leave him, ultimately, with nothing in the end. He dies, his sons die or disappear, and his daughter dies childless, her only beau her own brother. Even Sutpen’s house is burned up by his illegitimate daughter, the aforementioned Clytemnestra, at the end of the novel.³³⁰

In fact, the name of this daughter is deeply significant in unpacking the novel’s allusions, in understanding its problematizing of mimesis. Quentin’s father tells of her naming in this way:

He named Clytie as he named them all, the one before Clytie and Henry and Judith even, with that same robust and sardonic temerity, naming with his own mouth his own ironic fecundity of dragon’s teeth which with the two

³³⁰ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 299-300.

exceptions were girls. Only I have always liked to believe that he intended to name her Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augur of his own disaster, and that he just got the name wrong through a mistake natural in a man who must have almost taught himself to read.³³¹

Sutpen's mistake, then, is a mistake in reading, in allusion. He inserts himself into an old story, believing he can simply copy it. And thus he "augurs his own disaster"—he spawns sons who kill each other, a daughter who destroys his house, employs the man who kills him.

In other words, while this is a novel full of allusion, it can also be read as a warning about the *misuse* of allusion—which is also, here, the misuse of mimesis. Faulkner emphasizes this danger by suggesting that the character literally reads himself into the *Oresteia*, the classical tragedy famously told in three plays by Aeschylus, and retold in parts by Sophocles and Euripides, and, in nearly all ways, a story into which no one would ever wish to read themselves. In the tale, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia, his own daughter, to win victory for the Greeks at Troy, leading his wife, the original Clytemnestra, to kill him when he returns from the war, which leads their children, Orestes and Electra, to kill her.³³² A similar chain of violence plays itself out in Faulkner's novel. As Shreve reflects at the novel's closing:

So it took Charles Bon and his mother to get rid of old Tom [Sutpen], and
Charles Bon and the octoroon [Bon's first wife] to get rid of Judith, and

³³¹ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 48.

³³² Anne Carson, translator, *An Oresteia*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).

Charles Bon and Clytie to get rid of Henry; and Charles Bon's mother and Charles Bon's grandmother got rid of Charles Bon. So it takes two n*****s to get rid of one Sutpen, don't it? ... Which is all right, it's fine; it clears the whole ledger, you can tear all the pages out and burn them, except for one thing. And do you know what that is? ... You've got one n***** left. One n***** Sutpen left.³³³

Not only do elements of plot resound here; language does, too. Shreve's invocation of a "ledger" here recalls the language of Anne Carson's translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, in which the Chorus states that, "That man is impious / Whose daring goes beyond justice / ... But a man of excess has no shelter. / He kicks the altar of Justice out of sight."³³⁴ In both the *Oresteia* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the characters are driven out of a sense of righting imbalance.³³⁵ The members of the House of Atreus kill in order to avenge a dead family member, never realizing that in killing, they are not simply righting a balance but incurring a debt. Having killed Agamemnon, Clytemnestra declares herself satisfied:

I for one propose to swear a truce with the demon of this house.

I'll be content with where we've got to now, hard though it is to bear.

Let the demon go grind out murders on some other family.³³⁶

³³³ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 302.

³³⁴ Carson 23-4. Carson uses rather unconventional spellings for the names of the classical playwrights and the characters; to maintain consistency, I have kept to the "standard" spellings in the text of my paper.

³³⁵ This theme runs through the *Oresteia*, particularly Agamemnon's *Aeschylus*.

³³⁶ Carson 69.

Clytemnestra does not realize that what she sees as a balanced ledger might not seem “balanced” to all, certainly does not seem balanced to either her son or her daughter. The “demon” cannot be excised; the “demon” is within, invoked by the act that supposedly excises. This is true in *Absalom, Absalom!*, too, and it is not perhaps entirely coincidental that Sutpen himself is referred to as a “demon” by not just Rosa but also Quentin and Shreve. There is no truce in *Absalom, Absalom!*; the demon keeps “grind[ing] out murders.” It is as if, as Shreve so crudely says, there is ever an excess, ever the need for more violence to set right what is already doomed, already damned.

The error that undergirds all these relations is an attempt to live on another’s terms—to set right by an old balance sheet, to succeed according to another’s symbols, to insert oneself as a character in an old story. But the other’s terms—the other’s words?—do not do what their author intends. As Derrida writes in *Plato’s Pharmacy*, “If a speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier to it, if at the limit an undeferred logos were possible, it would not seduce anyone.”³³⁷ But “language”—the objects of wealth, the desire for a son, the name Clytemnestra—seduces Sutpen. Moreover, the story of his downfall perhaps illuminates the capacity of language to seduce more than Sutpen only.

(ii)

But the errant mode of living, reading, and desiring that Sutpen models in *Absalom, Absalom!* does not just call into question his own “reading” practice; it does

³³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated and introduced by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 103.

not merely call into question an approach to narrative that stresses the “old story.” For—despite all I’ve said thus far—Sutpen does not, in fact, only represent an attempt to live according to an “old story.” Even as the character seems to perfectly exemplify a mode of mimetic imitation that I have previously associated with Faulkner’s “old story,” he also appears as an enacted beginning that seemingly comes from nowhere. After all, Quentin says that Rosa tells him of “that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he [Sutpen] *first* rode into town out of *no discernible past*.”³³⁸ The emphasis on Sutpen’s unprecedented-ness is worth noting here. In many ways, Sutpen’s *is* an old story; his life is exactly in tune with the hierarchy of the Old South, except that he came from poverty. At the same time, in his establishment *as* a part of an old story, he *inserts* himself into the world and sets forth a new and previously unknown story, and thus “begins” in precisely the way described by Arendt.

What this reading of Sutpen illuminates, then, is the thread that links the “old story” and the “entirely new” one—that links, in other words, Arendt and Faulkner, and the racism that underwrites both. What Sutpen and his story highlight is the way in which both an Arendtian “new story” and a Faulknerian “old one” purport to possess perfect completeness, a kind of sovereignty expressed in the barring of any alternative voices or possibilities. In a sense, then, Sutpen’s attempt to live according to the old symbols of the South and Arendt’s insistence on the “new story” in *On Revolution* are merely two sides of the same coin: two stories that perpetuate themselves on the basis that they are the *only* story, univocal and uncontestable.

³³⁸ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 7, emphasis added.

Importantly, this dynamic—an insistence on newness that becomes indistinguishable from *oldness*, inasmuch as the “new story” seems driven by a (mimetic) desire for traditional forms and structures of power—is one that frequently plays itself out upon an American stage. As Herman Spivey wrote in a 1973 essay entitled, “Faulkner and the Adamic Myth: Faulkner’s Moral Vision”: “For a century and a half no philosophical and religious theme that I can think of has been as extensively and variously used by American writers as the Adamic myth.”³³⁹ Spivey, citing the work of R.P. Lewis, describes the Adamic myth as one that centers on “the authentic American as a figure of *heroic innocence* and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a *new history*’ in a new world offering humanity a *second chance* ... The past is relatively unimportant; indeed, tradition tends to enslave.”³⁴⁰ The ethic of American “exceptionalism” has been a part of American thinking since John Winthrop told his fellow travelers that their new settlement was to be “as a city on a hill.” This exceptionalism insists that America is *newness*, a *New World*, with *new* political ideas, a place that became the setting for, as Arendt puts it, a “revolution” that was, essentially, a “new story ... never known or told before.”³⁴¹

But though Sutpen inserts himself into Jefferson, Mississippi *as if* his arrival constitutes a break, his newness, as we have seen, is not really new, modelled as it is upon the landowners who lorded over him when he was young and apparently,

³³⁹ Herman E. Spivey, “Faulkner and the Adamic Myth: Faulkner’s Moral Vision,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1973-4): 497. Spivey credits R.B. Lewis’ 1955 book, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, for noting this common motif and coining the “epithet” that describes it.

³⁴⁰ Spivey 498, emphases added.

³⁴¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 18-9.

purportedly, “innocent.” And we must also ask, I think, if Plymouth was “new,” repeating, as it did, some of the religious unfreedoms it had sought to escape; we must ask, indeed, if America is *new*, founded on a purportedly revolutionary commitment to rule by the people, yes, but also, throughout history, crucially—viciously—committed to an inherited version of who the people is. As Aziz Rana writes in *The Two Faces of American Freedom*,

The vision of indigenous territory as empty land was part and parcel of [American] settler efforts to transform themselves into ‘natives’ and to escape the very category of colonialism. In keeping with this, the desire to see the United States as an exceptional nation was partially built on the need to distance the country from its European origins and to assert an authentically American way of life.

Yet in failing to place the national project within the context of settler colonialism, public discourse in the United States essentially forgets the conditions that gave rise to American accounts of liberty and their implications for contemporary politics. When describing the democratic features of American founding, scholars and commentators unwittingly isolate only the internal aspects of the settler colony. Thus most discussions of national origin fail to appreciate how these internal features developed as a result of settler interactions.³⁴²

³⁴² Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 9-10, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cornell/detail.action?docID=3300890>.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that Arendt draws a distinction between the “enacted story” and the “recorded story,” noting that this distinction is stressed particularly in *The Human Condition* as well as in *On Revolution*. In the latter, Arendt not only emphasizes the unprecedented nature of the story “unfolded” by the founders, by the American revolutionaries, but exhorts her contemporary Americans not to forget it, writing that “What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in its turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it.”³⁴³ As has been noted several times already, Arendt cites Faulkner in her footnote to the line, thus seemingly calling attention to the way that *literary* works can themselves be political, in their capacity to incite and continue inciting *memory*, and yet even as she makes this literary reference—as I have repeatedly argued—she seems to fail to give literary context, to ponder the complications and layers and stylistic modulations of the story Faulkner tells.

Because of this, Arendt, who stresses the importance of remembering, herself endorses a kind of forgetting that Rana highlights in the passage above. Arendt asks her American readers to remember the newness of the act; Rana asks his to ponder the ways in which America’s claim of newness—of Eden-like “innocence” —was never really that, pushing his readers to consider the ways that America is an echo and a mimic of other places and other peoples. Arendt, in other words, does not connect the “innocence” she identifies in the Boers to the “newness” she sees in the Founding Fathers. The figure of Sutpen makes this correspondence increasingly difficult to

³⁴³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 212.

ignore, and indeed, Rana's argument makes the connection that Arendt's work belies.

As he writes:

American commentators and citizens often view aspects of national history to be uniquely homegrown when in fact they are present to varying degrees in numerous settler societies ... Even the idea of a frontier as distinctively American obscures similar claims made by other settler societies. For example, while a century ago Frederick Jackson Turner famously argued that the frontier experience was essential to shaping American individualism and democratic self-government, Afrikaners in South Africa ... presented nearly identical arguments (at virtually the same historical moment) to explain the egalitarianism and uniqueness of their own communities.³⁴⁴

My argument here isn't that America imitated the Boers, at least not in the manner that Sutpen imitates the Virginian aristocrat at whose door he knocks. It isn't even that America has no claim to newness—to a “story, never known or told before,” a story that, in Arendt's telling, anyway, is tied to a mode of democratic politics. It is, rather, to say this: that America, and its desires (in their idealism, in their insidiousness, in their inscrutability) has never existed in a vacuum. It is to say, moreover, that “newness” *cannot* be made synonymous with “innocence,” cannot be understood to be *newness* only, enacted and then passed on, perfect, kept pristine untouched and ever uncontextualized. As Rana writes, “This is not to say that the American self-understanding as a historically exceptional political social project is

³⁴⁴ Rana 11.

simply false. Rather, what makes the American experience distinctive must be read in light of its comparative continuities.”³⁴⁵

Rana reads America neither as exceptional nor innocent but in comparison, as not utterly distinct from but in relation to histories in “numerous settler societies, as diverse as the French in Algeria, the English in Northern Ireland, the European Jewish community in Israel/Palestine, and the Chinese in Taiwan.”³⁴⁶ In the next and final part of this thesis, I will—as I have tried to from the beginning (which is only perhaps a beginning?)—read Arendt in the same way: in comparison, in context, and if that context is ever shifting and expanding, my context, *here*, is Faulkner, or, more precisely, not Faulkner the man but Faulkner the text.³⁴⁷

(iii)

How can Faulkner illuminate Arendt’s errors—Arendt’s incompleteness—if Arendt’s anti-Black racism is part and parcel of this incompleteness, and Faulkner himself (as I have suggested previously, as is widely acknowledged), as a writer and public figure, expressed and endorsed racism? The answer is less that Faulkner provides some “key” to Arendt than that Faulkner’s work introduces a mode of allusion and allusiveness (or, *elusiveness*) that belies and, in a way, disproves the mode of “allusion” seemingly endorsed by Arendt, both in her own allusive practice and in her delineation of an “enacted story” and a “recorded” one. Another way of

³⁴⁵ Rana 10-11.

³⁴⁶ Rana 10-11.

³⁴⁷ The context that I have striven to give Arendt’s words throughout this thesis is an expansive, but not an entirely comprehensive, one; in other words, if I am now coming to my end, there is no reason, on the lights of this argument, that it might not be someone else’s beginning—or, indeed, someone’s else’s mistaken turn.

putting this is to say that Arendt's practice of "allusion" is *similar* to Sutpen's enactment of his "mimetic desire." What these modes of allusion and mimesis share is a way of seeing storytelling as imitation. And it is this commitment to storytelling as imitation that enables a "new story" and an "old story" to converge on the same point, for this emphasis does not allow either to understand the nuances and complexities of a story, to think of how repetition might both deaden and enliven, reinforce and rip away.

And yet, one might ask (as Faulkner's work perhaps prods us to ask): what if mimesis is not imitation? This is precisely the possibility that Jill Frank raises in *Poetic Justice*.³⁴⁸ Frank's book is a particularly apt one to place in conversation with Arendt because of the way it suggests that "Socrates's story," *contra* Arendt, is not simply some singular, easily understood thing. We do not, according to Frank, know Socrates's story merely because we see the recording of his speech in the dialogues, which are, after all, authored by—made by—Plato. Plato's dialogues, on Frank's account, do not simply *record* Socrates's story; the dialogue's "philosophical figures" cannot simply be understood as "authoritative dispensers of doctrine, although these figures' interlocutors often take them to be such. Rather ... the dialogues stage occasions for these interlocutors to ask questions, to resist, to wonder."³⁴⁹ Frank suggests that mimesis functions "as a condition of ... possibility," and the reason that it can open such possibility is because of the way that Frank understands "mimesis" not as "imitation" merely but as "representation."³⁵⁰ Frank explains this distinction as

³⁴⁸ Frank 1-18.

³⁴⁹ Frank 16.

³⁵⁰ Frank 18, 38.

the difference between a mirror that reflects and a representation that shows not just *what is* but also *what is missing* and thus, what might be.³⁵¹ Mimetic representation, on Franks account, involves not simply “verisimilitude,” but what is “complex, various, manifold, plural” *about* what is seemingly “imitated.”³⁵² That is, to quote Frank once more, “mimetic representations make apparent our *inability* to see what is invisible while inviting us to look harder, more slowly, and again.”³⁵³

We can, I think, find this kind of mimesis—this un-imitative representation—in Faulkner’s work, too. For Faulkner, of course, is not Sutpen, and if Sutpen is “innocent,” if he, in some ways, represents the kind of Adamic American hero, the larger story that Faulkner tells of Sutpen suggests the *unreality* of the Adamic myth. As Spivey writes, “Although Faulkner’s fiction reveals sympathy with some aspects of this myth, Faulkner rejected its core emphasis, namely, the concept of innocence, a new start for the American in a new Eden, the ignoring of the significance of the past.”³⁵⁴ Of course, and as I have tried to suggest above, a total embrace of the past—of the “old story”—can itself be a means of propagating and reinforcing old hierarchies and racist practices. However, Faulkner’s work can read in a way that suggests a far more complicated relation between past and present.

In *Faulkner’s Questioning Narratives*, for instance, Minter writes that although repetition is everywhere in Faulkner’s works, one ought not understand his work as *merely* imitative, a recasting of a dead history he was somehow stuck reliving. In fact,

³⁵¹ Frank 34, 38.

³⁵² Frank 40.

³⁵³ Frank 40.

³⁵⁴ Spivey 498.

Minter characterizes the writer's fiction as possessing a sort of "dual-sidedness"; the split here, however, is not between *old* and *new* but between *old-as-old* and *old-as-new*. Minter argues that there are two sides to Faulkner's fiction and

On one side, there is an active commitment to—at times even a felt reverence for—one's *données*, one's givens, one's inherited stories, or more broadly, perhaps, one's traditions that manifests itself as a felt commitment to the task of salvaging from the humble, indicted dust lives and stories that might otherwise be lost. On the other side, there is a principle of playful experimentation in which repetition becomes a form of play and leads to and even merges with a commitment to revision, innovation, and re-creation.³⁵⁵

Here, to allude—to return—to reread—is not to imitate, to copy, but to grasp tight to the "given" (a term, we might remember, that Arendt uses, too), even as one recasts it, reimagines it. To allude is to look deeply not only for what is present but what is unseen.

We can see all this in *Absalom, Absalom!* For if the novel thematizes the failure of imitative allusion on the level of plot and in the character of Sutpen, Faulkner himself uses allusion in a more complicated manner. Of particular importance in this regard is his use of the *Oresteia*, a story from classical Greece that was variously staged by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The last of these was himself a purveyor in allusion and mimesis, for many of his plays tell stories that

³⁵⁵ Minter 58.

Aeschylus and Sophocles staged before him.³⁵⁶ I want to pause, briefly, on the manner in which Euripides carried out these allusions, for it illuminates precisely the kind of mimesis that Frank theorizes and, I will argue, that Faulkner himself comes to enact.

In reenacting familiar myths and previously staged plays, Euripides engaged in the telling of “old stories”—but of a different sort than Sutpen’s. As Victoria Wohl suggests, Euripides employs allusion in a way that *both* pays homage to what he quotes *and also* underlines some of the irrationalism and unlikeliness of the tradition.³⁵⁷ In Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, Wohl says, “one act of violence calls forth another in an adamant chain of crime and revenge spanning generations.”³⁵⁸ But in the *Electra* and *Orestes*, the plays of Euripides that restage large swaths of this tale, “instead of action following one another according to a logic of cause and effect, one gets the sense that anything could happen at any time.”³⁵⁹ On this phrasing alone, we would seem to be back in the domain of the “new story,” where freedom is constituted on the basis that *anything can happen*. Except this is not what the “new story” means, even, I would argue, for Arendt. In *Origins*, after all, is not *freedom* that is entirely fictional but totalitarianism, with its core slogan of, “everything is possible.”³⁶⁰

And in any case, it would not be right to say that *everything is possible* or even that *anything can happen* in the world of Euripides, for what is “supposed” to

³⁵⁶ Isabelle Torrance, “In the Footprints of Aeschylus: Recognition, Allusion, and Metapoetics in Euripides,” *American Journal of Philology* 132, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 178. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/docview/875110940?accountid=10267>.

³⁵⁷ Victoria Wohl 2, *Euripides and the Politics of Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 85-6.

³⁵⁸ Wohl 2-3.

³⁵⁹ Wohl 2-3; Euripides, *Electra*, edited by E.P. Coleridge (New York: Random House, 1938), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0096>; Carson, *An Oresteia*.

³⁶⁰ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 563-4.

happen—what the audience *knows* will happen—always does. Convention wins out in the end. The myth comes to its foregone conclusion, alluding to what has come before. Nonetheless: Euripides’ drama is neither an “old story” or a “new one,” not an imitation or an echo but a story that makes itself at once *old* and *new* through the use of allusion. It constitutes, in the same breath, both a continuation and a break. The ending is a perfect conclusion, a perfect balancing-out of all the violence done—and in its almost divine balance (or perhaps *simply* divine: Euripides’ plays often end through the use of a literal *deus ex machina*), it unbalances. The ending, like the play as a “whole” leaves the audience feeling a kind of uneasiness, a sense that the symbols don’t add up, that there are *alternative possibilities*.

It is my contention that Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* can be read similarly. In answer to a reader’s question about whether he liked to read the Greek tragedians, Faulkner’s answer was, “When I was young, yes.”³⁶¹ He names no names here, does not say whether he read Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides or all three, and so his allusions to the story of the House of Atreus in *Absalom, Absalom!* could be to any or all of these writers. Regardless, there is a strong similarity between the way in which Faulkner uses allusion in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the way that Euripides does in works such as the *Electra*. (In this sense, this similarity is allusive and also—as allusion, these writers seem to suggest, must always be—elusive.) After all, Faulkner alludes most directly to the story of the House of Atreus not through a one-to-one

³⁶¹ Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 51.

correspondence, but a misnaming—a daughter named Clytie who was supposed to be Cassandra and is a kind of Cassandra anyway.

Like Euripides, Faulkner opens in closing. *Absalom, Absalom!* in its repetitions, its stops and starts and rewinds of Sutpen's story, creates its own kind of structure of internal allusions. One could say that these repetitions, these retellings, are meant to *authenticate* the story, give it power. Yet the repeated narrators in Faulkner's tale have the opposite effect, destabilizing the seeming opposites of "truth" and "fiction," "real" and "not."³⁶² In the book's conclusion, Quentin and Shreve take up the tale (again) stating things as fact that they cannot possibly know. Listening to Shreve, Quentin reflects: "Yes ... too much, too long. I didn't need to listen then but I had to hear it and now I am having to hear it all over again because he sounds just like Father."³⁶³ Quentin is stuck in a narration that has already happened, a repetition that cannot be undone. On this reading, a force of necessity, the force of the "old story" overtakes all. The novel closes with the doom we have always expected; the expirations of nearly everyone.

But allusion does not just enmesh. It provokes. As in Euripides's plays, this is made particularly clear in the deep ambivalence that runs through the ending. "Now I want you to tell me just one thing more," Shreve says. "Why do you hate the South?"³⁶⁴ To which Quentin responds:

³⁶² Minter 15-7.

³⁶³ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 171.

³⁶⁴ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 303.

I dont hate it,” Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately. “I dont hate it,” he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark. *I dont. I dont. I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*³⁶⁵

Repetition—mimesis—here does not deaden, but enliven; it does not suffocate but emphasizes, creates emotion. Quentin does not *hate* or *love* but—maybe—both at once. The radicality of the allusion—its relevance to the revolution—is its ability to be a double negative, to grapple with what Arendt calls the “given” as well as the ways that givenness has yet to be recognized, the ways that givenness is ungiven. The radicality of allusion is its capacity to be like and unlike, to love and hate, to be, in a sense, past and future.

(iv)

Why does the preceding matter? What is the relevance of all this to the questions I’ve posed, to the ways that Arendt thinks “story” in *Origins* and *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition*?

My answer is that Faulkner’s concept of the allusion, as I have outlined it above, can be read with and against Arendt. Indeed, the mode of mimetic representation—a mode of repetition that both reinforces and repudiates—challenges the easy distinction made earlier in this thesis between a narrative theory of “influence” and one of “intertextuality.” In the third chapter, I allied the former with Arendt and the latter with Faulkner. However, the reading of Faulkner I have produced in this chapter makes it more difficult to draw such quick associations.

³⁶⁵ Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 303.

“Representative mimesis,” as an allusive/elusive practice, seems to be somewhere in between the two modes.

In fact, even Clayton and Rothstein, the editors of the volume on *Influence and Intertextuality*, suggest that literary theory might be properly carried out in this in-between. As the pair writes, “We do not intend to utter battle cries for either side or even to insist that there must be sides, but rather to address the theories that explicitly set agendas for influence and intertextual studies, agendas not followed in practice.”³⁶⁶ Moreover, in an essay included in the same volume entitled “Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author,” Susan Stanford Friedman asks, “Does the ‘birth’ of intertextuality as a critical term insist upon the ‘death’ of influence as its conceptual precursor? Is the ‘death’ of the author as writer the precondition for the ‘birth’ of the critic as reader?”³⁶⁷

While it may be something of a coincidence, one of the striking things about Friedman’s engagement with an *in-between* of “influence” and “intertextuality” is that some of the key terms of her essay are also important concepts in Arendt’s discussion of the story, among them “web” and “birth”—concepts that, on a less “territorial” reading might not be eschewed but would have to be rethought. “Birth” is connected to Arendt’s notion of “natality,” an important part of the theorist’s account of action; “web” is also used to illustrate “action” in *The Human Condition*, in a passage that I quoted in the first chapter of this thesis and that Ephraim employs in her “anti-

³⁶⁶ Clayton and Rothstein 4.

³⁶⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author,” in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, 146.

territorial” reading of *The Human Condition*.³⁶⁸ In this section, I will return to the “Action” chapter of *The Human Condition* to conduct a close reading of Arendt’s text, ultimately asking how a concept of “mimesis-as-representation” enables us to read Arendt not in terms of the distinctions she draws but of the ones she cannot.

In describing the “‘web’ of human relationships” in her examination of “action,” Arendt writes that:

The physical, world[l]y in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men’s acting and speaking directly *to one another*... We call this reality the ‘web’ of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality.³⁶⁹

Ephraim uses this passage to call attention to the connectedness between politics and the realm of nature; Markell likewise draws attention a similar kind of connection—between politics and work (and politics and *artwork*). Ephraim goes so far as to write that people “not only relate to nature qua sustenance ... we also receive nature qua appearance as spectators and speak for it as actors, establishing conditions for life in common.”³⁷⁰

What Ephraim does not suggest, however, is what *Intruder* and *Absalom*, *Absalom!* do: that “speaking” for nature “as actors” is by no means a straightforward, or even a *singular*, task; it is not a task one can carry out, moreover, from only one vantage point. Part of the aim of the final turn of this chapter—and this thesis—is to

³⁶⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182-3; Ephraim 47

³⁶⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182-3, emphasis original.

³⁷⁰ Ephraim 36-9.

recast the “web” of which Arendt speaks in more *narrative* terms, such that the “birth” that Arendt invokes as the insertion of action is a “second birth” that is *also* a “rebirth.”³⁷¹ At the same time, in casting Arendt’s “web” in more narrative terms, I am not attempting to pull her theoretical insistence upon ineffable action into some Faulknerian (Sutpenian? Coldfieldian?) universe of unending repetition and an always already defeated past—of mimetic imitation—but *rather* a “Faulknerian” universe of mimetic *representation*. Indeed, in this sense, both of Friedman’s quasi-Arendtian terms—“web” and “(re)birth”—are apt ones, suggestive as they are of a relation that is not a submergence, of a connection that is not a collapse. My aim, in other words, is to read Arendt’s work in terms of narrative-as-influenced and narrative-as-intertextual, thus working *against* the division that Arendt herself marks between the “enacted story” and the “recorded one.”

While, in some ways, this might also seem to work against some of the central tenets of Arendt’s text—a commitment to definitions, to an understanding of narrative as *imitative*, as either influenced or influencing—it is my contention that reading her work in this way is actually better suited to making of sense of and realizing the import of a claim that is, in my view, at the heart of *The Human Condition* and of her work more generally: that politics, and thus human community, is crucially a matter of *words and deed*, that human community needs *action, work, labor*—the public sphere, world, nature—*and* that which is irreducible to all three: story.

³⁷¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

Consider, for instance, a section in the “Action” chapter of *The Human Condition* that Arendt subtitles, “The Web of Relationships and the Enacted Stories.”

Here, Arendt writes that

The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only ‘somebody’ it reveals is its hero and it is the only medium in which the originally intangible manifestation of a uniquely distinct ‘who’ can become tangible *ex post facto* through action and speech. *Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he was.³⁷²

The “intangible manifestation” that Arendt refers to here is what has been discussed as the “enacted story,” which becomes “recorded”—or, here, “made tangible *ex post facto*,” through the “medium” of the storyteller. What is important to note about the way that Arendt frames this telling is how singular, straightforward, and even “simplistic” this account is. There is precisely *one* non-plural “real story in which we are engaged as long as we live”; there is no possibly corruptive outside force on this story, for this “real story ... has *no visible or invisible maker because it is not made.*” Moreover, it is a *singular* “somebody” whom story can reveal, and a singular “who” whose story can be understood by the storyteller who is referred here not *as* storyteller but as a kind of biographer. As in her “Little Rock” essay, a single subjective position is treated as (somehow, Arendt does not go into detail) objective.

³⁷² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

Importantly, Arendt is (or at least seems to claim to be) *specifically* speaking of “real stories,” which is to say, precisely *not* the stuff of fiction. The passage quoted above begins with lines that aim to mark this distinction. Arendt critiques notions of “action” that locate agency not in the individual or “hero” himself (I will maintain here the Arendtian practice of using the masculine pronoun because it further emphasizes the undertheorized subjective bias I am attempting to unpack). Arendt writes,

The invisible actor behind the scenes is an invention arising from a mental perplexity but corresponding to *no real experience*. Through it, the story resulting from action is misconstrued as a fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and directs the play. The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence. The distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was ‘made up’ and the former was not made at all.³⁷³

As this passage suggests, one way to “square the circle,” so to speak, between Arendt and Faulkner would be to argue that the two are talking of different things. That is to say, if the “real story” is *not* the “fictional story,” perhaps it does not matter if Faulkner saw the story—the chronicle—differently. It does not matter, because Faulkner speaks on a different imaginative plane, one of *what if* and not *what is*;

³⁷³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 185-6, emphasis added.

Faulkner *makes* his story, and Arendt is concerned primarily, only with those stories that are *not made* but are rather *enacted*.

The problem with such a distinction is that I do not believe it can be made perfectly, cleanly, for I am not at all convinced that it is easy, and perhaps, even entirely possible, to differentiate the story we live from the stories we make (this, recall, is what Chick grapples with at the end of *Intruder*). And in fact, Arendt herself seems unable to keep to the distinction she marks here. For if it is perfectly true that Arendt suggests a distinction between “realness” and “fictiveness” in the passage above, it is not true that she is consistent in upholding it or even holding to it. In the paragraph that comes directly *after* the passages quoted above, Arendt embarks on a brief discussion of the term “hero,” which quickly complicates the just-insisted-upon binary.³⁷⁴ “The hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities,” she writes, a claim that seems quite in keeping with her notion of a *real* story, as opposed to a fictional one, for in the *real* world—at least according to Arendt—each individual is the hero of his own story. However, this claim is belied by the phrase that comes next; Arendt writes that “the word ‘hero’ originally, that is, in Homer, was no more than a name given [to] each free man who participated in the Trojan enterprise and about whom a story could be told.”³⁷⁵ While Arendt’s use of Homer buttresses her claim about the story and its egalitarian politics, her invocation of the ancient poet also works against the distinction she has pointed to at the top of the page. (It does not matter that earlier

³⁷⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

³⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

eras might have considered Homer more of a historian than a poet; that confusion merely strengthens my point.)

Arendt follows all this with a discussion of “art works” that further muddies the boundary between the “real story” and the “fictional story,” and this is where her line of thought becomes *truly* surprising.³⁷⁶ Having just suggested that the *real story* cannot be understood as similar to a *fictional story*, which has a maker, she nonetheless argues that the “making” of art can have political import and content. She writes that “The specific content as well as the general meaning of action may take various forms of reification in art works which glorify a deed or an accomplishment and, by transformation and condensation, show some extraordinary event in its full significance.”³⁷⁷ Once again, a distinction is made between the “enacted story” (which exists in the public sphere) and the “recorded” or “reified” story (which exists in the human-made “world.”). Yet the *way* in which Arendt speaks of this reification process is significant. She writes:

However, the specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and ‘reified’ only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or *mimesis*, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate only to the *drama* ... Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story’s plot can convey the full meaning, not so much in terms of the story itself, but of the ‘heroes’ who reveal

³⁷⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187.

³⁷⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187.

themselves in it. In terms of Greek tragedy, this would mean that the story's direct as well as universal meaning is revealed by the chorus, which does not imitate and whose comments are pure poetry, whereas the intangible identities of the agents in the story, since they escape all generalization and all reification, can be conveyed only through an imitation of their acting.³⁷⁸

Arendt has briefly moved, in little more than a few paragraphs, from a discussion of the "real story" (the "story resulting from action" *as opposed to* the "fictional story" which is "made"), to a discussion of the "hero" (seemingly in the context of the *real* story, although she cites the epic poetry of Homer), to a discussion of the way in which the "enacted story" (which is also the "real story" of real heroes, who may not be *heroes* in the more celebratory sense of the term) is "reified" in art and artistic narrative. One may excuse the reader for having some degree of whiplash.

Of course, one might claim that some distinction between *fiction* and *reality* is maintained here. It may be worth noting that in the just-cited passage, Arendt does not speak of "fiction," instead referring to "art works," "imitation or *mimesis*," "drama," and "pure poetry." In this passage, Arendt does not seem interested in works of literature such as novels (modernist, realist, or otherwise), but in *theater*. As she says in the above passage, though Aristotle associated the "reification" or "representation" of action with *all* modes of art, it is "actually only appropriate to drama," for, as she puts it in the conclusion of this section, "theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art."³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187-8, emphasis original.

³⁷⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187-8.

Perhaps Arendt's choice of theater, and specifically, "Greek tragedy," simply stems from her penchant for taking examples from the ancients—a penchant for which she is well-known.³⁸⁰ But her choice also seems related to the *form* of theater and the way that Arendt sees it as structurally parallel to the "real story" of action itself. In discussing theater, Arendt distinguishes the *acting* of the characters from the "comments" of the "chorus." The former are equivalent to the "intangible identities of the agents in the play" and are thus comparable to the similarly "originally intangible" and "uniquely distinct 'who'" "disclosed" through action—the only difference, in Arendt's analysis, being that one takes place in the public sphere and one happens in a play. This is why she claims that theater "is the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship to others."³⁸¹ In contrast to the intimacy and intangibility of the "identity" or "agent," Arendt pits "the story's direct as well as its universal meaning," which is revealed by the "pure poetry" of the "chorus." So perhaps all is steady, stable, uncomplicated, uncorrupted. All of this might *seem* to basically fit in with Arendt's schema of the story—of, on the one hand, the "enacted story," and on the other, the "recorded" or "reified" one, which Arendt also refers to as "a kind of repetition, [an] imitation or *mimesis*."³⁸²

Yet, as perhaps is typical of Arendt's work, distinctions are not as simple as they might appear. Markell has argued, for instance, that the conceptual triad of *The Human Condition*—the triad of the *vita activa* that the book is, in fact, *known* for—is not truly a trinity at all. As he writes:

³⁸⁰ Villa 30-1.

³⁸¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187.

³⁸² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 186.

the conceptual triad of labor, work, and action is best understood not as a single functionally continuous three-part distinction, but rather as the fraught conjunction of two different pairs of concepts—labor and work, work and action—which operate in very different ways and serve quite different purposes in Arendt’s book.³⁸³

Is there not something similar at work here—the *proliferation* of binaries (and perhaps even triads) and not simply one *stable* conceptual distinction?

Consider: Arendt opposes the “fictional” story to the “real” story, and yet if this is a *similar* opposition to the opposition between the “enacted” and “reified” stories, it cannot be the same one. After all, the tragedy—which we might place on the “fictional story” side of the former (given its made-ness, its created-ness at the hands of a Sophocles or an Aeschylus) is nonetheless said to be *split* between the two sides of the latter: the “enacted” and the “reified.” In other words, although the play would seem to be *made*—although Arendt even acknowledges this created-ness of works of theater when she writes that, “the imitative element [of plays] lies not only in the art of the actor, but, as Aristotle rightly claims, in the making or writing of the play, at least to the extent that the drama comes fully to life only when it is enacted in the theater”—an aspect of it is characterized as *unmade* and thus *free*.³⁸⁴ That is: the “actor,” whose actions have been, at least to some extent, *authored*, is nonetheless said to enact something, if not precisely *action*, then something very like it; the *acting* is almost entirely distinguished from the *chorus*, who acts as the tragic narrator, despite

³⁸³ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 18.

³⁸⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 187.

the fact that both the chorus and the “actors” are *characters*, a word that, in this passage, anyway, Arendt never uses.

Perhaps Arendt only intends this passage to be read as an illustrative example, a recorded story, say, an imitation of; the theater is not political *act* “par excellence,” but rather, “political *art* par excellence.”³⁸⁵ And yet even if we take the “stage” as a mere illustration of the “public space”—is it not a representation that illuminates something that an exegesis of Arendt’s allusion to Chick’s line in *Intruder* likewise illuminates? Perhaps, the subtext suggests, the *actor* does not simply act “in and into man’s enduring chronicle” but rather is acted upon by the script that is given, by the chronicle, which shapes the very contours of the individual who acts, shapes how and what that individual sees.

It could be that Arendt saw no threat in employing the example of theater to explicate the difference between the *action* of a play (in public or in the theater) and the *meaning* of it. Across time and culture—even under the dictates of the most unforgiving gods—humankind has usually maintained a belief in free will, has not seen all action as simply authored by some divine puppet-master.³⁸⁶ If Arendt uses theater to exemplify the “space of appearances,” then, perhaps it is because she has already made it perfectly clear that *theater*—or anything that is *made*, any *work* of art—is not, so speak, “real” because it has been made; we *know* the theater is not real, and so, one could say, Arendt’s boundaries are simply illustrated, not undone.

³⁸⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188.

³⁸⁶ A recent discussion with a friend prompts me to add that if humankind has *not* maintained such a belief, but rather continues to call into question whether we *do*, in fact, possess “free will,” what is perhaps more clear is that most of us continue to act, on some level, to some degree, as *if* we do.

Maybe. But if Arendt's seemingly "territorial" triad is expressed in a work (in its most Arendtian sense) that, as Markell says, "remains deeply and visibly marked by the twists and turns her thinking followed," this seems to be one place that twists.³⁸⁷ And it twists, I think, because Arendt tries *hard* to maintain a seemingly simple distinction that is not at all simple: real versus fiction, made (authored) versus not made. We are not *either* utterly authored or entirely self-made. And so, like actors in a play, if our lines are not scripted for us, we are constrained—or, one could say, inspired—by the space we must occupy for the duration of our performance, by the characters onstage with us, by the audience (who, it is worth noting, are given no equivalent in Arendt's theatrical metaphor; the chorus alone sets the meaning).

Thus, if the stage is intended to illustrate the space of appearance—the space of action—it is an illustration that brings something with it (a problem for a theory that purports, at least at points, to define action and identity as *intangibles*). It is an illustration that calls into question the very terms it is meant to exemplify. This is not the only Arendtian illustration that has this effect, this underside. In *The Human Condition*, after all, Arendt writes that, "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."³⁸⁸ There is perhaps some twisting—some ambiguity—in the phrasing of our *confirmation* and *taking upon* of the world, of the "naked fact of our original physical appearance."³⁸⁹ And yet the passage, like much of the thrust of *The Human Condition*, seems clear in

³⁸⁷ Markell, "Arendt's Work," 20.

³⁸⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

³⁸⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

its delineation of human action as that which acts *on* nature and world, not that which is acted upon by it. As Arendt says, “This insertion [of action] is *not* forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work.”³⁹⁰ But if action is a *second* birth, is this not to compare it (not contrast it) to that *first* birth, which seems to explode the very difference upon which Arendt—at least on a most “territorial” reading of the text—would seem to stake her book? For *birth* is something that occurs in nature, part of an ever-recurrent cyclical process; it is like *work*, the product of human-making; and it is also, as Arendt says, like action, for it is the eruption of the new. For that matter, birth would seem to cut across Arendt’s real/fiction distinction, because, inasmuch as are natal beings, inasmuch as we were born, we are both *made* by another, and also beings who make, who enact, ourselves.

I am not the first Arendtian reader to notice that she contradicts herself—or even that she is perhaps most interesting when she does. What I am trying to argue, rather, is that many of these contradictions—these blurrings of boundaries—are related to the way that Arendt thinks the matter of story and narrative, and, more specifically, the way in which she oversimplifies matters of authorship. Arendt, as we have now seen, treated *enacted stories* as stories with no author, which are recorded (or “repeated,” “imitated”) by a witness who is not a storyteller so much as a “biographer,” a recorder of facts. Arendt tries so diligently to keep to this binary. And she can’t.

As a student of literature, what I want most to ask of Arendt when I read these passages is: *why?* Why stress the importance of the *story*, which is told and received

³⁹⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176-7, emphasis added.

in a community, and yet not consider the nuances and ambiguities in the way stories “unfold” (to borrow Arendt’s own phrasing)? Moreover, why, if Arendt has to bend over backward to make these distinctions—to keep “enacted stories” separate from “recorded ones”—why does she make them in the first place? Why does she so *insist* upon them? One could, of course, ask this question of Arendt’s philosophy more broadly: why does she so stress the differences among action and world and labor, among public and private and the social, between the political and the social?

In their recent work on Arendt, Markell and Ephraim have suggested that Arendt’s distinctions are *not* as rigid as they have sometimes been read, thus arguing against the “territorial” reading that had previously dominated Arendtian scholarship. I share this view, as I have sought to suggest throughout this thesis and even in the close reading of *The Human Condition* included just above. And yet, as I have also sought to suggest throughout this thesis, I see Arendt’s commitment to—and blurring of—her distinctions as deeply tied to the way that she thinks narrative, thinks story. In this sense, I want to suggest that her insistence upon (an inability to uphold and an inability not to try to uphold) stems from a *narrative* oversight of her texts: an oversight that is, essentially, an incapacity to expand perspective, and thus, to more fully push herself from the position of the White gaze. But if this is a narrative *error*, it is, at least for her readers, a gap that might be an opening.

That is to say: in *The Human Condition*, as in *Origins*, Arendt admits and even stresses the fact that the question of the “human condition” is not one we confront from some “outside,” some totally externalized, “objective” perch. In the “Prologue” to *The Human Condition*, Arendt wonders if “the emancipation and secularization of

the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but a god who was the Father of men in heaven, [will] end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures?”³⁹¹ Writing during the early stages of the Cold War, she suggests that,

today we may almost say that we have demonstrated even scientifically that, though we live now, and probably always will, under the earth’s conditions, we are not mere earth-bound creatures. Modern natural science owes its great triumphs to having looked upon and treated earth-bound nature from a truly universal viewpoint, that is, from an Archimedean standpoint taken, wilfully and explicitly, outside the earth.³⁹²

And yet, as its very title suggests, *The Human Condition* does not examine this potential “outside”; it is not a book that treats some possible human future, be it one of space exploration or automation or both. To such “preoccupations and perplexities,” Arendt writes in the “Prologue,” “this book does not offer an answer.”³⁹³ Instead: “What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears” in order to “think what we are doing.”³⁹⁴

Arendt takes up the “vantage point” of *life on earth*, life in the natural and material world into which we are born. Her decision to take up *this* vantage point, instead of some purportedly *outside* perspective is, I think, deeply tied to the

³⁹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2.

³⁹² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 11.

³⁹³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

³⁹⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

literariness of her work, to her commitment that politics (and, as it happens, political theory) is impossible without community, without story. Indeed, she stresses her reliance on an *internal* rather than *external* perspective in her exploration of “the human condition” and human affairs in a footnote to the book’s first chapter that connects her philosophy with her understanding of the relationship of storytelling to philosophy as such. Arendt states that

It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves—this would be like jumping over our own shadows. Moreover, nothing entitles us to assume that man has a nature or essence in the same sense as other things. In other words, if we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it, and the first prerequisite would be that he would be able to speak about a ‘who’ as though it were a ‘what.’³⁹⁵

In a footnote to the line, Arendt quotes Augustine on this point, and summarizes the line of argument here thus: that

the answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ is simply: ‘You are a man—whatever that may be’; and the answer to the question ‘What am I?’ can be given only by God who made man. ... The question about the nature of man ... can be settled only within the framework of a divinely revealed answer.³⁹⁶

But if “only a god” could tell us *what* we are, then this does not—or at least, should not—matter much for Arendt’s theory, on her own lights. As I have suggested

³⁹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.

³⁹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10-1.

both above and throughout this thesis, it is the *who* that matters to Arendt, the *who* that must be asked and answered of each person in order to constitute a political community. As she writes later in *The Human Condition*, a line I have quoted already, “Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: ‘Who are you?’” and if Arendt considers that the “disclosure of who somebody is” to be “implicit in both his words and his deeds,” she also, as I have argued, insists on the need for those words and deeds to be *received* and retold by somebody. Indeed, in the early part of *The Human Condition*—in a footnote, no less—she even shows an awareness for the way *different* versions of a tale (in this case, the Judeo-Christian creation narrative(s) of the Book of Genesis) can spawn different kinds of understandings. (“In the analysis of post classical political thought,” Arendt writes, “it is often quite illuminating to find out which of the two biblical versions of the creation story is cited.”)³⁹⁷

And yet: the “what” seems to creep in through Arendt’s analysis. By this I mean that for all her emphasis on integral nature of storytelling to politics, her theory is riddled with definitions and delineations, which are often given to the reader not only in a tone of assuredness but, seemingly, from a position of unassailability and indeed *objectivity*. Recall, for instance, the way that the “territorial” reading understands her work as defining “action,” “world,” and “nature” utterly discretely, a delineation that enables her to insist upon other distinctions among “public,” “private,” and the “social.” Even her commitment to storytelling shows signs of this attempt to

³⁹⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8.

pin down objective definitions. Her understanding of politics can only contain an “enacted story” and a “recorded one”; she does not (tries not to) deal with the interstitial space.

It is as if—and here we are back in the terrain of Sutpen, in the terrain of America, its myth and that myth’s elisions—her account of politics is only capable of extending a space of appearance wide enough for some ‘who’s, and that indeed, this who-ness is “proven” by the what-ness of those who are excluded. If this is so, it would be in keeping with her theoretical structure more generally. For instance, her very delineation of *action* depends on what she excludes. As Markell writes,

It is famously difficult, beyond this point, to secure agreement about just what Arendtian action is, but she seems perfectly clear about what it is not; and this—the recovery of a concept of action sharply distinguishable both from productive work and from necessary labor—is widely understood to be *The Human Condition*’s central contribution to political thought.³⁹⁸

And so if Arendt’s work is often read in terms of its definitions and delineations, rather than its anecdotes and allusions, perhaps this is the way she intended it, thus leaving us with a theory that draws equations between some things (enacted story/recorded story) and distinctions among other things (action/world, politics/material). But if this is what Arendt’s theory gives us, then we also have to reckon with the system of reading that underwrites it, a way of understanding the world that defines by delineation, by equivalencies and stark oppositions, a way of understanding and reading and narrativizing, that is to say, that also underpins notions

³⁹⁸ Markell, “Arendt’s Work,” 16.

of Whiteness in the United States. In his 1963 book, *The Fire Next Time*—a volume published the same year as *On Revolution* and only five years after *The Human Condition*—James Baldwin writes that:

a vast amount of the energy that goes into what we call the Negro problem is produced by the white man's profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white, not to be seen as he is, and at the same time a vast amount of the white anguish is rooted in the white man's equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released by the tyranny of his mirror.³⁹⁹

Baldwin describes Whiteness as something that is *created* by the desire of “white” people “not to be seen as he is,” a desire that then fuels the “Negro Problem.” Systemic racism—White supremacy—that is to say, is not produced by what Black people are but what White people need them to be in order to “prove” their own fictive image. “Difference” with another (an other) is used to cement “sameness” with an in-group, and here, we are back in the logic not just of Thomas Sutpen but also, I think, of Hannah Arendt, who can only tell us what politics *is* by telling us what it is not.

And yet, as I have tried to suggest above, there are ways of reading that are not so tied—need not be so tied—to what Baldwin terms, “the tyranny of [the] mirror,” to the tyranny of imitative mimesis, uncritical allusion. There is, I think, a limit to what Arendt can tell us if we read her the way she often read others: univocally, without accounting for shifts in tone, gaps in perspective, reading only her interlocutors

³⁹⁹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International Edition, 1993), 95. Given my discussion on Arendtian allusions, I feel the need to say: my allusion to Baldwin here, as singular as it is, does not do the writer justice, nor does it even really begin to trace the relationship between the work and ideas of Arendt and Baldwin. For more on the latter, see Butorac, “Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, and the Politics of Love.”

according her own gaze, and not through theirs. And so, I think, if we are to read Arendt and find in her work a politics, or at least political ideas, for the world that confronts us today, we cannot allow ourselves to only imitate her equations and reify her distinctions; we have to read the way that her work represents the human condition *not* in terms of “is and not” but in a way that *interrogates the relation* between presence and absence, the relation between what she says and what she may have elided. We have to read for the *allusions* and *mimetic structures* of her work, interrogating each one not only for what they reflect but what they do not, investigating the relationship between what she pulls in and what she (tries to) ignore.

(v)

Politics, in Arendt’s eyes and, I admit, mine, depends upon the story. But it also depends on our ability to recognize the way we must always push the boundaries of narrative, plumb further at its depths, its inflections, its (missing) perspectives. An old adage calls justice blind; I think what my argument here suggests is that perhaps, it is *moving*. By this, I do not mean that it is relative, entirely up to the discretion of whoever happens to be seated in the place of power. As Arendt’s discussion of the fictive nihilism of totalitarianism suggests, the story we tell ourselves of human existence can never be totally unhinged from world or from context. In this human-occupied earth where action and world and nature are, as Arendt suggests and Ephraim emphasizes, “entwined,” to tell a just story—to give a just accounting—means having some sort of relationship with the “given,” and some measure of *gratitude* for it. But how we approach that given, and how we understand it, is not pre-ordained or set in stone, and if the story we tell of it is not entirely fictive, that this not

to say that there is no element of it that allies it with the stuff of fiction and with literature, with prose and poetry. To be grateful for *some kind of given* does not mean—*contra* Arendt in her “Reflections on Little Rock”—that any of us gets to take our own understanding of someone else’s perspective (or even our own *sympathy* for someone else’s perspective) for granted, and it certainly does not mean (again, *contra* Arendt) that we can ever insist of our readers that they do “likewise.”⁴⁰⁰

If we are to be not just good readers, but good just ones, I think we have to consider the extent to which to read Arendt is always to read Arendt through Faulkner, and Faulkner through Euripides, and the other way around, to attempt to consider the extent to which what is there might appear from a different vantage point. There are times when I read Arendt’s work and think that, on some level, she already knows this. Perhaps, I think, this is why she ends *Origins* with two allusions, one Faulknerian, one Biblical. The passage reads:

For those who were expelled from humanity and from human history and thereby deprived of their human condition need the solidarity of all men to assure them of their rightful place in ‘man’s enduring chronicle.’ At least we can cry out to each one of those who rightly is in despair: ‘Do thyself no harm; for we are all here.’ (*Acts*, 16:28).⁴⁰¹

When Arendt wrote *On Revolution*, she produced a book that focused on *some* founding figures of *an* America that we are today confronting as not then, and certainly not now, *revolutionary* enough. All too often, in Arendt’s text, and in

⁴⁰⁰ Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 45.

⁴⁰¹ Arendt, *Origins*, 632.

American history, claims of *newness*—like claims of oldness—engender only a repeated pattern of injustices: an imitative mimesis, an allusion that deadens. But I don't think that Arendt's work (or America's) has to be read only for what it names explicitly, any more than we have to accept all of what it suggests implicitly. In that sense, I have to wonder if the revolutionary impact and import of Arendt's account of storytelling can only emerge if we stop thinking in terms of *newness* and *oldness* but instead start to grapple with the expansiveness of the *we* who are *all here*, that expansive *we* emergent in the allusions she makes, the readers who follow them, so that we read for *who* and *what* are here and not here and still can be.

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