

Marginal semiotics*

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Faulkner's Marginal Couple focuses on Faulkner's fiction written during the 1930s, with major emphasis on the novels *Light in August*, *The Wild Palms*, *Sanctuary*, *Pylon*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Duvall's study is a reaction against what he regards as a dominant view of Faulkner's fiction. This view, best exemplified in the writings of Cleanth Brooks, sees the fiction as built on an opposition between the community (the norm) and the individual (the deviant). 'The community [in Brooks's view] is good because it provides tradition, continuity, and normative values; the individual threatens these values with a distorted thinking' (p. xiv).

Duvall's alternative view is that Faulkner's fiction of the 1930s repeatedly portrays the union of marginalized characters:

At the boundaries of the community, outcast individuals tend to form couples whose relationships defy communal norms. ... [Their relations] invert the hierarchy of male dominance (the males are passive; the females are active); they are androgynously marked in appearance; and the women characters desire roles not traditionally allowed them by their culture. (p. xiv)

From this brief synopsis, it is obvious that Duvall primarily addresses his book to fellow literary scholars and students of Faulkner. Also apparent is the impact of feminist criticism. What is not apparent from the above remarks, and what makes his book of potential interest to readers of *Semiotica*, is that Duvall claims that his method of analyzing Faulkner's fiction 'is primarily structuralist, with a special debt to the narrative semiotics of Greimas' (p. xv). As might be expected, Duvall makes use of Greimas's famous semiotic square, but he also draws upon Greimas's actantial analysis.

In this discussion of Duvall's book, I will focus on theoretical and methodological issues rather than the details of Duvall's analyses of

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individual novels. However, Duvall's methodology cannot be properly evaluated without making some reference to Faulkner's fiction. Originally I had intended to move beyond a critique of Duvall's use of Greimas and examine Greimas's theory itself, but that task, I have decided, is best deferred to another occasion.¹ I have limited myself here to a few succinct remarks about Greimas's semiotics. Duvall's work provides the occasion to discuss some general issues in narrative semiotics that are not tied to any one researcher's approach. One is the question of what implications, if any, the traditional genre distinction between short story and novel has for the theory and methodology of narrative semiotics. A related matter is the methodological implications of the distinction between analysis of a single work and that of a collection of works.

A fair amount of space will be devoted to Duvall's arguments with Brooks's criticism of Faulkner. A feud between literary scholars may seem marginal to narrative semiotics, but it does have implications that bear on Duvall's claim to 'follow the path of structural narrative analysis' (p. 3). One question that emerges is the theoretical compatibility of structuralist analysis and feminist criticism, to which Duvall is also indebted.

Let us begin by examining Duvall's claim to 'follow the path of structural narrative analysis'. In an endnote to that claim, Duvall states:

Both Propp and Lévi-Strauss saw the value of searching for structural parallels between narratives. Their methods allowed them to categorize folk tales and myths according to structural rather than manifest markers. ... Narratology from Propp to Lévi-Strauss to Greimas thus invites us to question the content-centered distinction between Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and non-Yoknapatawpha novels and stories still current in Faulkner studies. ... This Yoknapatawpha/non-Yoknapatawpha split works against a search for homologous structures in the whole of Faulkner's texts. (p. 134)

Duvall's remarks do not acknowledge some fundamental differences in the methodologies of Propp and Lévi-Strauss that have long been recognized. One striking conclusion that Propp (1968: 23) reached is that 'All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure'. Lévi-Strauss (1960: 138) concedes that before Propp we did not know what the tales in Propp's corpus had in common; but after Propp, we are deprived of the means for knowing how the tales differ from one another. Lévi-Strauss suggests that it is as if Propp had focused just on syntax and ignored vocabulary (p. 149).

This difference can be illustrated with a very simple example from the domain of linguistic analysis. Consider two sentences such as *The cat sat on the mat* and *The bird sang in the tree*. From the perspective of syntactic structure, the sentences are identical. It is only when we take into account

the particular lexical items that make up each sentence that we can describe how they differ; e.g., *mat* is not the same word as *tree*. Taking a more abstract view, we could perceive an opposition between low and high; or the cat could be seen as terrestrial, as opposed to the bird as celestial. This highly simplified example does give some idea of a basic difference between the two approaches to narrative analysis.

With this in mind, we can see that Duvall's claim that the Yoknapatawpha/non-Yoknapatawpha distinction 'works against a search for homologous structures' does not, in fact, necessarily follow. The notion of homologation refers to a correlation between two oppositions, A:B::C:D. It is conceivable that the Yoknapatawpha/non-Yoknapatawpha distinction could be correlated with some other opposition. This is admittedly a relatively minor point, but one worth making.

Let us briefly consider one specific example of Duvall's search for homologous structures in a Yoknapatawpha and a non-Yoknapatawpha novel. Duvall asserts that the non-Yoknapatawpha novel *The Wild Palms* repeats the narrative structure of the Yoknapatawpha novel *Light in August* (p. 37). Each is said to employ two plots — one tragic, one comic — to tell a single story (p. xvii).

Here are the 'larger structural parallels between *The Wild Palms* and *Light in August*' that Duvall posits:

The tragic lovers Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer are to Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden what the tall convict and the hill woman are to Byron Bunch and Lena Grove. Like Joanna ... Charlotte has notions of romantic love largely determined by literary convention. Harry, though dissimilar to Joe in most respects, remains the passive partner in the relationship. Both males kill with a blade the women they love in response to a struggle over how the couple will live their future lives together. In both cases, the struggle originates as a reaction to the news of the woman's pregnancy. The tall convict and the hill woman, on the other hand, are almost a parodic inversion of Byron Bunch and Lena Grove — a story of man's hatred, rather than love, at first sight. (p. 39)

Note first of all that these remarks do not begin to describe the complete plot of either novel. Furthermore, there is no indication that the above observations are anything other than the result of impressionistic reading, rather than a detailed analysis of the two novels. Duvall is able to formulate these parallels — almost a parody of Lévi-Straussian analysis — only by forcing episodes into a conformity they in fact lack.² First of all, Joanna is not really pregnant, but is entering menopause. Joe kills her because he does not want to accede to her request to kneel and pray with her. Charlotte, in contrast, is really pregnant, and she dies from an

abortion that Harry only reluctantly performs on her after her repeated implorations. (Harry is a trained physician, it should be noted.)

Duvall also notes some smaller-scale parallels between *The Wild Palms* and *Light in August*. For example, the doctor's wife Martha in *The Wild Palms* — the doctor Harry calls when Charlotte begins hemorrhaging — is said to be a 'reincarnation' of Martha Armstid in *Light in August*:

Mrs. Armstid is a 'gray woman not plump and not thin, manhard, workhard, in a serviceable gray garment' (*LA*, 17) 'with a savage screw of gray hair at the base of her skull' (*LA*, 19). The other Martha 'with her gray hair screwed into papers' (*WP*, 10) is 'a shapeless woman yet not fat ... who had begun to turn gray all over about ten years ago' (*WP*, 9). (p. 40–41)

Although Duvall freely appeals to similarities in physical description here, and elsewhere, to establish parallels between different narratives, he also rejects such appeals when he finds it convenient. For example, commenting on one critic's observation that some characters in *Pylon* recall others in *Light in August*, Duvall says that

In *Pylon*'s reporter ... Millgate sees another Byron Bunch, but an ironic one. ... If, however, we consider not so much physical appearance and mannerisms and focus instead on the male's relationship to the woman, then Shumann — not the reporter — appears closer to characters such as Byron [and] Henry Stribling in 'Hair'. (p. 83)

Before we consider the use Duvall makes of Greimas's notions of actant and semiotic square, let me cite one passage from Duvall's discussion of *Light in August* that gives a sense of the type of 'semiotic' observations to be found in his book:

That Lena finds Byron occurs only through the similarity of Byron's name (Bunch) to that of the true father (Burch) and suggests the slippage of the signified (maternity) under the signifier (paternity); in this minimal difference of the signifier — *r/n* — Lucas may be seen as the self-castrating male (for what is the *r* but a castrated *n*?) who denies both patronymic and paternity. (p. 34)

Turning now to specifically Greimassian notions, Duvall says he finds 'particularly powerful' Greimas's

model of actantial relations in which he sets forth the possibilities for narrative action. In this model, an elaboration and reworking of Vladimir Propp's structural analysis of Russian folk tales, narrative possibilities are played out by six 'actants' (entities that act) along the axes of knowledge (or communication), desire, and power (or conflict). In this study, I am particularly interested in the knowledge/

communication axis. Along this axis, the 'destinator' (e.g., the king) sets up an object (e.g., the grail) for the 'destinee' (e.g., the knight). (p. xv)

One minor point to note here is Duvall's use of *destinator* and *destinee* for Greimas's *destinateur* and *destinataire*, respectively. Duvall recognizes that the usual translations are *sender* and *receiver* (or *addresser* and *addressee*); but he feels that 'if we shift slightly the meaning of the Middle English word *destinator* from "he who destines" to "that which destines", then we are much closer to the sense of Greimas' *destinateur* than are the other translations' (p. xv).

Note, however, that Duvall cites only English translations of Greimas. (In fact, only three works are cited: *Structural Semantics*, the Greimas-Courtés *Dictionary*, and 'The interaction of semiotic constraints'.) My experience with most such translations is that they offer an unreliable guide to Greimas's meaning. And the choice of archaic English terms cannot aid in comprehension.

A more substantive criticism is that Duvall's remarks seem to indicate a confusion on his part between 'functional' analysis and 'actantial' analysis. The former basically deals with the 'possibilities for narrative action'. Actantial analysis deals essentially with characters in terms of their role in the plot structure, which can be represented by a sequence of functions.

But Duvall never presents a plot analysis, along Proppian lines, of a single work. He wrenches actantial analysis out of its subordination to plot analysis, noting at one point that 'a repetition of [a] destinator figure may point to a larger social or ideological structure' (p. xv). Furthermore, he primarily refers to only one actant, the 'destinator', and the others are either ignored or mentioned only in passing — hence ignoring the fact that the set of actants are seen as forming a system.

Consider the following remarks Duvall makes about Lena Grove, a character in Faulkner's *Light in August*:

In chapter 1, Lena Grove's narrative program dominates because it occupies the most textual space and because her object — to find Lucas Burch — is foregrounded. For Lena, as Greimasian subject, her destinator is both nature and culture or, more precisely, culture's interpretation of nature: she becomes pregnant (a fact of nature) and her brother calls her a whore (a cultural judgment that values nature). Lena's older brother, then, is her particular destinator (the king giving the knight his quest, as it were), but as the spokesperson of culture he is also an embodiment of the more ideological destinator — culture (especially patriarchal language) reading nature (especially female sexuality), an act that recurs in a great number of the novel's other narrative programs. (p. 25)

The above remarks concerning Lena's 'destinator' pertain to a couple of pages at the beginning of the novel — a flashback briefly explaining why she is on the road in Mississippi. Lena's parents died when she was twelve years old, and she went to live with her brother and his wife.

She [Lena] slept in a leanto room at the back of the house. It had a window which she learned to open and close again in the dark without making a sound ... She had lived there eight years before she opened the window for the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all.... The sister-in-law told the brother. Then he remarked her changing shape.... He called her whore. He accused the right man ... but she would not admit it, though the man had departed six months ago. She just repeated stubbornly, 'He's going to send for me.' ... Two weeks later she climbed again through the window. (pp. 5-6)

Clearly, Lena's brother did not banish her from his home. Also, this whole incident is narrated in a summary fashion — it is background information. This is not an isolated example; many other instances could be cited in which Duvall gives detailed analyses of minor incidents that Faulkner presents in a summary fashion. Admittedly, it is sometimes necessary to 'expand' the narrative text, but this can be justified only in the context of a detailed analysis of plot structure — which Duvall at no point provides. To speak glibly of characters' 'narrative programs' is not to offer any real analysis of plot.

Duvall makes frequent use of the notion of 'destinator', but there would be little point in considering further instances. However, a bizarre twist in his use of the notion does merit mention. In a discussion of the novel *Sanctuary* Duvall posits a destinator-destinatee relationship between the fictional character Ruby and literary critics who have written about *Sanctuary* (see pp. 74-75).

Any criticism of Duvall's use of *destinator* must be tempered by an acknowledgment that Greimas's own use of *destinateur* is often less than clear. In fact, his whole system of actants is open to stringent criticism, but I will limit myself to a couple of general observations here.³ When Duvall refers to six actants recognized by Greimas, he has reference to the analysis in Greimas (1966): addresser/sender (*destinateur*), addressee/receiver (*destinataire*), subject, object, helper, and opponent. One striking indication of a glaring inadequacy in Greimas's analysis is that he downgrades Propp's role of villain to 'opponent' on a par with the role of helper; and he characterizes the term *villain* as a pejorative designation for opponent (Greimas 1966: 179). And the role of opponent, like that of helper, is seen as being of secondary importance; it is characterized as

a circumstantial participant and not a true 'actant' of the spectacle (p. 179).

Thus Greimas effectively reduces his system of actants to only four. However, he later has to reintroduce the notion of a major antagonist. The term *addresser* is projected onto the semiotic square, giving rise to four actantial positions: addresser, anti-addresser, non-addresser, and non-anti-addresser. But only addresser/anti-addresser is used to any extent; and this pair is said to be correlative to that of subject/anti-subject, which is needed to account for the 'polemic' structure of narrative discourse (see the entry *Anti-destinateur* in Greimas and Courtés 1979).

By 'polemic' structure Greimas presumably has in mind what I earlier termed 'dramatic' structure, one of two types of narrative structure (Hendricks 1975). Dramatic structure is a matter of an agonistic struggle between protagonist and antagonist. It is symptomatic of Greimas's attempt to transcend the distinction between narrative and expository that he uses the term *polemic*.

Let us turn now to a consideration of the only other major notion of Greimas's that Duvall attempts to use, that of the semiotic square. This is presented in the final chapter of the book, entitled 'Female subject positions in Faulkner'.⁴

According to Duvall, 'Faulkner's fiction from "Hair" (1930) to "Tomorrow" (1940) presents various possibilities of unions between women and men. Charting ... [those] unions and the woman's subjectivity within those unions requires that we consider both the various subject positions Faulkner's women occupy as sexual beings and the narrative movements between these positions' (p. 119). Duvall lists the following five possible narrative movements (p. 120):

1. virgin → wife
2. virgin → wife → adulteress
3. virgin → spinster
4. virgin → prostitute
5. virgin → sexually active (called whore) → wife

Duvall claims that 'Faulkner's fiction exhibits a recurring narrative movement (no. 5 above) in which a virgin takes or is taken by a premarital lover and then later marries another man' (p. 120).

Among the examples he cites are Temple Drake in *Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun*, and Lena Grove in *Light in August*. However, even at this point objections can be raised. Temple becomes a wife only in *Requiem for a Nun*, so the 'narrative movement' in this case spans two separate novels. In the case of Lena Grove, her sexual activity is related

in a very brief flashback. She remains sexually inactive for the balance of the novel, which ends with the episode of her, still unmarried, repulsing the sexual advances of Byron Bunch.

Duvall regards the 'subject positions' of wife, prostitute, virgin, and spinster as primary; and these he assimilates to Greimas's semiotic square based on *devoir* (see Figure 1).

Duvall makes equivocal claims for what this square is supposed to represent. Immediately after presenting it, he says, 'The question I would hope the reader might ask is not whether this square represents Faulkner's conception of female-male sexual relations but rather, what does such an anthropological approach allow us to see in the texts of William Faulkner?' (pp. 122-123). In the Preface, however, he states his intention to construct a semiotic square 'of the various subject positions women as sexual beings occupy in *Faulkner's world*' (p. xviii; emphasis added). These remarks suggest a focus on narrative possibilities totally within Faulkner's fiction, whereas reference to an 'anthropological approach' implies a concern for extratextual reality and its reflection within the texts. (Incidentally, 'anthropological approach' does not correctly characterize Greimas's own conception of the semiotic square, which is a matter of deduction, not induction.)

From an 'anthropological' (empirical) perspective, Duvall's square leaves much to be desired. It could be argued that the positions of marriage and prostitution should be reversed. If sexual relations are prescribed in marriage, then one should not talk about the possibility of rape in marriage (which Duvall at one point alludes to in the case of Faulkner and his wife Estelle).

How well does Duvall's square in fact represent Faulkner's conception of female-male sexual relations? Let us briefly consider *Go Down, Moses*, a book Duvall mentions only in passing. There is a scene in 'The bear', a major part of the book, in which, as synopsized by Brooks (1963: 268), Isaac McCaslin's wife 'locks the door of their rented room and calls him

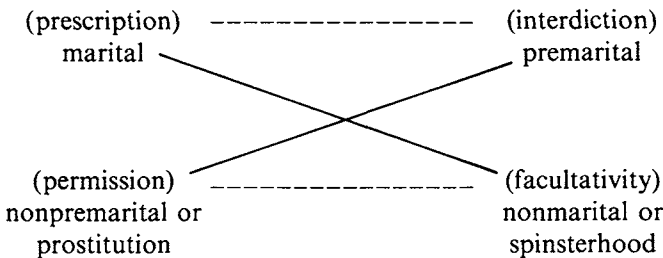


Figure 1

to her bed, using her body to extort from him [Isaac] the promise that he will reassume possession of the plantation', an inheritance he had renounced. This scene, one of the most powerful in Faulkner, concludes as follows:

he ... lay spent on the insatiate immemorial beach and again with a movement one time more older than man she turned and freed herself and on their wedding night she had cried and he thought she was crying now at first, into the tossed and wadded pillow, the voice coming from somewhere between the pillow and the cachinnation: 'And that's all. That's all from me. If this dont get you that son you talk about, it wont be mine:' lying on her side, her back to the empty room, laughing and laughing. (p. 315)

At the very beginning of *Go Down, Moses* Ike McCaslin is described as 'past seventy ... a widower now [for twenty years] and uncle to half a county and father to no one'.

The above scene is certainly one confirmation of Duvall's judgment that 'Faulkner's novels and stories repeatedly present failed marriages that become poisonous environments for the cultivation of the next generation' (p. 130) — but his semiotic square of sexual relations does not begin to capture this fact. Relevant here is Brooks's (1963: 268) observation that 'Many years after the publication of *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner, answering questions at the University of Virginia, made some rather harsh comments on Isaac's wife. He called her ethics those of a prostitute'.

The biggest failure of Duvall's semiotic square is that it fails to shed light on the question he poses at the beginning of the chapter in which the square is presented: why in Faulkner's novels and stories does a man call a woman a whore? A recurrent answer in Faulkner's fiction, according to Duvall, is that 'a woman is called a whore whenever her sexuality exceeds or threatens to exceed male control' (p. 119). The term *whore*, it is clear, is distinct from that of *prostitute*. As Duvall recognizes, *whore* is 'a term that inaccurately and moralistically names the transitional stage [between virginity and marriage]' (p. 120). Thus, what Duvall earlier characterized as 'a recurring narrative movement', namely

virgin → sexually active (called whore) → wife

is not representable in terms of the semiotic square he presents, though in the Preface he states that 'I hope to describe the rules governing transformations from position to position' (p. xviii).

Duvall's attempt to use the semiotic square, it must be concluded, is just another instance to add to 'the hundreds of applications, benighted

and inconsistent in their conclusions, that have been made of the famous semiotic square' (Segre 1984: 276). This outcome was almost preordained, for Duvall has, in effect, reduced semiotics to just one of a grab-bag of tools he feels he has at his disposal. It is as if Duvall has taken to heart one literary scholar's call for '[us] outsiders or interlopers ... to *steal* the pieces [of Greimassian semiotics] that interest or fascinate us, and to carry off our fragmentary booty to our intellectual caves' (Jameson 1987: viii). This suggestion cannot fail to wreak havoc with Greimas's theory, which at its best is marked by a systematicity and an interrelatedness of key terms that bespeaks the influence of Hjelmslev.

Duvall's lack of success in 'following the path of structural narrative analysis' is not simply due to his superficial knowledge of theory and methodology. Duvall has other goals than just a description of Faulkner's fiction of the 1930s, as he makes clear when he notes that his book 'began as a response to two conflicting desires — to read Faulkner ... and to lend whatever small support I, as a man, might to improving the conditions of women in our society' (p. xi). One might well wonder why the author saw these two desires as in conflict. His answer is that the conflict resulted, on the one hand, from hearing feminist critics build a case against Faulkner as a misogynist; and, on the other, from his conviction that Faulkner's fiction is 'potentially liberating, not repressive' (p. xi). Thus, one goal of Duvall's book is a defense of Faulkner.

Duvall's defense of Faulkner takes the following form. First he quotes an extended passage from an essay by Josephine Donovan, who says of *Light in August*: 'The rank misogyny and racism which run through the moral text make it impossible for me as a feminist and humanist to suspend disbelief and to accept the probabilities of Faulkner's fictional world'. Duvall then comments:

If the position is that one should simply not read Faulkner, then Donovan's perceptions might be understandable, but to assert with outrage that Faulkner is a fascist or that Faulkner is a misogynist is an ineffective tactic if one's goal is to have an impact on the teaching of the texts of William Faulkner. What Donovan describes is not so much the Faulknerian text, but rather the conventions of a masculinist interpretive discourse that her comments in part reproduce. (p. 16)⁵

In other words, it is not Faulkner's texts that are objectionable, but the dominant critical interpretation of those texts, which is primarily represented in the writings of Cleanth Brooks.⁶

What Duvall finds objectionable about his Faulkner criticism is that he sees Brooks as little more than a mouthpiece of Southern Agrarianism: 'Gaining its entry through the literary analysis of Cleanth Brooks, South-

ern Agrarianism silently informs the discourse of Faulkner studies' (p. 10).

Brooks's Agrarian perspective on Faulkner may be summed up in the concept of community: 'the powerful though invisible force that quietly exerts itself in so much of Faulkner's work' (Brooks 1963: 52). According to Duvall, the term *community* as used by Brooks 'carries a heavy ideological burden which we may partially unpack by examining his earlier essays and lectures' (p. 7). Such an examination yields the following truisms: the community is centered on the family; the family depends on the rigid maintenance of sharply divided gender roles (men are active, women are passive); female characters who do not fit the male/female dichotomy are deviants; there are no deviant male characters, only innocents (pp. 7-9).

Much of what Duvall says about Brooks cannot be disputed. The influence of Southern Agrarianism is clearly evident in Brooks's (1963) study of Faulkner; e.g., 'Faulkner's sense of history and his sense of participation in a living tradition have been of the utmost importance. Faulkner's work ... embodies a criticism of the prevailing commercial and urban culture, a criticism made from the standpoint of a provincial and traditional culture' (p. 2).

However, it should be stressed that Duvall presents only a one-sided discussion. First, Duvall overlooks important antecedents to Brooks's view of Faulkner's fiction. Whereas Duvall points out that 'Brooks aptly dedicated *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* to Warren and pays homage to both Warren and Lytle [Southern Agrarians] in the book's preface' (p. 11), he totally fails to mention that among those Brooks thanks is the Northern liberal Malcolm Cowley. Brooks (1963: x) acknowledges that Cowley's 'introduction to *The Portable Faulkner* gave powerful impetus and direction to the serious criticism of Faulkner'.

Cowley's essay, in turn, is seen by Hoffman and Vickery (1963: 11), editors of an anthology of Faulkner criticism, as the 'fullest and in many respects the most ingenious adaptation' of an earlier essay by O'Donnell, 'Faulkner's mythology', which they say 'established the pattern of a very distinguished form of interpretation' (p. 8).

Duvall mentions O'Donnell only in passing, and in a way that implies that he is associated with the Agrarians: 'Brooks ... takes his stand among those critics from George Marion O'Donnell of the 1930s to M. E. Bradford of today who have created in Faulkner "a traditional moralist ...", one who justifies the ways of the "Southern social-economic-ethical tradition" to the world (O'Donnell, 82)' (p. 10). (Incidentally, through an oversight Duvall fails to include the O'Donnell essay in his list of 'Works cited'.)

Not only does Duvall overlook or downplay these antecedents to

Brooks, he also overlooks a very important side of Brooks's criticism. Consider the following remarks by Brooks (1963: 4): 'Much of [Faulkner criticism] takes his fiction to be sociology. ... Particular insights and moral judgments that the critic has derived from fictional contexts are smuggled across the frontier into the realm of historical fact and become generalizations about Southern culture'. As an example, he cites an article by a physician that was published in the *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* on Faulkner's depiction of the idiot Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*. The physician found this portrayal to run counter to clinical facts about idiots. Furthermore, he notes that Faulkner also has his legal facts wrong; Mississippi state statutes are cited which would have forbidden castration of institutionalized individuals. Brooks comments:

Though the present case is extreme, anything calculated to shake the reader's confidence in the literal accuracy of Faulkner's 'facts' is probably to be commended What is of basic concern here is what is always of concern in literature: the relation of truth of fact to aesthetic value — of 'truth of reference' to 'truth of coherence'. (pp. 5-6)

Brooks then notes that

This misplaced stress upon realism might seem to find its proper corrective in a compensating stress upon symbolism. ... But a good deal of Faulkner criticism has to be described as little better than symbol-mongering. ... It magnifies details irresponsibly. ... It views the novel not as a responsible context with its own network of interrelations but as a sort of grab bag out of which particular symbols can be drawn. (p. 6)

In the above remarks it is not Brooks the Southern Agrarian who is speaking, but Brooks the New Critic, the literary formalist. Both voices are clearly present in his study of Faulkner, but it is the former that predominates, as Burke (1966) makes clear in his stimulating discussion of Brooks.

Brooks can jump from a formalist position in one sentence to a regionalist position in the next, as the following remarks by Burke show:

Formalistically, we can sympathize with Mr. Brooks when he writes, 'Faulkner is writing fiction, not sociology or history, and he has employed all the devices for heightening, special focus, and in some instances, distortion that fiction demands and justifies'. But think what is implied in the very next sentence: 'Still, the picture of the yeoman farmer and the poor white that emerges is perfectly consonant with the findings recorded in Owsley's history'. The 'distortions' are justified Formalistically, as resources natural to fiction; but insofar as some aspects of the work reflect what the writer who is here being cited with approval

takes to correspond with an actual social ... situation outside the work ... a wholly non-Formalist criterion is introduced. (p. 502)

Burke recognizes that Brooks's book contains a great deal of excellent formalist analysis. Also, Brooks has 'many valuable things to say about the extrapoetic *situations* from which Faulkner is writing'; but, he adds, 'one does not convert them into full-blown Formalist criticism simply by an occasional slighting reference to sociology. They *are* sociological' (p. 499).

Burke himself has done some excellent formalist analysis, and he has some interesting suggestions for such an approach to Faulkner. From a formalist perspective, he notes, one will not regard, say, violence as reflecting a social situation, but as a 'narrator's device for bringing things to a point of crisis' (p. 503). Likewise, characters would be viewed formally in terms of their contribution to furthering the plot and not as 'representative of the author's general attitude toward life, or as examples of prevailing cultural conditions' (p. 487).

It would seem that the formalist side of Brooks's study of Faulkner, properly developed, could yield the defense of Faulkner's texts that Duvall wants to make. Admittedly, it is unlikely that a purely formal analysis of Faulkner would totally appease feminist critics and others who feel the need to move beyond a rejection of the referential relation, but it would be a step in the right direction. The indisputable fact is that what we have here is not a simple issue of either attending to the referential relation or not attending to it. No text, even a non-fictional narrative, offers a totally transparent 'window' on reality.

Duvall, incredibly, seems totally unaware of this issue. First of all, he only indirectly acknowledges Brooks's position as a New Critic. The dust jacket blurb for Duvall's book states that the book 'uncovers what the New Criticism concealed' about the nature of Faulkner's fiction. And within the book Duvall backhandedly links formalism with Southern Agrarianism:

Perhaps Grant Webster goes too far when he claims in *The Republic of Letters* that the Agrarians, having failed in their larger political goals, settled instead for securing English departments through the 'Tory formalism' of New Criticism, yet the Agrarians succeeded admirably in transforming their concerns into the issues of Faulkner studies. (p. 12)

It is not clear how the expression '*Tory formalism*' of *New Criticism* is intended to be interpreted — i.e., as asserting that all formalism is extremely conservative or just that of the New Criticism. In any case, the expression is sheer nonsense. Formalism, broadly interpreted (as a con-

cern for internal relations of parts to a whole, as opposed to external functions of these parts or of the whole) is an intellectual position that transcends political ideologies and cultural boundaries. Note that Greimas can be labeled a formalist in a general sense, as the following remark makes clear:

... the problem of truth, as we treat it here, is totally independent of an *external designatum*. By that, we mean that from a semiotic point of view the narrative establishes its own 'intrinsic truth', for example, the one that is implicitly posited in the case of our simple narrative: the exchange of victory over the dragon against the daughter given in marriage is characterized by truth. There, we have a sort of *internal designatum* (Greimas and Courtés 1976: 441)

Brooks, of course, knows that he is a formalist; and the fact that he strays far from the path of formalism in his study of Faulkner may be explained by Burke's comment that

all of the works discussed in [Brooks's] earlier volume *The Well Wrought Urn* are poems, written under local conditions to which the critic was a comparative stranger. Here he is dealing with narrative prose that uses as its active background an extraliterary scene known to the critic intimately. The difference is so great, one can readily understand why Formalist criticism should fly out the window when Regionalist love comes in the door. (p. 506)

Duvall, on the other hand, seems totally incognizant that his claim that 'my method of analysis in thinking about Faulkner's fiction is primarily structuralist, with a special debt to the narrative semiotics of Greimas' (p. xv) commits him to a formalist position that is incompatible in many respects with the feminist perspective he also adopts.

We have already seen that Duvall's attempts at structuralist/semiotic analysis are rather marginal. He further dilutes such analyses by frequently eschewing formalist principles. For example, he makes several references to Mississippi law and its interpretation in court cases; e.g., in his discussion of *Light in August* (p. 23). Particularly telling are the following remarks he makes in a discussion of *Sanctuary*:

That Temple's jury is all-male might strike the modern reader as an anomaly, yet this is historically accurate. In Mississippi of the late 1920s when Faulkner was writing *Sanctuary*, only males over the age of twenty-one could serve as jurors (*Laws of Miss., 1914*, ch. 208). In fact, women were not allowed to serve on juries in Mississippi until 1968, a fact that reflects a cultural attitude that woman's proper sphere of influence is in the home and not in public (*Gen. Laws of Miss., 1968*, chapter 335). Although Faulkner's courtrooms are on this score representationally correct, on another point of law — the competency of witnesses —

Faulkner's fictions are inconsistent and at times incorrect. This repeated incorrectness, which circuitously leads us back to Temple's motivation for her perjury, suggests that the courtroom in the texts of William Faulkner is a nonmimetic space that foregrounds the silencing of women by patriarchy.... (p. 75-76)

Duvall also does not hesitate to make appeals to Faulkner's personal life:

Brooks' scheme — community based on family in turn based on rigidly divided gender roles — cannot adequately account for newly disclosed facts about Faulkner's life. How does one take a man whose own marriage was a shambles and turn him into the defender of the sanctity of the family? Both the Faulkners were alcoholics capable of cruel and thoughtless behavior, but whether Estelle denied William sex after the birth of their daughter Jill or whether he raped his wife one night leads us perhaps into a realm of speculation about the self-interest of the individuals making these claims. Nevertheless, there seems to have been little significant communication between husband and wife, as Faulkner's several extra-marital relationships suggest. (p. 9-10)

Duvall's study of Faulkner is like Brooks's in that it is a mixture of formalist and 'sociological' analysis. And the similarity does not end there. Consider, for example, Brooks's discussion bearing on the problematic narrative unity of *Light in August*. He notes that the reader

can scarcely be blamed if he goes on to ask whether *Light in August* is a novel at all. What possible relation is there between the two main characters, Lena and Joe Christmas, who never meet and who go their separate ways, the one placidly, the other violently? There is obviously the bare fact of contrast; but is there anything more? Do not these characters between them rend the book in two? ... Lena and Joe Christmas, as everyone has seen, stand in obvious contrast to each other. Their very likenesses stress their basic differences. Both are orphans; both escape from home by crawling out a window; both are betrayed by their first loves; both in the course of their wanderings come to Jefferson. But how different they are in relation to society! ... Joe repels, Lena attracts the force of the community into which they both come as strangers. (p. 55)

Now compare these remarks by Duvall:

Besides sharing the common destinator ... Joe and Lena share a number of other structural parallels, many of which have been noted frequently but which bear repeating here: both are orphans who lead early lives of deprivation ... both respond to adolescent sexual longings and escape through windows to see their first lovers ... both are betrayed and left in trouble by their more experienced lovers; both then set off on the road ... and ... both are immediately perceived as strangers ... when they reach Jefferson. Yet despite these similarities, their differ-

ences are crucial. ... At the Armstids' Lena graciously accepts food, but Joe ... tells Byron, 'I aint hungry. Keep your muck'. (p. 27-28)

Ironically, given Duvall's strongly negative feelings towards Brooks's criticism of Faulkner, the connection between Duvall's study of Faulkner and that of Brooks runs even deeper than the similarity noted above. Not only do both give prominence to the notion of community — which Burke (1966: 504) has characterized as 'the sociological motive par excellence' — but Duvall's notion of community is an inversion, or mirror image, of Brooks's.

We have already seen that Duvall claims that Faulkner's fiction of the 1930s focuses on unions of marginalized characters. Duvall further claims, 'If one were to speak of these unions from within the traditional discourse of Faulkner studies, one might call them *deviant couples*. ... But ... I would prefer to call these couples *alternative communities*, inasmuch as they begin to question the sexual politics of such textual communities as Jefferson' (pp. 3-4).

Duvall goes out of his way to elevate a couple into a 'community' precisely in order to counter Brooks's notion of community. Just as Brooks's notion is an extratextual one, so likewise is Duvall's. Duvall wants to give due recognition to a reality that exists outside the fiction. (According to the description on the dust jacket, Duvall's book uncovers the fact that Faulkner's fiction 'traces the full androgynous spectrum of the human condition'.)

Duvall believes that structuralism and semiotics can provide a rationale for his concept of community:

In order to step outside the opposition of the individual and the community, we need to redefine the minimal constituent unit of community in a way that dislodges the Agrarian assumption that the family is the basic unit. Here structuralism and semiotics provide a way to think through such a task. I propose to reassess the Faulknerian community through A.J. Greimas' conception of reciprocal communication as an exchange constituting a contract (semiotic if not always legal) and Roman Jakobson's communication model outlined in 'Linguistics and Poetics'. ... Jakobson's model allows for a radically different way of understanding the minimal constituent unit of community: two people sharing a code or communication circuit. ... This structuralist/semiotic view, then, contends that community is founded on communication and dialogue. ... [A] counterforce to the hegemonic community requires only two people. (pp. xiv-xv)

Duvall's remarks constitute an inappropriate use of technical notions and are based on an inadequate knowledge of the concepts he invokes. An exploration of this issue will allow some interesting points to be made.

Let us begin by noting the obvious — there is an etymological link

between *community* and *communication*, namely Latin *communis*, 'common'. But each term has its own complex range of senses and uses. The sense of *community* that is closest to Duvall's use is that of 'a group of people marked by a common characteristic but living within a larger society that does not share that characteristic', e.g., *the Chinese community in New York* (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*). The notion of 'group' is rather vague. Note that in English the word *community* has a more complex set of connotations than does the more neutral term *group*.

Duvall is apparently unaware of the technical term *speech community* in linguistic theory. According to one linguist, 'Each language defines a *speech community*: the whole set of people who communicate with each other, directly or indirectly, via the common language' (Hockett 1958: 8). Some speech communities, Hockett notes, are extremely large, e.g., English, with several hundred million speakers. 'At the opposite extreme stands a language like Chitimacha, an American Indian language which in the late 1930's had only two speakers left. When a language reaches such straits as this, it is doomed' (p. 8). Thus, the technical notion of speech community does not lend much support to Duvall's attempt to elevate a couple into a community.

It is ironic that Duvall should turn to a linguistic model to bolster his notion of an alternative community, for the standard notion of a speech community has recently come under criticism along the same lines as Duvall's criticism of the Southern Agrarian conception of community. For example: 'the linguistics of community has ... been an androcentric project, reluctant to address language differentiations along gender lines. It has been an obstacle to understanding the social production of gender and the social reproduction of male dominance' (Pratt 1987: 54).

Pratt does recognize that sociolinguists have studied internal social division and hierarchy in the speech community, and she refers to a 'linguistics of subcommunities' which 'indeed does challenge the normative force of standard grammar, insisting on ... the existence and legitimacy of lifeways other than those of dominant groups. In this way it participates directly ... in the political and social enfranchisement of those groups' (1987: 56). But Pratt finds this approach ultimately unsatisfactory in that it does not 'see the dominated and dominant *in their relations with each other* — this is the limitation imposed by the imaginings of community' (1987: 56).

The above views are presented here only to add perspective to Duvall's concerns, and any exploration of them would take us too far afield. In fact, the whole discussion of the linguistic notion of speech community may seem to skirt Duvall's central claim that 'Jakobson's model allows

for a radically different way of understanding the minimal constituent unit of community: two people sharing a code or communication circuit'. We need to turn our attention to Jakobson's model.

This model, and the associated work of Greimas to which Duvall alludes, bears the influence of Shannon's mathematical theory of communication, also referred to as 'information theory'.⁷ This theory is essentially concerned with engineering considerations in the transmission of signals via telephone, radar, television, etc. — Shannon developed the theory while at the Bell Telephone Laboratories. The 'information' of concern in this theory has nothing to do with the ordinary sense of information as 'meaning'; rather, it has to do with the selection of signal-units from a fixed inventory. In telegraphy, say, a 'message' is encoded into a series of dots and dashes, representing the letters of the alphabet and supplementary punctuation marks. Communication is successful if at the destination these signals can be decoded back into the sequence of letters and punctuation that the transmitter originally sent.

Further perspective can be gained on Jakobson's model by an examination of Saussure's notion of 'speech circuit':

Pour trouver dans l'ensemble du langage la sphère qui correspond à la langue, il faut se placer devant l'acte individuel qui permet de reconstituer le circuit de la parole. Cet acte suppose au moins deux individus; c'est le minimum exigible pour qui le circuit soit complet. (1965: 27)

Harris (1987: 204ff), who relates this notion of speech circuit to Locke's 'translation' theory of communication, suggests that Saussure's model met with widespread acceptance because it echoed the technology of message transmission — telegraphy, telephony, etc. — emerging in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is no accident, he suggests, that the illustration of the speech circuit in the *Cours* shows the two individuals linked by what look like telephone wires. And as for Saussure's requirement that a minimum of two individuals is required for the circuit to be complete — talking to oneself does not count — Harris relates this to technology. He claims that the earliest scientific application of the term *circuit* dates from 1800 and relates to electricity. There is no flow of electricity with a battery if two wires are connected to one and the same terminal. Harris does not associate the Lockean–Saussurean communication model with Shannon's theory of communication, though he does note that in some modern versions of it the metaphor of translation is replaced by 'encoding' and 'decoding'.

Does Saussure offer any support to what Duvall wants to accomplish? Note that Duvall treats 'communication circuit' and shared 'code' as

synonymous, when in fact the two are sharply distinguished in Saussurean linguistics, insofar as we can equate 'communication circuit' with *parole* and 'code' with *langue*. Recall Saussure's remarks in introducing the notion of speech circuit: 'Pour trouver dans l'ensemble du langage la sphère qui correspond à la langue, il faut se place devant *l'acte individuel* qui permet de reconstituer le circuit de la parole' (1965: 27; emphasis added). Saussure continues, 'On peut la [= la langue] localiser dans la portion déterminée du circuit où une image auditive vient s'associer à un concept' (1965: 31). Here we are confronted with what has been termed the 'Saussurean paradox' (cf. Harris 1987: 198): since *langue* has its locus in the brain of an individual, it can be described by considering data from an individual, whereas data for the description of *parole* can be obtained only by observing speech events in social interaction — such events are not already stored in the brains of individuals.

The exploration of this issue would obviously take us too far afield from Duvall's book. Relevant here, however, are these remarks Saussure makes in summing up his position:

... nous avons d'abord distingué, au sein du phénomène total que représente le langage, deux facteurs: la *langue* et la *parole*. La langue est pour nous le langage moins la parole. ... Mais cette définition laisse encore la langue en dehors de sa réalité sociale; elle en fait une chose irréelle, puisqu'elle ne comprend qu'un des aspects de la réalité, l'aspect individuel; il faut une *masse parlante* pour qu'il y ait une langue. A aucun moment, et contrairement à l'apparence, celle-ci n'existe en dehors du fait social, parce qu'elle est un phénomène sémiologique. (p. 112)

In the English translation of Saussure by Wade Baskin, the expression *masse parlante* is translated as 'community of speakers' (Saussure 1959: 77).

Before moving beyond this issue, I would be remiss not to point out Jakobson's (1974: 20) own disagreements with Saussure:

Saussure's definition of *langue* as 'the social part of language, extrinsic with regard to individuals', in opposition to *parole* as a mere individual act, does not consider the existence of a personal code which removes the temporal discontinuity of the single speech events and which confirms the preservation of the individual, the permanence and identity of his ego; nor does he take into account the interpersonal, social, mutually adaptive nature of the 'speech circuit' which implies the participation of at least two individuals.

However, I do not see that Jakobson's proposed emendation of Saussure lends any support to Duvall's position. No interpretation of the technical term *speech community* can match the particular connotation Duvall attaches to *community*.

Let us turn now to a consideration of some broader issues in narrative semiotics suggested by Duvall's work. By way of prelude, we may note that Duvall's basic approach is highly selective and impressionistic. There is no evidence of any thoroughgoing systematic analysis of the type that we would expect from someone claiming, as Duvall does, to 'follow the path of structural narrative analysis'. It is instructive to compare Duvall's work in this regard with that of Lévi-Strauss and Propp, both of whom Duvall cites.

Lévi-Strauss (1955) set forth a methodology that included analyzing each myth individually by breaking down its 'story' into 'gross constituent units', corresponding to sentences, and distributing these into a two-dimensional chart. It cannot be said that Lévi-Strauss has literally followed this procedure in all of his later work. However, his proposed methodology greatly influenced my initial attempts to develop a methodology for the structural analysis of narrative, which I applied to Faulkner's story 'A rose for Emily' (Hendricks 1965).⁸

As for Propp, in the preface to his book, Propp (1968: xxv) noted that 'The present study was the result of much painstaking labor. ... The work went through three phases. At first, it was a broad investigation, with a large number of tables, charts, and analyses. It proved impossible to publish such a work, if for no other reason than its great bulk'. The book Propp did publish contains several tables and charts.

There are no comparable tables or charts in Duvall's book, which, incidentally, is almost identical in size to the second edition of Propp. (Both books were published by the University of Texas Press.) Ironically, given Duvall's negative view of Brooks's study of Faulkner, one can find in Brooks a chart of the chronology of events in *Sanctuary* (1963: 387-389); a table of events in *The Mansion*; and a chart setting forth 'What we know about Thomas Sutpen and his children' (1963: 429-436). Also, there is an index of characters (pp. 453-487).

It goes without saying that charts and tables, in themselves, do not yield an adequate structural analysis; and there is no mechanical discovery procedure that can obviate recourse to intuition. But the fact remains that Brooks's study comes closer to following 'the path of structural narrative analysis' than does Duvall's. As we have already seen, there is a degree of kinship between Brooksonian formalism and that of Propp *et al.* But the formalism of the New Criticism focused on lyric poetry rather than the narrative, and on what could be termed 'paradigmatic analysis' rather than 'syntagmatic analysis'. Brooks's charts, which he relegates to the 'Notes' at the end of his study of Faulkner, are only a nod in the direction of the hallmarks of structuralist analysis at its most systematic and thorough.

If one truly attempts to follow the path opened up by Propp and Lévi-Strauss, one will be committed to a painstaking processing of textual material that will produce a bulk of data. To the best of my knowledge, the all-time record for the ratio of (prose) pages analyzed to pages of analysis belongs to Greimas (1976), who has devoted a book of over 260 pages to the analysis of Maupassant's story 'Deux amis', which is only six pages long. I am not aware of any comparable detailed analysis of a single novel, much less a number of novels.

Note that in terms of length, as measured by approximate word count, Propp's corpus, consisting of 100 Russian fairy tales in the Afanas'ev collection, is equivalent to one average length novel. This fact raises some important questions. It would obviously be a Herculean task to try to follow strictly Greimas's example and carry out a comparably exhaustive analysis of a single novel, much less a collection of novels, as in the case of Duvall, who dealt with well over five times as much textual material as Propp. Clearly, an attempt to follow in the path of Propp raises a question of feasibility when the object of analysis is the novel.

The fairy tale and the myth are generally considered to be the equivalents, in oral literature, of the short story in written literature. Narrative semiotics has its roots in the analysis of these two types of oral text. To the best of my knowledge, no one has raised the question of whether the efforts at generalizing and refining Propp's work have succeeded in transcending the distinction between short story and novel that literary criticism has traditionally drawn.

Let us briefly consider this traditional distinction in genres, as discussed by Pratt (1981). She notes that invariably the short story is distinguished from the novel in terms of length — that is, a quantitative feature and not esthetic properties. As Pratt observes, shortness is not an intrinsic property, but only occurs relative to something else (1981: 180). She then raises eight points in which she believes that an understanding of the short story is increased by the recognition that it is dependent on the novel. Most of these points do not transcend the purely quantitative distinction that is traditionally drawn. For instance, her propositions include: the short story deals with a single thing, the novel with many; the short story is a sample, the novel the 'whole hog'; the novel tells a life, the short story a fragment of a life; the novel derives from history, the short story from folk (oral) tradition.

Conspicuously absent from Pratt's discussion is any reference to narrative theory that derives from Propp — the whole movement in structural analysis and narrative semiotics. A key element of that theory is the recognition that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between the basic unit of plot structure, the *narrative proposition*, and the sentences

that constitute a narrative text. What this means is that there is no direct correlation between the number of propositions that enter into a representation of plot structure and the length of the narrative text being described.

Furthermore, most theories recognize the existence of units intermediate between the narrative as a whole and the narrative proposition. For example, Propp recognized the unit he called a *move*. A single tale can consist, at a minimum, of a single move; more complex tales will consist of several moves, with different possibilities for their combination (e.g., simple concatenation, embedding, etc.).

The above two key aspects of narrative theory would seem to render the purely quantitative dimension irrelevant. The only point among those raised by Pratt that might have implications for plot structure is the generally recognized suggestion that the novel derives from history and chronicle. As I have elsewhere suggested (Hendricks 1990), historical narrative, or nonfictional narrative in general, may not have the same type of narrative structure as the folktale, or related forms. But this remains at the moment only in the realm of speculation and is not the result of any thorough empirical investigation. It would thus seem a reasonable working hypothesis that narrative theory (as part of the semiotics of discourse) is equally applicable to the novel and the short story.

Now let us briefly consider one other relevant issue related to the matter of quantitative size of the corpus: the issue of what one chooses to analyze — a single work, or a collection of works. This is not as simple a distinction as it may first appear. For example, did Propp analyze a single work or a collection of works? On the one hand, his corpus consisted of 100 Russian fairy tales; but on the other hand he reached the conclusion that all the tales in his corpus have the same structure. Furthermore, he proposed that 'the entire store of fairy tales ought to be examined as a *chain* of variants' (1968: 114). Specifically, he proposed that all tales can be derived from a tale about the kidnapping of a princess by a dragon; and elsewhere he made it clear that he regarded this as the historically most remote tale (Propp 1971).

Later researchers have generalized Propp's methodology so that it is not tied to a particular corpus, or a tale with a particular content. Much of this work has, in turn, been applied to single tales, and not a collection of tales. One extreme example of this, already mentioned, is Greimas's detailed study of a single story by Maupassant.⁹

Is there any model or precedent in the semiotic literature for the analysis of a group of novels written by a single author? As a matter of fact, the final chapter of Greimas (1966) is devoted to a discussion of the

works of the French novelist Georges Bernanos — though, strictly speaking, Greimas's discussion is based on a dissertation on Bernanos's work; he himself never cites any actual passages from Bernanos. We have already noted Greimas's very expansive treatment of a single short story. In striking contrast, the discussion of several Bernanos novels takes up only about 34 pages.

What Greimas actually claims to describe is the 'semantic microuniverse of Bernanos'. A microuniverse is a semantic whole susceptible of being articulated by a semantic category, e.g., life/death. In fact, it is this very opposition, life vs. death, that Greimas proposes as a description of the Bernanos microuniverse. In an anticipation of the semiotic square, the opposition is elaborated into a correlation of two binary categories: life vs. non-life, and death vs. non-death (1966: 233). In later developments of Greimas's theory, this type of structure came to be referred to as deep narrative-semiotic structure, and was posited as a generator of the syntagmatic sequence known as surface narrative structure (approximately equivalent to plot structure). It should be emphasized that all of this is mere theory — no single adequate analysis has ever substantiated such an approach. And it goes without saying that such an analysis of a group of novels is highly reductive.

It must be said that the semiotic literature does not offer much in the description of novels, either individually or collectively. Let us briefly consider what a few influential literary critics have to say about Faulkner's work as a whole. Brooks (1963: vii) says that his study 'attempts to deal with William Faulkner's characteristic world, the world of Yoknapatawpha County'; but basically he deals with Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels one at a time. Aside from three brief introductory chapters, each chapter of his book is devoted to a single novel.

O'Donnell's early seminal essay does deal with Faulkner's work as a whole. O'Donnell (1963: 83–84) suggests that Faulkner's

novels are, primarily, a series of related myths (or aspects of a single myth) built around the conflict between traditionalism and the antitraditional modern world in which it is immersed. ... In Mr. Faulkner's mythology there are two kinds of characters; they are Sartoris or Snopeses, whatever the family names may be. ... And the Sartoris–Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism.

O'Donnell proceeds to very briefly discuss some of Faulkner's novels, indicating how this pattern recurs; e.g., 'In *Sartoris* ... the conflict is between young Bayard Sartoris ... and the Snopes world of the 1920's' (1963: 84). He notes that 'To provide such exegesis ... it is necessary to do violence to the fictions themselves, by abstraction' — but he somehow

concludes that 'the necessity for abstraction is evidence that ... the theme is really informed in the fictions or myths' (1963: 87).

Most critics would now agree that O'Donnell has done injustice to Faulkner's novels by trying to force all of them into the mould of his pattern — particularly in the case of *Light in August*, where he regards Joe Christmas as a Snopes character.

Cowley (1963: 97–98) has a somewhat different perspective on Faulkner's work as a whole:

It sometimes seems to me that ... all the people of the imaginary county [Yoknapatawpha] ... have played their parts in one connected story. ... Just as Balzac ... divided his *Comédie Humaine* into 'Scenes of Parisian Life', 'Scenes of Provincial Life', 'Scenes of Private Life', so Faulkner might divide his work into a number of cycles: one about the planters and their descendants, one about the townspeople of Jefferson, one about the poor whites, one about the Indians. ... All the cycles or sagas are closely interconnected; it is as if each new book was a chord or segment of a total situation always existing in the author's mind. Sometimes a short story is the sequel to an earlier novel. ... Sometimes, on the other hand, a novel contains the sequel to a story.

Cowley's ideas were an acknowledged influence on Alexandrescu (1971), who posits the existence of certain 'cycles of civilization': Chickasaw (Indian), Sartoris (aristocratic), and Snopes (modern bourgeois). Alexandrescu gives a nod toward plot structure insofar as he sees each 'civilization' in Faulkner — e.g., that of Sartoris — as passing through the stages of founding–stabilization–crisis–decadence. This, of course, is extremely abstract, and cannot throw very much light, if any, on the plot structure of any individual novel.

What is most noteworthy about Alexandrescu's work, in the present context, is his attempt to apply Greimas's early work on actantial structure to Faulkner's fiction. The result has many shortcomings, but it is superior to Duvall's attempts. Alexandrescu at least recognizes that the actants form a system and that they are potentially useful in the development of a typology of characters.

Where does Duvall's work stand in comparison to other critics' views of Faulkner's work as a whole? As already noted, Duvall deals primarily with five Faulkner novels, which he says he sees as a 'unit' (p. xv). This might seem to imply that he sees the novels as one long narrative, along the lines suggested by Cowley, but this is not the case. Duvall seeks 'a repeated relationship between characters' which is a 'union of marginalized men and women' (p. 3). Analysis of this recurrent 'structure' is much closer to thematic analysis than it is to plot analysis. It entails a

focusing on parts of works and says nothing about the global composition of complete works.

It seems to me that it is premature to try to present a semiotic analysis of a group of novels by a writer — especially since we lack a detailed plot analysis of even a single novel. With particular reference to Faulkner studies, questions raised by Cowley's early study still have not been satisfactorily resolved. Cowley claimed that Faulkner 'is not primarily a novelist. ... Almost all his novels have some weakness in structure' (1963: 105). Later critics have accused Cowley of failing to appreciate the structure of the novels, but they have lacked the tools to clarify the structural organization. Narrative semiotics has the tools, or the potential for forging the requisite tools. The work is waiting to be done.

Notes

1. I recently examined aspects of Greimas's semiotics (Hendricks 1989) — but that discussion is rather narrow and does not touch on some major issues.
2. To be fair, it should be noted that Lévi-Strauss's own analyses have elicited similar criticisms; see, for instance, Sperber (1979). It goes without saying, though, that Lévi-Strauss's own analyses have a thoroughness and flair that goes well beyond anything Duvall presents.
3. I have discussed Greimas's earliest work on actantial analysis (Hendricks 1977a), but that critique needs to be expanded to take into account his later elaborations.
4. Duvall indicates that *subject position* is a term used by Foucault, but he fails to make the concept clear. He cites a couple of sentences from Foucault that, at least out of context, make no sense. Furthermore, Duvall fails to indicate which of the three works by Foucault in his 'Works Cited' is the source of the quotation.
5. It seems to me that Duvall accepts with equanimity the possibility that one should not read Faulkner — a position which can shade imperceptibly into the position that no one should be allowed to read Faulkner. That there are strong forces for censorship and abridgment of free expression is evident from the controversy currently surrounding the novel *American Psycho*; see Christopher Hitchens's discussion in the January 7/14, 1991 issue of *The Nation*.
6. To be fair, it should be noted that Duvall at least acknowledges that some attempts at ideological analysis of Faulkner, generally from Marxists and feminists ... often overwhelm Faulkner's texts. The problem with such criticism is that, in an attempt to be socially responsible, it often cavalierly equates the represented utterance of particular characters with the author's beliefs (p. 15).
7. For a nontechnical discussion of information theory and some of its implications for linguistics, see Hockett (1953). Even more basic is the discussion in Campbell (1982).
8. The full analysis, involving a sentence-by-sentence processing of the text, has not been published; but the methodology itself is described in Hendricks (1973); and the end results of the methodology, much revised, are presented in Hendricks (1977b).
9. A detailed critique of Greimas would pay particular attention to the question of whether he in fact has transcended Propp's dependence on a single tale, the kidnapping of a princess by a dragon. Certainly Greimas's terminology has become much more abstract, but an underlying dependence on Propp's canonical tale can be easily discerned.

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