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Imola Bülgözdi

Where Faulkner Comes From: The South

> WHAT IS THE SOUTH? Answering this question has long been a popular pastime with sociologists, psychologists, and professional and self-anointed political, historical, and literary experts of every calibre. Their theories present a mass of contradictory interpretations and irreconcilable differences; while all agree that there is and has been a region with characteristics unlike those of the rest of the United States, they have been unable to reach unanimity about these differences. Their confusion is reflected in a picture which oscillates between snow-white cotton fields and black-smoked blast furnaces; *Tobacco Road* and *Gone with the Wind*; hookworm-ridden tenant farmers and courtly plantation masters; Ku Klux Klan outrages and magnolia-spangled campuses; wild-eyed demagogues and frock-coated, long-haired statesmen; Franklin Roosevelt's terse remark, "the nation's number one economic problem," and the pride-inspired Southerner's retort, "the nation's number one economic hope" (Ezell, 1).

This non-exhaustive list dating back to 1963 does not do justice to a number of things traditionally associated with the South, like Dixie music, 'pickaninnies,' the Confederate flag, and segregation to mention a few, some of which are capable of causing controversy even nowadays. Readers of Faulkner could very well continue this list based on their knowledge of the mythical Yoknapatawpha County, where Southern history is re-enacted from all its splendour and tragedy to the most sordid details. The aim of this essay, however, is not to investigate Faulkner's fictional South, since countless papers and books have been published on the topic. Due to lack of space only brief references to his works and biography are made, as familiarity with them is assumed. Our focus is not Faulkner himself but the specific part of the world that produced the author and became the subject matter of his novels. In an attempt to place his work in a larger cultural context, the peculiarities of this region and its traditions will be addressed within the framework of Cultural Studies, with the point of departure based on the latest developments in social sciences, which regard 'culture' as referring to "whatever is distinctive about the 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social group". Culture

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is now seen as a process, a set of practices as opposed to the products of 'high art,' and is "concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings […] between the members of a society or group" (Hall, 1997:2), in other words "with questions of shared social meanings" and "the various ways we make sense of the world" (Barker, 2003:7).

Regional culture and identity

The most well-known literary representation of the South is undeniably Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* due to the huge success of the film adaptation, which both abound in simplistic stereotypes. In comparison, Faulkner's works take place in a far more varied Southern environment, constructing a more realistic picture of the region, and yet drawing heavily on the same symbols and themes of the regional culture. So much so that Cleanth Brooks in the introduction to *William Faulkner: First Encounters* (1983) claims that "most of us identify Faulkner with the South, and it is natural that we should do so, for his fiction is filled with references to its history, its geography, its customs; and his prose often employs its special idiom" then proceeds to explain why he is "not a mere provincial in either time and space" (1). Although it seems surprising that a Nobel-laureate should need defence against such charges, the point of Faulkner's rootedness in Southern culture is yet again made by a leading authority on the topic.

The model of culture this analysis is based on was developed by Stuart Hall in *Doing Cultural Studies: the Story of the Sony Walkman*, which assigns language a pivotal part in the process of meaning production due to the fact that it is the main representational system which enables the participants to "build up a culture of shared understandings and so interpret the world in roughly the same ways" (Hall 1997:1). His 'circuit of culture' consists of five major practices of equal standing: representation, regulation, consumption, production and

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construction of identity, which all interact. It follows that cultural meanings "organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects" (1997:3) and these very same meanings are constructed by the participants. Meaning is conferred upon objects, people and events partly by the frameworks of interpretation, partly by the way they are used and integrated into everyday practices and in part by the way they are represented: the words they are described with, the stories about them, the emotions associated with them, the ways they are classified and conceptualised, and the values placed on them.

> Culture, we may say, is involved in all those practices which are not simply genetically programmed into us […] but which carry meanings and value for us, which need to be *meaningfully interpreted* by others, or *which depend on meaning* for their effective operation. Culture, in this sense, permeates all of society. It is what distinguishes the 'human' element in social life from what is simply biologically driven (Hall 1997:3).

This definition of culture provides the broadest possible context to situate literature in, as a practice that is present in all the key 'moments' in the circuit, and therefore, lends itself to analysis from a number of aspects. As opposed to the traditional stance, that things possess an intrinsically determined meaning, the social constructionist approach regards meaning as something conferred upon the signs through use: it is their function that matters and they do not have a meaning in themselves. Consequently, "representation is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things; and thus culture is conceptualised as a primary or 'constitutive' process" (Hall 1997:5-6) that has a direct effect on shaping social subjects and historical events, just like the economic or material 'base.'

Discursive approaches have made the effects and consequences of representation their area of study, examining the way the knowledge produced by a particular discourse relates to power, constructs identities, defines how things are represented or studied, etc. "The emphasis in the *discursive* approach is always on the historical specificity of a particular form or

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'regime' of representation" and the investigation of "the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice" (Hall 1997:6) is a key element.

Hall's definition of the 'practices of representation,' namely "the embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted" (1997:10), classifies literature as such without doubt. It is through these practices that meaning can circulate within a culture and in order to complete its journey around the circuit, it has to be received at some other point in the chain. As both the encoder and decoder of meaning are indispensable and interactive participants in representational practices, it would be contrary to the nature of representation to consider works of art as detached from their authors, social circumstances and interpreters. "Representation functions […] like a dialogue" sustained by the shared cultural codes, "which cannot guarantee that the meanings will remain stable forever – though attempting to fix meaning is exactly why *power* intervenes in *discourse*" (Hall 1997:10).

Cultural Studies professes to the tenet that "a full analysis of any cultural practice requires discussion of both 'economy' and 'culture'" and "the articulation of the relations between them," while rejecting Marxist economic reductionism (Barker 2003:36). Based on the anti-essentialist conceptions of the self supported by psychological and sociological research, the construction of personhood is a consequence of acculturation, which means that "identities are wholly social constructions and cannot exist outside of cultural representations" (220), and therefore "our understanding of the material is itself cultural" (35). It follows that culture and the material are indivisible and "material objects and social practices are given meaning and brought into view by language" (119) in a system of representation, which generates meaning under specific historical conditions.

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Having thus justified the relevance of the study of culture to the study of literature, this area of research seems to be especially rewarding in the discussion of an author so engrossed in writing a version of his region as Faulkner, who stated:

> Beginning with *Sartoris*, I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own (qtd. in *A Faulkner Encyclopedia* 208).

In order to better understand what the 'postage stamp of native soil' meant for Faulkner, the main area to investigate is that of the Southern regional differences which take us beyond superficial stereotyping. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. authority on Southern literature declared in 1980 that "from the time that the states of the early American republic began to identify their concerns along geographical lines, there was a self-conscious South. Nowadays, almost two centuries later, there still is," marking out the discursive formation that envelopes all the former slave states, however diverse they may be: *the Southern regional identity*. The 1993 *Encyclopedia of American Social History* professes that

> Rurality lies at the heart of southern identity. In this most rural of American regions, the overwhelming majority of southerners during the past four centuries have been born and bred in rural communities, on plantations and farms, quarters and tenements, dispersed in open-country neighborhoods. As late as 1860, when the rest of the nation experienced an industrial and urban revolution, the countryside was home for nine out of every ten southerners. A century later, nearly half of all southerners reported a rural residence. Rurality thus has served as a powerful force shaping the South's distinctive *regional identity*, an identity that has not been lost despite the region's extraordinary environmental, economic, racial, ethnic, and ideological diversity (italics mine).

In 2000 Gray makes an even more specific statement regarding the validity of the concept: "the South is still a concept active in the everyday lives and exchanges of communities; it is still there as a determining part of their mental maps and speech acts" (503). The theoretical background to a more detailed analysis of Southern identity draws on Stuart Hall's discussion of 'cultural identity,' defined as the "aspects of our identities which arise from our

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'belonging' to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures" (Hall 1996:274). In this case, 'national' should be substituted for 'regional culture,' while the mechanism of the system of cultural representation remains roughly the same.

Since W. H. Odum's 1920 founding of the Department of Sociology and School of Public Welfare at the University of North Carolina, the South has been in the researchers' focus of attention who have tried to describe and define it. Odum "thought to combine a socially organic traditionalism with the products of rational change in social structures to create a social order that reflected a complete harmony between the self (or inner being) and the objectively (or outwardly) structured society" (Havard 422). His 1925 editorial to the *Social Forces* – a year before Faulkner started publishing novels – starts with the typical Southern lament of the age:

> Why, then, are the Southern States so barren of individual leaders who represent the highest achievement in their fields? In politics, in education, in literature, in art, in industry, in religion, in any aspect of human endeavor, where are there to be found in the South leaders occupying the foremost place in their respective groups? Or how many even are there who have attained more than mediocre rank? (739)

Odum himself looked back on the old Southern leaders with nostalgia, describing them as "examples of distinction, charm, order, force, character" in spite of "their shortcomings in democratic standards, in attitudes toward the negro and the working man" (740). This, however, did not prevent him from an unbiased evaluation of Southern society, and his interest in the region's and its people's specific traits was carried on by John Shelton Reed, whose devoted investigation into the sociology and social psychology of the South yielded valuable results.

Shelby Foote's historical research cites as evidence that before the Civil War the phrase the United States took a plural verb, which means that "for many antebellum Americans (and not just Southerners) their 'country' was effectively their state" and the pressure on the Union

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resulted in the forging of "an overarching national identity quite different from what had existed before" (Reed 2000). The unusual circumstances that led to the formation of the United States of America could be an explanation for the persistence of diverse regional identities that, according to Hall, are typical of the pre-modern age and traditional societies. To a large extent, the ante-bellum South would subscribe to these characteristics, which survived well into the 20th century, since significant changes to the Southern lifestyle occurred only after World War II, with the exception of large cities and important commercial centres, such as New Orleans. Sixty years after the Civil War, in the 1930s Odum's survey based on several hundred economic and demographic criteria was still able to mark out scientifically, too the eleven states - 'the Old South' - traditionally thought of as Southern (Reed 1982:67).[i] In *One South — An Ethic Approach to Regional Culture* the results of Reed's research conducted in the early 1970s confirm that more than one hundred years after the Secession these states still possessed a strong regional identity (67).

According to Hall, "national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it" (1996:293). The 'Cotton Kingdom,' the 'Bible Belt,' 'Dixieland' or more recently the 'Sunbelt' abounds in them, having created a whole mythology in its attempt to come to terms with its past and present. No wonder that Gray claims that "attachment to the Southern land – or as William Faulkner would have it, loving and hating that land – is a determining feature of what it means to be Southern" (497). My analysis of Southern regional culture will follow the five main discursive elements as outlined by Hall:

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- § The 'narrative of the nation' in national histories, literature, the media and popular culture, which "provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals." All this "*represents* the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation," and connect the everyday lives of the people with a national destiny (1996: 293).
- § The importance of origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness that characterise the national identity, and posits an eternal national character.
- § The 'invention of tradition:' "a set of practices … of a ritual or symbolic nature which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours by repetition which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historical past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger qtd. in Hall, 1996:294).
- § The 'foundational myth' of origin of the people and their national character.
- § The idea of a 'pure, original people or folk' who are symbolically at the roots of national identity (1996:295).

Besides the commonly understood definition of the South as a geographic area that is characterised by a unique tradition and history, Himes claims that this term has another, often overlooked, meaning and it is exactly this aspect of the South that is crucial for discussing the culture of the region:

> It [the South] is a quasigroup, a self-conscious collectivity capable of acting as a unit. The people of the region tend to think of themselves as 'we' united by shared memories, hurts, values, possessions, longings, and aspirations. They can resent perceived slights, grow angry over alleged mistreatment, exult over symbolic victories, and work for collective goals. In this telic sense the South is often a gigantic social movement. (xi)

The 'narrative of the nation' and the 'foundational myth'

The cohesive forces described above in the South are related to the 'narrative of the nation' and the 'foundational myth' which in this case intertwine, since they date back to the Civil War. When trying to pin down the difference between North and South various historical reasons are brought to the limelight and one must remember that Southern identity

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has been shaped and reinforced by conflict with the North. First and foremost, the institution of slavery and the defeat suffered in the Civil War have to be mentioned, along with the almost exclusively rural lifestyle characteristic of the region until the 1920s. The burden of these phenomena is clearly detectable in Faulkner's works and is thought to have influenced in general the authors associated with the Southern Renaissance. Rubin, however, draws our attention to the fact that at more than four generation's distance from the abolition of slavery, it is not likely that this element should be of utmost importance in the definition of Southern identity. Consequently, there must be other factors at work, and the memory of the Civil War is one of them:

> Yet in defeat the South not only retained its sense of identity, but added to it the mythos of a lost cause, a sense of ancestral pieties and loyalties bequeathed through suffering, and a unity that comes through common deprivation and shared hatred and adversity. This was not exactly what those who favored secession had in mind, but if their object was to preserve Southern identity, there can be no doubt that it worked. (1980:5)

Himes, on the other hand, points at the far-reaching economic consequences of the abolition of slavery, which "necessitated the creation of a new labor system of free workers that was based on several credit patterns — sharecropping, the company store, and the advancement of seeds, tools, and supplies to tenants" — practices that were still in existence even a hundred years later and also witnessed by Faulkner's characters.

With this in mind it is not surprising that several historians posit "a sense of grievance at the heart of Southern identity, a sense of ill-treatment at the hands of the rest of the country" (Reed 1983:70). In *Southern Aberrations – Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* Gray argues that the term that originally denoted chattel slavery, and thereby the most significant difference between North and South, has percolated into the construction of the concept of the latter. Now "a function of discourse rather than a matter of fact; the 'norm' or 'center' is positioned and defined as being whatever the 'aberration' or 'margin' is

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not, and vice versa, in a complex dialectic of reinforcement" (xiii). It follows that Southern self-fashioning displays an ever present consciousness of its own marginality (500), which manifests itself in a series of oppositions that divide it from a national 'other': place versus placelessness, past versus pastlessness, realism versus idealism, community versus isolation (499). When one's identity is seen as 'aberrant' by the majority, feelings of resentment are not surprising. Reed's research also tried to answer the question to what extent the past plays a role in the construction of regional identity. He cites Hackney's quick outline of the previous 150 years as a point of departure, which might as well be regarded as a summary of salient topics in modern Southern writing:

> They are likely to be most conscious of being Southerners when they are defending their region against attack from outside forces: abolitionists, the Union Army, carpetbaggers, Wall Street and Pittsburgh, civil rights agitators, the federal government, feminism, socialism, trade-unionism, Darwinism, Communism, atheism, daylight-saving time, and other by-products of modernity. (1983:71)

The division of complaints into political, economic and cultural injustice is not a recent one, the first two well-documented by historic and sociological research. I would like to elaborate on the latter, seeing that this area is relevant to the issues discussed, bearing in mind that the former two have also influenced the 'cultural' background of Southerners.

Although by 1971 high regional consciousness and identification did not significantly vary depending on the respondent's Confederate ancestry (Reed 1983:86), Southern identity "has its origins in history, particularly in the events leading up to the Civil War and in the war itself" and even decades afterwards "the boundaries of the group have been largely defined by individuals' relation to that history" (1983:85). Reed's essay "Instant Grits and Plastic-Wrapped Crackers: Southern Culture and Regional Development" approaches this issue from a sociological point of view, and asserts that by 1980 "cultural differences cannot be explained in any obvious way by differences in demographic composition or economic

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circumstance" (27). His research draws on statistical data to show what the still dominant Southern tendencies as opposed to Northern communities are. Firstly, we have to emphasise, that in the late 1970s a Southerner, on average, spent nearly twice as many waking hours "in families and communities organized around sentiments and presuppositions somewhat different from those found elsewhere" (27). Secondly, he claims that the nature and extent of religious belief and practice, ninety percent of the people being Protestant, is still a live force in Southern communities, due to its homogeneity and the greater number of churchgoers. Last but not least, a special web of social relationships was also documented by this survey, also justified by the fact that far more Southerners are satisfied with the place where they live and would not move than in any other area of the United States. Reed calls this phenomenon

> 'localism'—roughly, a tendency to see communities as different from each other, and to prefer one's own. There is more to this, I think, than mere parochialism: the trait seems to be related to the 'sense of place' remarked by so many observers of Southern life and culture, a sensitivity to the things that make one's community unique and, in particular, the existence of a web of friendship and, often, kinship that would be impossible to reproduce elsewhere. (32–3)

All in all, it appears that besides the fading memory of the well-known historical reasons there is a much stronger emotional element at play, naturally strengthened by the former, but not solely their product. Rubin, a forerunner to Hall's arguments, defines this characteristic of the South as a "social and cultural community in which membership offers a form of self-definition," in which "there is a shared identity involved" (1980:17). It is this feature in the long run that has helped the South to maintain its cultural autonomy most, for its "most valuable weapon" is "an incorrigible talent at individualizing and humanizing its experience" (1980:19).

The invention of tradition

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Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913 is the title of Gains M. Foster's detailed study of the South's reaction to the Civil War, in the introduction of which the author justifies the need for scientific research in the following way: "To modern eyes the Lost Cause appears at best excessive romanticism and at worst sheer craziness. A large number of white southerners participated in it and took it very seriously, though, and historians must as well" (4). Foster basically agrees with Reed asserting that

> Out of the activities of these postwar Confederate organizations emerged the Confederate tradition, the dominant complex of attitudes and emotions that constituted the white South's interpretation of the Civil War. The tradition developed out of and in turn shaped individuals' memory of the war, but it was primarily a public memory, a component of the region's cultural system, supported by the various organizations and rituals of the Lost Cause. (5)

The movement peaked between the late 1880s and the early 1910s, and in Foster's view it facilitated the passage of the South through a particularly difficult period of social change: it not only "helped them cope with the cultural implications of defeat," but also provided unity especially for the middle class and townspeople during the period of transition to the New South of the twentieth century. Honour saved and social order preserved, by the 1920s "the Lost Cause declined in utility and therefore in importance" and the Confederate tradition no longer served "as a basis of social identity because it had lost much of its specificity and power to shape behavior" (8), but as we have seen, its sentimental legacy still lingers. The 'invention of a tradition' centred on the Lost Cause did its job: the result of the process is present more than a hundred years after the Civil War: in 1983 about half of Reed's respondents claimed that "most Northerners look down on Southerners," a quarter of them believed that "most Northerners dislike Southerners," close to half agreed that "books and magazine articles about the South play up its bad points and don't give a fair picture,"

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(1983:72-3) and 41 percent thought it was true that the North exploited Southern natural resources (1983:74).

The most conspicuous manifestations of the mythmaking tendency are the myths of the Old and New Souths, embodied, shall we say in the Compsons and the Snopeses respectively? In the *New South Creed — A Study in Southern Mythmaking* Gaston points out that

> one of the reasons for the superabundance of Southern myths is that Southern life has involved such a high degree of failure and frustration that intellectual and emotional compensations have been at a premium. Myths have been equally important as means of making some sense and order out of the complex, ambivalent patterns of the Southern experience. (8)

The constant presence of tradition and progress in all walks of life since the Civil War is one of the ambivalent situations to come to terms with, and Gaston claims that the function of these myths has been similar to that of religion, namely the unification of experience. The equally ambivalent result was "the simultaneous rise during the 1880s of both the New South creed and the mythic image of the Old South", and the romantic plantation myth conquered the masses "in the same decade that the New South spokesmen's ideal of a bustling, rich, and reconstructed South captured the American imagination" (167). Bearing in mind that the discourse of national culture "constructs identities which are ambiguously placed between past and future" (Hall 1996:295), the contradictory tendencies are not that surprising. However, as we shall see, the regressive element that tries to restore past identities in the South was more powerful than usual.

These two myths offered two different models of identification for the individual. While the New South creed was much closer to the all-American experience of progress and prosperity, Southern experience involved failure, defeat and poverty. Odum addresses his audience eloquently in his 1925 editorial, pointing out the corollaries that still lingered sixty years after the Civil War at the beginning of Faulkner's career:

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> We are tired, eternally tired, of limitations. Tired of wrong impressions, tired of the defense complex and mechanism, tired of unending ridicule, tired of taking second and third and fourth rate places in achievement, tired of undeveloped potential, tired of lack of opportunity, tired of complacency, ignorance, poverty, and all the paradoxes that now flower out of a soil which can produce better. Anyone can add up the five counts which we have enumerated and see the impossibility of ever hoping for distinguished achievement and service so long as these conditions last. (745)

Given these claims, Havard believes that "the Southern historical experience has been closer to the experience of humanity at large than has the national experience" (425) and, in order to back this assumption, he cites Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, which elaborates the Agrarian belief that the pre-Civil War culture of the South is more closely connected to European or Western traditional culture than to the North. The link with classical antecedents – not surprisingly made given the traditional education in classics typical of Southern schooling – also means the expansion of the cultural basis of the South and, consequently, takes away the edge of the frequent charge of provincialism. In spite of all the drawbacks of "the spiritual mode, religious zeal, demagogic appeal, stubborn individualism, ethnic unity, heroic pride, adolescent combativeness, imaginative romance" characterising the South, Odum called for "some sort of renaissance of intellectual conviction, spiritual rejuvenation and stable morality that does not rattle with superficial verbiage" (746). At that point he ruthlessly outlined the Southern attitude as follows:

> In its sensitiveness the South is still hotheaded, emotional, unthinking in its attitude toward many questions and toward those who do not agree with its opinions or traditions, or those who do not approve of its conduct. This is especially true of matters relating to race, religion, industry, and outside criticism. On the other hand, the South is boastful and superficial with reference to its achievements. (745)

Born in 1897, with a Civil War colonel, lawyer, businessman and novelist for great-grandfather, a figure looming large in the family traditions, Faulkner grew up in a traditional Southern environment then witnessed the slow transformation of the Southern lifestyle. The unexpected appearance of numerous remarkable artists in this period in what was regarded as

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a provincial backwater triggered the scholarly investigation of the region and its past in order to account for the origins of the Southern Renaissance. From the overview of the historical explanations of this unexpected phenomenon by Richard King in *A Southern Renaissance — The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* Allen Tate's 'backward glance' thesis is worth mentioning, which states that "the Renaissance was the product of the creative tension between the Southern past and the pressures of the modern world" (4).

Robert Penn Warren specified this experience in his Introduction to *Faulkner — A Collection of Critical Essays*. He contrasts a rural, "cut-off, inward-turning, backward-looking" culture "frozen in its virtues and vices" and characterised by "the unchangeableness of the human condition" with a progressive North after WW I. Warren is also aware of the fact that the vision of the South was paradoxical as this immobility and non-history were "coupled with another vision, a sort of antithetical vision, in which violence irrationally erupted [...] to create the characteristic 'Southern' drama," and what is more, it "seemed the true challenge to youthful energy that always demands change, and at the same time it was [...] the place where history *had* been, had already fulfilled itself, had died—and could be contemplated" (3-4). According to Warren, Southerners suffered a profound cultural shock after World War I when they had to face not only Europe, but also the North and the new order there and he claims that "the South, then, offered the classic situation of a world stung and stirred, by cultural shock, to create an art, in order to objectify and grasp the nature of its own inner drama" (4). This view reminds one of the function of mythmaking also, as the artist is compelled to come to terms with a complex situation and explore the traditions of Southern culture.

Another popular view was formulated by Wilbur J. Cash, the historian, who proposed that Southerners attempted to justify themselves and their society in a hostile American

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environment, establishing the idea of a 'defensive' theory. In his preface to *The Mind of the South*, Cash delineated a "fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern--a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and associations of ideas" (qtd. in *A Mythic Land* 176-7), typical of the South and in his view responsible for the cultural differences. Naturally, the mentality of the region had an effect on the representation of the South, living up to Cash's aphorism: it is "not by its history that the mythology of a nation is determined, but, conversely, its history is determined by its mythology" (qtd. in Osterweis 3), which exults the past.

The *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History* also claims that "the idea of the South and the mythology of the Lost Cause exerted a profound hold on this postwar generation of southerners, but many were, simultaneously, pulled in cosmopolitan directions and confronted by a full-scale assault on the religious orthodoxy so central to the South." The psychic difficulties faced by the intellectuals of the Southern Renaissance are not detailed in any of the explanatory theses discussed above, although they are held accountable:

> […] the unspoken codes of authority, the rigid expectations of orthodoxy and loyalty, the sense of common identity and membership that was alternately comforting and suffocating. Some felt a nagging rub of doubt and guilt on the question of race. The result was a tremendous intellectual outpouring--the Southern Renaissance--of distinctive art and commentary produced by a generation of history-obsessed, often God-haunted, but always eloquent southerners.

Even though Warren, Tate and Cash fail to name them, such concerns might as well be draped into the terms of cultural shock or the burden of history. King's analysis of the period reveals the problematic nature of relating to regional identity, something Faulkner and one of his most memorable characters, Quentin Compson also had to come to terms with:

> [...] the writers and intellectuals of the South after the late 1920s were engaged in an attempt to come to terms not only with the inherited values of the Southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past, what Nietzsche called "monumental" historical consciousness. [...] the relationship between present and past

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> which the Renaissance writers explored was fraught with ambivalence and ambiguity. The "object" of their historical consciousness was a tradition whose essential figures were the father and the grandfather and whose essential structure was the literal and symbolic family. (7)

This generation, after the cultural crisis of World War I, “felt increasingly estranged from the tradition. That tradition loomed distressingly distant and overpoweringly strong, insupportable yet inescapable” (King 16), violence threatening to surface in a period of transition. King's three-stage structure of historical consciousness sets out from a ‘culture of melancholy,’ which is based on a repetition of and identification with the past, and via a period of tragic confusion of past and present and estrangement from the past reaches the reconstruction of ‘reality’ after the demystification of the family romance, while the past is incorporated into the present at a higher level, in a new state of self-consciousness.

‘Regional character’ and ‘a pure, original people or folk’

In spite of the traditional wording, King’s explanation, too, reveals the constructed nature of Southern identity, which also became object of sociological research for John Shelton Reed. Investigating “the individual’s ‘life space’ (his cognitive field or psychological environment), that is, […] his environment as he sees it and with the properties and relations of entities within it,” Reed aimed at investigating people’s representations of their environment, as “shaped by what and how individuals have been taught to perceive, their characteristic ways of seeing and organizing what they see, and their needs, moods, goals, ideals, and so forth” (1983:8). This includes ‘social objects’ like regional groups, which he cautiously posits as cultural products to some extent (1983:28), and an interest in “Southerners not as an aggregate defined by residence in a particular piece of geography, but as a reference group, a cognitive entity that people use to orient themselves” (1983:11).

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Looking back from the distance of more than ten years, in his introduction to *Southerners, the Social Psychology of Sectionalism,* Reed laments that "as recently as that [1971], we (like most other Americans, I believe) construed 'Southerners' to mean white Southerners, and it struck us as possibly puzzling or offensive to ask black respondents some of our key questions" (1983:5). Although by submitting Southerners to "the ordinary concerns of ethnic group research – questions of identity, stereotyping, prejudice, social distance, and the like" (1983:3) he set a new trend in Southern regionalist social science based on ethnic group research, Reed and fellow researcher Glen Elder again confirmed Lillian Smith's 1965 observation: "there's a male and female South, which are two different entities. Then there's a black South and a white South, which are two more cleavages. [...] The South has usually meant the male, white South" (qtd. in Brantley 29). In fact this bias does not pose a problem in the case of Faulkner, since that was the perspective he took himself when writing, as argued by various critics who point out his racism and sexism, both inherent in the region's culture.

The first and foremost issue to be cleared was the respondent's self-definition as a Southerner or not, which revealed - besides the fairly transparent identification based on residential history – affection for other Southerners, similarity to them, and difference from Northerners and their ways (1983:15-6). In spite of the significant economic and political changes that took place in the decade following World War II, in 1971 white Southerners' opinion did not change significantly regarding the North, as the question about the most important difference between South and North revealed the persistent belief in divergent cultural and psychological characteristics. Hall's claim that a 'pure, original people or folk' lay at the heart of national culture could not be truer than in the case of Southerners, who trace back the following qualities to the ante-bellum period: "Southerners are, by their own

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reckoning, slower, more traditional, and more polite and friendly than other Americans – a constellation of traits that, as some studies have shown, other Americans are generally prepared to grant them" (Reed 1983:41).

> Far and away the most frequent characterization of Southerners (by these Southerners) was an elaboration on the theme that Southerners are *good people*, as several said in so many words. 'Good,' to our respondents, meant primarily pleasant to be around: 'considerate,' 'friendly,' 'hospitable,' 'polite,' 'gentle,' 'gracious,' 'cordial,' 'genteel,' 'courteous,' 'congenial,' 'nice' - all of these our respondents' words, many of them used often. (Reed 1983:42, italics mine)

Cash's 1941 view of the drawbacks of the 'Southern temper' in the following quotation are in harsh contrast with the above, though some of Reed's respondents admitted that the people of the region could be traditional and conventional, even narrow-minded and backward, but on the whole the respect for religion and family ties was a positive characteristic.

> Violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and a too narrow concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false values, above all too great attachment to racial values and a tendency to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism. (qtd. in Dorman 290)

How could one fail to recognise them in Faulkner's characters, who display an almost infinite number of variations on mixtures of both the positive and negative features above? The explanation for both stereotypical descriptions can be found in the rural economy and society and the isolation of the region, as argued by Grasmick in a study investigating the 'traditional value orientation' of folk and peasant societies in general. His findings confirm Cash's view to a certain extent and these ideas are formulated in more scientific terms:

> He developed measures of familism, localism, fatalism, resistance to innovation, traditional sex-role ideology, racism, some aspects of authoritarianism, and suspicion and dislike of 'outsiders' […]; and his review of the literature on modernization concluded that these traits have characterized preindustrial societies throughout the world. (Reed 1983:48)

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Reed's deployment of a similar, more elaborate test reproduced the basic result: the top 58% of the Southern white respondents scored high on the 'traditionalism' scale, and the values they held coincided to a great extent to the historic stereotype of the Southerner (1983:49), testifying to the presence of an 'eternal' regional character and continuity. Grasmick also pointed out the correlation between traditional value orientation and the following factors: "growing up on a farm, the absence of education, and the absence of a cluster of variables he called 'late socialization experiences' - urban residence, travel and residence outside the South, and exposure to the mass media" (Reed 1983:48). Reed's thorough research again confirmed these results and provided scientific evidence of the existence and explanation for the qualities attributed to a stereotypical Southerner.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by historical evaluation and sociological analysis, Faulkner's South was and still is different from other regions of the United States, the cultural resonance of which is constantly present in his novels set in the South in different historical periods and staging various social classes. The *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, published in 2001, in fact claims that "it was out of the *cultural* and political, as opposed to the geographical, entity of the South that a second and more complex idea of the South emerged, one that not only demarcated boundaries but also asserted an *identity* and assigned *value*" (italics mine). Faulkner's exploration of the mentality of the region leads to representations of the South that are closely linked to the question of regional identity, as understood in his time and place: the burden of history and honour traditionally centred around the figure of the white male. The investigation of the five criteria that inform regional identity according to Hall has also demonstrated the intricate web of relationships between

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history, politics, economy, culture and social forces on the one hand, and marked out the Southern tradition as clearly distinct from the mainstream American 'frontier myth' or the 'self-made man' of the American Dream.

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Notes

[i] Joseph S. Himes's Preface to *The South Moves into Its Future: Studies in the Analysis and Prediction of Social Change* discusses the problems of definition in detail (pp. x-xi):

The South is defined and perceived in three related ways. First, the South is defined in terms of its past, its traditions. By reference to politics, it is called 'the Confederate States'; by reference to tradition, 'the Old South.' The relevant list of states is shown in the columns below.

Confederate States	Old South
Florida	Florida
Alabama	Alabama
Georgia	Georgia
Louisiana	Louisiana
Mississippi	Mississippi
* Texas	*Kentucky
Virginia	Virginia
Arkansas	Arkansas
Tennessee	Tennessee
North Carolina	North Carolina
South Carolina	South Carolina

In 1937 Vance, and in 1970, Killian spoke of the Old South that contained a list different from the Confederacy (see asterisks). These lists recognize both the importance of the Confederacy and the consistency of traditional Southern culture.

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