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Faulkner's Ecologies and the Legacy of the Nashville Agrarians

Though J. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur's celebration of the "Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures" of an American farmer marks the genesis of the robust and enduring literary tradition of agrarian socio-political thought in the United States, his *Letters From an American Farmer* (1782) are, like the tradition itself, haunted by the spectre of slavery and racism. The problem was canonized within the literary establishment with the 1930 publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, an agrarian manifesto collecting essays by "Twelve Southerners" known as the Southern, or Nashville Agrarians.¹ The collection provides a biting critique of the effects of industrialization on rural communities, but largely elides the complex history of racial subjugation entwined with southern agriculture, and often reveals a simplistic nostalgia for Confederate values imbued with racial injustice. Thus, while the American agrarian tradition today thrives both economically and intellectually as expressed in recent movements toward local, sustainable food networks, agrarianism is still regarded with a measure of skepticism within the literary critical establishment despite its apparent relevance to the recent turn to environmental

criticism. Indeed, the ecocritical response to the Nashville group—who performed extensive and explicit literary-critical plumbing of the nexus of nature and culture decades before the term “ecocriticism” was coined—has largely been to ignore them.² This is unfortunate, because the full breadth of the agrarian tradition offers animated and apposite critique of the ways globalizing industrial processes entail negative relationships between humans and their environment. And, perhaps more importantly, the agrarian tradition provides a radically responsive economic program for extricating ourselves from those damaging relationships, which is sorely lacking in mainstream ecocriticism. Unfortunately, Wendell Berry’s decades-old refrain that environmentalism “has no economic program, and [thus] has the status of something exterior to daily life,” still rings true: ecocriticism’s activist intent and promise continues to be stymied by a reluctance to theorize the economic changes necessary to foster ecological health (77).

This essay will reexamine the legacy of race in the agrarian tradition by turning to a contemporary of the Nashville Agrarians whose treatment of race, rurality, agriculture, and modernity has occasioned overwhelming critical praise rather than reproof: William Faulkner. By transcending the Nashville Agrarians’ focused polemics in expansive narrative surveys of an entire southern landscape, Faulkner reveals that the difference

between agrarianism and industrialism is more than merely ideological, but also at its core *ecological*. Through the dramatization of settings spanning the continuum between industrial and agrarian ecologies, Faulkner's fiction exposes the fundamental flaw in the nostalgic Nashville argument: plantation (agri)culture in the South, and its racist social legacy, is the antithesis of agrarian ecological interaction, rather than its fullest expression. Agrarian ecologies feature flows of energy which build and conserve the health of all beings comprising the land, whereas the plantation ecologies lauded by many of the Nashville group entail the extraction of energy at the expense of health for the sake of human profit. As such, plantation landscapes more accurately feature characteristics of industrial ecologies, such as racist ideologies rationalizing the exploitation of humans and land. Faulkner's novels both demonstrate this connection between racism and industrial plantation ecologies, and display the disruption of racist interactions in the more truly agrarian ecologies he narrativizes. After elaborating this dynamic in readings of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *Flags in the Dust* (1927), I will turn to *Go Down, Moses* (1942) to explore how a renewed agrarian vision can effect positive change within both ecocritical scholarship and today's global landscape of environmental racism and injustice.

It is remarkable how little the early twentieth-century South's premier novelist had to do with the literary "renaissance" occurring just a few hours north of Oxford in Nashville. While the Nashville group viewed themselves as a literary cohort solidifying a distinct southern response to the global modernist landscape, Faulkner was, so he would say, "not really a literary man," but more "a farmer, a country man [who] like[s] to write" (qtd. in Meriwether 191). Allen Tate, annoyed by these georgic pretensions and Faulkner's social standoffishness, said plainly that Faulkner was "a man I did not like," though he, with the vast majority of the Nashville group, greatly admired Faulkner's writings; Cleanth Brooks demonstrates that the group, "from a very early date, were aware of, and on record about, Faulkner's promise and his genius" (Watkins 106, Brooks 26). Faulkner, on the other hand, preferred to live and work in his native Oxford community rather than the cosmopolitan university circles of the Nashville Agrarians, and showed little interest in either their literary or critical output. But despite these personal differences, the two groups shared much the same agrarian philosophical foundations: namely, a belief in the moral worth of a life spent farming the land.

The central thrust of *I'll Take My Stand* posits the dominant American ideology of capitalist industrialism as a

distortion of the "right" relationship between humanity and nature.³ This occurs as property and the means of production are amassed into fewer hands, changing former proprietors into modern employees. This shift generates an alienating layer of corporate bureaucracy between the individual and the land which sustains it, and creates concentrated profit by effecting general poverty under the guise of a "progress" that is in fact merely increased consumption. Centrally, this poverty is not only economic but psychological and spiritual too, as "nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent" (xlii). Thus industrialism is not only "the economic organization of the collective American society" but also its modern "gospel": a hegemonic, self-fulfilling paradigm which permits recognition only of further industrialization as cure for the ills it creates. Against this industrial ideology, *I'll Take My Stand* advocates an "agrarian" one, which posits "the culture of the soil" to be the "best and most sensitive of vocations, and [suggests] that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers" (xlvii).

Most would agree that Faulkner, in statements both in his fiction and without, appears to largely agree with the basic tenets of this resistance to modernity, though his mode of expression is never so didactic. In the words of Floyd Watkins, Faulkner and the Nashville Agrarians tend to "philosophically like the same things: a close relationship to the land and nature, the historical and the traditional, farming, the rural, the South, individualism and small communities, labor ... and a simple religion" (53). Brooks goes a step further, arguing that "for all their differences in forms, tonalities, and specific subject matters, [Faulkner and the Nashville Agrarians] differed very little in their devotion of their native region and what they have to say about it in praise and in reproof" (39). Though the remainder of this essay will assert a major difference of "praise and reproof," I concur that the core of Faulkner's agreement with the Nashville Agrarians is that "devotion" to his "native region": the deep and abiding love for the ecology—animal, plant, human, soil, water, and wind—of northern Mississippi that remains among the most commented-upon characteristics of his writing and his worldview. Faulkner refers to the South as "the only really authentic region in the United States, because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment"; for Faulkner, as for the Nashville group and indeed all agrarian thinkers, the essence,

the shape of this inevitable bond reflects all other ties within the total ecology of a given landscape (qtd in Meriwether 72).

The source of the apologies for slavery and other racist positions found in many of the essays comprising *I'll Take My Stand* is a failure to discern key differences between the ecological characteristics of plantation and yeoman agriculture. Indeed, the Nashville Agrarians often conflate the two systems. Frank Lawrence Owsley displays this assumption most succinctly in his presentation of the southern historical narrative that Paul Conkin asserts to be "accepted by all the contributors" of *I'll Take My Stand* (81). Owsley writes,

the system of society which developed in the South, then, was close to the soil. It might be organized about the plantation with its wide fields and its slaves and self-sufficiency, or it might center around a small farm ... tilled by the owner, undriven by competition, supplied with corn by its own toil and with meat from his own pen. ... It might be crude or genteel, but it everywhere was fundamentally alike and natural. (72-3)

But plantations and agrarian farms are *not* fundamentally alike, differing in their economics, social relations, politics, environmental engagement, and even logics.⁴ In short, their entire ecology, the broader network of all these systemic relations, is different. The Nashville Agrarian who grasps this

most firmly is Andrew Lytle, whose "The Hind Tit" describes the traditional agrarian ideal of an economic ecology organized around the workings of various small, owner-operated, agriculturally diversified farmsteads which rely on a family-based workforce and a simple local market for small trade. A preponderance of such small farmsteads is the key to the American agrarian ideal, because the personal responsibility and management of a farm provides a constant reminder of the entwined fates of humanity and land that facilitates an active respect for both. This is recognized from Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson (whose own troubled legacy of agrarianism and race looms in the literal center of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County) to modern agrarian thinkers. In the introduction to his essay collection *The New Agrarianism*, editor Eric Freyfogle writes that agrarianism

is moral orientation as well as a suite of economic practices, all arising out of the insistent truth that people everywhere are part of the land community, just as dependent as other life on the land's fertility.. From this recognition of interconnected life comes an overriding attentiveness to the health of the land. (xiii, xix)

This entwined ethical and economic "attentiveness" generates the sustainable and just biological relationships that comprise an agrarian ecology. To an agrarian mind, the exploitation of

chattel slavery would be as ethically reprehensible as abusing the land to which one's own well-being is concomitant.

By contrast, the plantation society lamented by Nashville Agrarians like Owsley relies on such abuse, and requires not an agrarian but an industrial ecology, or an ecosystem in which the network of actant relations has been re-ordered to suit the logic and goals of industrialism. Like the farms comprising most of our agricultural system today, southern plantations were monocultural and profit-driven, depending entirely on both an industrialized global market for processing and sale of goods and a vast exploited workforce for labor. Ironically, plantation agriculture is the foundation upon which rests the entire industrial program that the Nashville "Agrarians" disdain. It is only by appropriating the real virtues of slaveless, small-scale agrarian ecologies that Owsley can arrive at the troublesome conclusion that "slavery ... was part of the agrarian system, but only one element and not an essential one," and other contributors can continually invoke his claim that "the irrepressible conflict" leading to the Civil War "was not between slavery and freedom, but between the industrial and commercial civilization of the North and the agrarian civilization of the South" (73-4). But small, agrarian family farms abounded on both sides of the antebellum Mason-Dixon, as did industry: mechanical in the North, and agricultural in the

South. Thus, the Nashville Agrarians mistake the South's embedded racial subjugation as an aspect of its agrarian tradition, rather than as a symptom of the South's societal aberration from the agrarian ideal, which was ironically more widely realized in the less-Confederate upland South and rural North before the war.

Faulkner, however, harbors no such illusions, and rather than eliding or apologizing for the South's racial injustices, he delves directly into their horrors and causes. Robert Penn Warren, the Nashville Agrarian who most redeemed his earlier segregationist views, writes that Faulkner's work "undercuts the official history and mythology" of the South that the Nashville Agrarians perpetuate by demonstrating that an individual's status as "Negro ... is such by social definition and not by blood" (259). Warren argues that this truth arises within Faulkner's work from his very agrarian presumptions. For Faulkner, racist cultural structures derive from the same basic flaw of industrial use of land as do many other modern ills. As Warren explains, "the rejection of the brother, the kinsman, [is] a symbolic representation of the crime that is the final crime against both nature and the human community": "the sin against reality, the sin of abstraction, the lack of reverence for nature that permits one to manipulate and violate it" (262, 253). In Warren's words, Faulkner's work reveals that "the right

attitude toward nature and man is love. And love is the opposite of the lust for power over nature or over other men" (51). The remainder of this essay will explore, first in Faulkner's narrative world and then in our own, where we can locate that "right attitude toward nature."

Thomas Sutpen is one of Yoknapatawpha County's most villainous inhabitants, the man whose sins against humanity, nature, and God curse the land and all relationships springing from it for generations. Though not the only cruel slave-owner in Faulkner's fiction, Sutpen looms the largest, his actions assuming near biblical proportions as traced in Faulkner's masterpiece, *Absalom, Absalom!* Sutpen's chronicle thus presents the closest Faulkner comes to a defined spiritual and economic indictment of the character of southern agricultural society itself, one which depicts the sins of slavery as originating in the improper industrial relationship to land.

Sutpen is born in what is now West Virginia in 1807, the upland frontier of Jefferson's commonwealth geographically ill-suited to plantation agriculture. Thus, Sutpen's early experiences are of hunting and gardening within an agrarian social ecology in which "the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'This is mine' was crazy" (220).

Sutpen's economic lifestyle accords to an agrarian logic in which "man" and "land," "Indian" "fire" and "rifle" exist equally together in the same ecological mesh, each actant vying for survival through energy, violence, and luck. The concept of ownership is thus foreign to Sutpen; his family can't comprehend "the vague and cloudy tales of Tidewater splendor that penetrated even his mountains" because "only a crazy man would go through the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for powder and whiskey" (221). Though Quentin's prelapsarian description of Sutpen's West Virginia is less historical reality than a conjured agrarian ideal—Sutpen's West Virginia is as foreign to Quentin as the Tidewater was to Sutpen—its emphasis on the issue of ownership highlights the way social mores accord to ecological-economic relationships. Just as the description of Eden in Genesis lasts only a few short verses, so the family quickly "tumbled head over heels back to Tidewater by sheer altitude, elevation and gravity, as if whatever slight hold the family had had on the mountain had broken" (222). Entering the Tidewater, Sutpen's family relinquishes "whatever slight hold" they had on the land, opening up the possibility of new social relationships unmoored from firm ecological attachment.

Sutpen's "fall" into Virginia's industrial Tidewater emphasizes the total difference between that place and his

mountain home, a difference not only of geography and economy but of ecological logic itself. The classless ideology into which he was born precludes understanding of a society in which the class and racial distinctions required by plantation agriculture shape the entire ecology of a "country flattened out now with good roads and fields and niggers working in the fields while white men sat fine horses and watched them" perform drudging labor "brutish and stupidly out of all proportion to its reward: the very primary essence of labor, toil, reduced to its crude absolute" (225, 236). Labor has no purpose within the Tidewater for those that perform it. This separation of the act of labor from its results is the essence of the industrial relationship, and sustaining that separation requires a division between classes and/or races. "You knew that you could hit [blacks, Sutpen] told Grandfather, and they would not hit back or even resist. But you did not want to, because they (the niggers) were not it, not what you wanted to hit" (230). What Sutpen wanted to hit were the attitudes of hate and resentment toward land, nonhumans, and humans that sustained the industrial Tidewater ecology. But the very logic of that system precludes that recognition, and Sutpen's Tidewater experience instead culminates in an ontological "explosion" (238). "To combat them," Sutpen discovers within the industrial idea, "you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did.

You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (238). As the Nashville Agrarians articulate, industrial ecology is enmeshed with a modern system of logic that engenders and sustains it, and permits no alternative. Sutpen's explosive realization is a total ontological revision, a loss of the non-modern logic of his agrarian origins and an acceptance, instead, of the industrial ideology. Within that logic, there is only one path to success: material accumulation in the capitalist model, a path which requires the subjugation of land and human.

The only thing that can break the strong historical cords of industrial ecology is fostering new relationships not merely with other humans, but to the land as well. *Absalom!* is full of characters who attempt to break the cycle of resentment through empathetic appeals to their human compatriots—Miss Coldfield being the clearest example—yet the entrenched industrial logic of strict humanist, classist, and racist divisions block their efforts. This situation can only be altered through a fundamental change to the underlying ecological operations of the Sutpen plantation, and the only force large enough to effect such a disruption in the novel is the Civil War. Sutpen and his slaves are then absent, and the financial ties which enable the plantation's normal industrial operations are interrupted. This leaves "Judith and Clytie making and keeping a kitchen garden of sorts to keep them alive" (124). All members of the household

must now participate in ecological interactions such as "plowing corn and cutting winter wood" that the antebellum plantation economy relegated along class and racial lines (125). And social changes accompany these shifts in ecological-economic relations. Wash Jones, "who until Sutpen went away, had never approached nearer than the scuppernong arbor behind the kitchen," is permitted to "even enter the house now" (125). Judith, Clytie, Rosa and Wash

grew and tended and harvested with our own hands the food we ate, made and worked that garden just as we cooked and ate the food which came out of it: with no distinction among the three of us of age or color but just as to who could build this fire or stir this pot or weed this bed or carry this apron full of corn to the mill for meal with least cost to the general good in time or expense of other duties. It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate, which kept that garden growing, spun thread and wove the cloth we wore. (155)

Since in the course of the shared labor of this war-time existence "flesh [must] touch with flesh," so it requires "the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too" (139). This new agrarian ecology engenders, in reverse order to Sutpen's fall, a re-apprehension of the non-industrial ontology he left in the mountains. Georgic labor reveals the essential

connection between human and land, between Judith and Clytie and the plants that make them and the soil that builds the plants and the sun that warms the soil. Direct activity in this entire process—rather than the compartmentalization industrialism requires, with some merely consuming while others live merely to perform the most drudging tasks of production—inculcates apprehension of the “one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate” of race, class, human or nonhuman status, that comprises the energetic pulse of the earth. The war-years are no Edenic paradise, just as Sutpen’s life in West Virginia was not—agrarian ecologies do not allow much time for human indolence or luxury—yet it is relatively lacking the racist and classist resentment fostered by the plantation system. But when Sutpen returns, he does “not even pause for breath before undertaking to restore his house and plantation as near as possible to what it had been,” and thus industrial ecology re-emerges, rendered only slightly less extreme by the shift from slavery to sharecropping, and the cycle of racial and class-based resentment continues (160).

Yet, elsewhere in his fiction, Faulkner depicts characters able to sustain agrarian ecologies over longer periods of time. M.E. Bradford, a student of the Nashville Agrarian Donald Davidson, re-centers Faulkner’s world on the yeoman farmer rather than the planter, claiming that “no group of characters

in the Yoknapatawpha Cycle offers more insight into the human qualities which Faulkner most admires than do his yeoman farmers" (29). The most notable of these is the MacCallum clan, who feature most prominently in Faulkner's first foray into Yoknapatawpha County, *Flags in the Dust*. The novel surveys the region's ecology across a continuum of industrial to agrarian landscapes: from plantation to town, sharecropping farm to independent farmstead. Representing the latter setting, the MacCallums inhabit the land of "smaller croppers with their tilted fields among the hills" northeast of Jefferson (288). They own their own land, raise crops and hunt for their own consumption and small trade, and measure value less in transferability and more in use, because their daily economy resides more directly with the extractive processes that sustain it. Whereas the Sartorises of *Flags* exist in a "cage" of "civilized" customs, the economic lifestyle of the MacCallums appears to be little separated from their environment (71). And this agrarian ecology, entailing as it does continual and substantive interaction and interdependency, extends to respect for fellow humans. Though Bradford's focus on the yeoman allows him to elide issues of race in the South, it is important to note that the MacCallums and other yeomen farmers of Yoknapatawpha do not own slaves before the war and employ no exploited tenants afterward precisely because those exploitative

relationships are not consistent with their agrarian economic ecology.⁵

That Faulkner chose the hilly upland to the northeast of Oxford as the site of his own Greenfield Farm, which he bought in 1938, suggests perhaps best his approval of the area's economic-ecology. Managed primarily by his brother and worked by black tenant laborers, the farm was relatively diversified, raising corn, cotton, hogs, horses, and, most importantly to Faulkner, mules, which at the time represented resistance to encroaching agricultural mechanization (Fargnoli 399). Mules, he writes in *Flags in the Dust*, remain "more than any other one creature or thing ... steadfast to the land when all else falter[s]," a statement perhaps revealing of Faulkner's own (agri)cultural goals, given his farm rarely turned a profit and yet was noted for its good treatment of tenants and the land (*Flags* 289, Fargnoli 399).

Though the legacy of the Sutpens and the example of the MacCallums suggest that non-industrial, agrarian ecologies actively resist racist attitudes and violence, they do not address whether there is any conceivable way to enact the more egalitarian ecological ontologies of agrarian life within the confines of a space laden with the legacy of racial hatred perpetuated by industrialism. This reflects one of

ecocriticism's most pressing questions: how can an individual or community economically practice a biocentric ethic? What would such an economy look like? Unfortunately, this question has been largely neglected by ecocriticism, first in a reverence for an impossibly non-economic wilderness, and more recently in calls for environmental justice that privilege the representation of problems over envisioning solutions, which are too often assumed will come through reforms of intrinsically industrial institutions.⁶ Ecocritical treatments of Faulkner reflect this problem, in that they tend to focus narrowly on the wilderness retreats of *Go Down, Moses*, at the expense of the plantation and town ecologies much more prevalent in and economically important to both that novel and to the rest of Faulkner's world.⁷ A large part of this problem is due to the literary-critical skepticism of the very term "agrarianism" in the wake of the Nashville group. The MacCallums are as neglected in ecocritical treatments of Faulkner as agriculture is in ecocriticism more broadly, despite the profound influence of agrarian thinking both in Faulkner's south and in our current environmentalist movement.

Yet ecocriticism cannot merely pivot to endorsement of some agrarian ideal. While the MacCallums succeed in living a good life relatively free of racist social structures and actions, they are able to do so only by isolating themselves from broader human society. Regardless, the majority of us today cannot

simply become yeoman farmers, for, as in the days of Faulkner and the Nashville Agrarians, the very structure of industrial economics resists such a possibility. Faulkner's fiction does not linger in the agrarian MacCallum place, because even at the beginning of his writing career that way of life was already disappearing. More relevant to the American experience are then and now Faulkner's industrial settings of town and plantation, where residents are forced to grapple with the legacy of slavery in the face of a new hyper-industrial age. Faulkner's greatest artistic interrogation of the racial legacy of southern agriculture, *Go Down, Moses*, deals directly with this problem, depicting multiple generations of the McCaslin family attempting ethical action, while—like the vast majority of Americans today—already being implicated in slavery or its ongoing legacy.

As Granville Hicks puts it, Buck and Buddy McCaslin "seem to be introduced for the express purpose of permitting Faulkner to say something about not only slavery and the Negro but economics in general" (278). For Faulkner writes that Buck and Buddy

not only possessed, but put into practice, ideas about social relationships [and] about land. They believed that land did not belong to people but that people belonged to land and that the earth would permit them to live on and out of it and use it only so long as they behaved and that

if they did not behave right, it would shake them off just like a dog getting rid of fleas. (*Unvanquished* 43)

This statement, and similar ones made later in *Go Down, Moses*, are the essence of Faulkner's agrarian belief, and would likely meet with agreement from most of the Nashville group. Yet Faulkner surpasses their understanding in the extent to which he makes Buck, Buddy, and later Isaac recognize the plantation agriculture of the South as not an agrarian, but an industrial ecology which must be not lamented but challenged. Thus, Buck and Buddy turn their father's mansion into slave quarters, live themselves in a two-room cabin, and develop a complex "system of bookkeeping" by which slaves may purchase their freedom through work (*Unvanquished* 43). This system succeeds in rendering the ecology of the McCaslin plantation less industrial, but because it still relies economically on large-scale monocultural production of a cash crop, it must retain some industrial elements, including the racist attitudes that permit slavery and exploitation. Later, their nephew Isaac recognizes that Buck and Buddy's adjustment of human relationships is not sufficient to eradicate the spectre of racism, and he extends their actions into the ecological realm. The problem, Isaac realizes, is the industrialized agricultural ecology their plantation requires: so long as the land is treated as a disposable site for profit extraction, so will be humans. Hence, he famously repudiates his

inheritance of the McCaslin plantation and foregoes all acts of ownership and industrial interaction. Many recent readers, such as ecocritic Robert Myers, suggest Isaac "retreats into escapism, rejecting his ethical obligation to manage the land and the people on it" (660).⁸ Yet such responses frequently argue from industrialist logic. Myers, for instance, cites a conflated land-and-people (implicitly, black people) as something which must be hierarchically managed either by Isaac, his relatives, or some other powerful human actor. An agrarian mind instead views land as an ecology of equally active and respectable human, plant, animal and mineral beings with whom an ethical individual must civilly negotiate. By recognizing the industrial structure of the plantation system precludes such negotiation, and seeking to construct alternate economic relationships beyond it, Buck, Buddy, and Isaac are to varying degrees able to represent agrarian belief and action in more just and effective ways than do the Nashville Agrarians.

But I do not intend to sanctify these characters as ideal ethical actors. Indeed, precisely what allows Faulkner's agrarian vision to surpass that of the Nashville group is his fictive wallowing in the depths of human moral ambiguity. No action can be entirely good, but where Buck, Buddy, and Isaac do succeed is in recognizing their complicity in unethical arrangements and seeking to ameliorate the effects of their own

actions and lifestyle within the confines of the industrial ecology in which they are inevitably enmeshed. It is in advocating this response to modernity when the Nashville Agrarians are at their best. As Andrew Lytle writes, "until [the small farmer] and the agrarian West and all the conservative communities across the United States can unite on some common political action"—which seems even more unlikely today than in 1930—"he must deny himself the articles the industrialists offer for sale" (244). Rejection or reduction of industrial consumption in favor of local or home production is effective agrarian activism because it adjusts an individual's ecological-economic connection to the land itself. This strategy can be extended to viewing one's financial interactions as ethical ones, and thus divesting personal and community capital from interests engaged in industrial exploitation of any beings.

Too often does environmentalist activism rest on the premise that widespread adoption of a the sort of biocentric, ecological paradigm it advocates will lead to positive economic change. This political strategy of consciousness raising elides the extent to which all consumers in an industrialized society remain the beneficiaries of continuing industrial exploitation of marginalized beings by suggesting that merely denouncing the idea of exploitation, or the racism that serves so often as its social arm, is activism enough. Finding fault first in others—

for instance, in Nashville Agrarianism for the racism of some of its speakers—distracts from one's own necessary implication in racist social structures as a twenty-first-century economic citizen of the "developed" world. Buck and Buddy do own slaves, and that is undoubtedly wrong, but today's readers of this essay are also likely wearing some item of cotton clothing purchased at an artificially low price subsidized by foreign exploitation of people and place, and that is wrong, too. An agrarian ecological vision finds fault first within one's own enmeshment within the industrial order, and acts first to adjust one's home and local economy to resist social and environmental injustice. A failure to do this is ironically the Nashville Agrarians' largest problem: they do not recognize the plantation ecology they idealize is implicated in the very industrial systems they critique. Ecocriticism can learn from this mistake by turning attention to the economic implications of its cultural critique, and by heeding the agrarian imperative to live out economically one's ecological vision.

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Notes

¹The group is known variously as the Nashville, Vanderbilt, Fugitive, or Southern Agrarians, and often simply as "the Agrarians." To avoid conflating the group with all agrarian writers, economists, and farmers of the South, I will refer to them throughout as the "Nashville Agrarians."

² See Major or Vernon's "Problematic" for reviews of the ecocritical response to Nashville Agrarianism.

³ Freyfogle notes in the introduction to his collection *The New Agrarianism* that throughout the agrarian tradition "industrialism" is variously substituted with terms such as "capitalism," "materialism," "technification," "possessiveness," "consumption," and, I might add, consumerism (xl). Following Freyfogle, I will, in this essay, employ "industrialism" "in the same suggestive, encompassing way as did the Twelve Southerners" (Freyfogle xl).

⁴ See Kirby for a thorough exploration of the South's various agricultural regions and phases that emphasizes "the diversity of the South in terms ... of topography and crop types, which fundamentally relate to farming systems and to what is broadly called culture" (xv).

⁵ See Fox-Genovese and Genovese for a study of Bradford's "excision" of "the memory of slavery" from Faulkner's work (91).

⁶ See Horrocks for an elaboration of this argument.

⁷ See Vernon, "Being Myriad," Buell, Myers, Harrington, and Welling.

⁸ See Peters for an overview of the critical response to Isaac.