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Jonathan Berliner
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Introduction

"I wish publishing was advanced enough," William Faulkner wrote to his friend Ben Wasson in the summer of 1929, "to use colored ink" in the publication of *The Sound and the Fury*, "as I argued with you and Hal in the speak-easy that day" ("To Wasson" 44). Faulkner wanted the opening section of the novel printed as "a continuous whole" so "the reader's eye" would see the "unbroken-surfaced confusion" of Benjy's thoughts, yet he also wanted to mark the "subjective" transitions "in Ben's mind" from one topic to another (44). While italics and line breaks could be used to indicate these shifts, Faulkner argued that this "presents a most dull and poorly articulated picture to my eye" (44). Given the cost of color typesetting at the time, however, Faulkner wrote that he would "just have to save the idea until publishing grows up to it," and the novel was published by Cape and Smith using only black ink (45). Faulkner later hoped to issue a special edition of the novel "using different color inks," and he "underlined [a] copy" of the novel "in different color crayons" for the publisher to use as a guide ("To Cowley" October 1945, 207). The project, however, never came to fruition, and his marked copy was lost.[1]

Some of the most exciting recent work in literary studies deals with the materials of writing. As Bill Brown argues, such attention to the materiality of representation "expand[s] the ways of locating physical detail in a sign system, which is how we make matter mean" ("Introduction" 25). Rather than submit to what Leah Price calls "a commonsense Cartesianism [that] teaches us to filter out the look, the feel, [and] the smell of the printed page" (12), Brown challenges us to engage with the "dialectical drama of opacity and transparency, physical support and cognitive transport, representation as object and as act" ("Introduction" 26). In certain situations, the material text itself can be the basis of this transport and even rapture.

[1] See Polk and Ross; Blotner 243–244, 319–321; and "To Cowley" October 1945, 207.

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"The wearing of sacred or magical texts," writes Rowan Watson, "has a long history" (483). During the Renaissance, "an individual might carry … a series of pieces of parchment … round the neck" in the hope of finding "love" even if the wearer "could not read the writing"; "[t]he opening words of St. John's Gospel were [also] especially popular" (483–484). In this instance, the *logos* becomes transposed from divine word to material script. To one degree or another, all writers must concern themselves with the physical aspect of the text. From clay tablets to vellum, paper to computer screens, texts are presented in an inescapably material manner. Even the flattest of flat screens has some depth. While images can be projected onto a wall, or into a room in the manner of a hologram, the realization of these images always takes a spatial form. To put it somewhat differently, a novel, for example, may be available online, but the ones and zeros of its code must be stored somewhere – often saved and backed up in the network of energy-intensive server farms that constitute the cloud. Even the word *text*, so often used in opposition to *book*, *scroll*, or other material form, "derives … from the Latin *texere*, 'to weave'" and is likely connected "with the Vedic 'tāṣṭi', to 'fashion by carpentry'" (McKenzie 13–14).[2]

Faulkner was particularly attuned to the physicality of the text. Over and against the idea of himself as "a literary man," he often presented himself "as a craftsman" (*Faulkner in the University* 23, 12). In the many speeches, interviews, and lectures he gave after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, Faulkner talked about his writing in terms of carpentry. "[T]he writer has three sources," he said at the University of Virginia, "imagination, observation, and experience…. [H]e uses his material from the three sources as the carpenter reaches into his lumber room and finds a board" (*Faulkner in the University* 103). In her essay "The Elizabethan Lumber Room" (1925), Virginia Woolf presents Richard Hakluyt's *Early Voyages* (1598–1600) as "an emporium, a lumber room strewn with ancient sacks, obsolete nautical instruments, huge bales of wool, and little bags of rubies and emeralds" (61). For Woolf, this style of writing gives Renaissance prose the quality of pastiche. Faulkner, though, describes refining rough wood into well-crafted prose "like a carpenter uses his tools" ("Interview with Cynthia Grenier" 220). In his 1954 novel *A Fable*, Faulkner describes one of his central characters, a nameless senior French general during the First

[2] This joining of materiality and textuality can also be seen in the East Asian context. "Written on bamboo and silk," notes Tsuen-Hsuin Tsien, "was an old Chinese expression for books, documents, or other written records produced in ancient times," "a period in Chinese book history … running from antiquity to about the sixth century AD" (vii).

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World War called the marshal, as passing "into the dusty lumber room of literature," a materializing trope that signals his legendary status (289).[3] While working on the novel, Faulkner exteriorized this imaginative lumber by writing an outline of the story on the wall of his study. Joseph Urgo maintains that *A Fable* as "intellectual labor" becomes "indistinguishable from … carpentry"; even today, "visitors" to Rowan Oak, Faulkner's home in Mississippi and now a museum, "confront with immediacy" this physical text ("Introduction" xiii). Faulkner worked on Rowan Oak himself, making improvements over the years he owned the property. Rather than separating physical labor from his writing, Faulkner brought them together both in terms of how he explained his writing process and in his enactment of it.

William Faulkner and the Materials of Writing proposes that Faulkner can serve as a guide to understanding the weave of medium and message. I take a material approach, examining the instruments, surfaces, and technologies of writing Faulkner incorporates into his novels and stories from worn paper to parchment, newspaper comics to telegrams, Bibles to an ivory tablet with a gold stylus. As a counterpart to Faulkner's exquisite verbal play, I argue there lies a previously undisclosed and equally exquisite play of physical texts. This book synthesizes close reading textual analysis; Faulkner's comments about his work; and an examination of how Faulkner, his publishers, and others repackaged his fiction for different audiences both during his lifetime and since his death in 1962. I consider multiple modes of publication – hardback first editions, pulp paperback versions of his novels – as well as adaptations of his work into films and *bon mots* selected from his writing, in particular Gavin Stevens's line from Faulkner's 1951 book *Requiem for a Nun* – "The past is never dead. It's not even past" – which has taken on new life today, quite apart from the context in *Requiem for a Nun*, as a statement about American history, particularly issues dealing with race (73). More than ever, Faulkner is not simply an

[3] All quotations from Faulkner's novels follow the most current Vintage editions as listed in the Works Cited unless otherwise noted. His first two novels, *Soldiers' Pay* and *Mosquitoes*, continue to be issued under the Liveright imprint, and quotations from these books correspond with the most recent versions in the Works Cited as well. References to *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion* are keyed to the 2012 Modern Library *Snopes* volume that prints the three novels together. Faulkner uses the phase *lumber room* twice in *A Fable*, the first time hyphenating the term as *lumber-room* (276) and the second time omitting the hyphen (289). It should be noted that *lumber* has a different meaning in North America – "[t]imber sawn into rough planks or otherwise roughly prepared for the market" – than it has in Great Britain, where the term refers to "[d]isused articles of furniture and the like, … useless odds and ends" ("Lumber").

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author on the shelf but in wide cultural circulation. This study uses *writing* as the key term from which to link multiple media forms. In part this is because our attention here is on someone who worked primarily in this medium, and Faulkner often brings experiments with other forms such as visual art into writing. *Write* has Germanic roots and has meant not only "[t]o form … letters, symbols, words" but also to "draw" ("Write"). Similarly, the suffix *-graph* used in terms to describe communications technology from *telegraph* to *phonograph* to *photograph* to *cinematography* comes from the Greek term *graphé*, "representation by means of lines" whether as "drawing" or "painting" but also "writing" ("Graphé"). Lisa Gitelman argues in *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (1999) that all information technologies function as forms of "*inscription*" (2), the root of which may share "the same Indo-European base" not only with "sketch" and "scratch" but "stylus" ("Scribe"). Although writing has been linked to a certain elitism over and against orality, Martyn Lyons's description of "'amphibious' culture[s], in which both oral and written communication [have] played significant roles," can be widely applied (74), particularly since colonial assumptions about what counts as writing are being reevaluated with a larger sense of writing that includes such forms as "*quipu* writing" and "*wampum*" in the Americas as well as communication with "cowrie" shells in West Africa (Gelb 4–5).[4] While attentive to differences between mediums, I emphasize in this book continuity across media forms old and new.[5]

This book has three objectives. First, I show how Faulkner can help us to think through questions about the relationship between writing and the human subject. In *The Sound and the Fury*, as Mississippi native Quentin Compson organizes his belongings before he takes his own life while studying at Harvard, he "pack[s] [his] trunk" and "carrie[s] … books into [his] sitting-room" (81). Quentin differentiates between two sets of books: "the ones [he] had brought from home and the ones *Father said it used to be a gentleman was known by his books; nowadays he is known by the ones he has not returned*" (81).[6] Quentin thus

[4] Although I. J. Gelb's definition of what counts as a writing system becomes quite narrow, his wealth of examples suggest a more capacious understanding of inscription. See also Diringer 27–34 and Jensen 24–49. More recent studies include Rasmussen, Steele, and Martínez-Ruiz.

[5] We find a variety of terms in use to describe material texts in ways that draw attention to this joining of things and words. Leslie Howsam calls the materials of writing a "base, or substrate, to carry texts across the limits of time and space" ("Study of Book History" 2). David Pearson uses the term "mediators" in his discussion of the way in which "books" join "texts" and "objects" (25). Particularly influential has been Gérard Genette's account of what he calls "the paratext" of materials and practices, which "enables a text to become a book" and "ensure[s] the text's presence in the world" (1).

[6] All the italics in the present study, unless otherwise noted, are in the source texts.

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transposes his father's cynical observation into his internal monologue. Southern gentlemen, Mr. Compson suggests, once proudly owned books, but now that this social class is in decline, they borrow things like everyone else, including their books. The fiancé of Quentin's sister Caddy, a man named Herbert Head, calls Quentin a "half-baked Galahad," and the impossibly of Quentin's romantic, unrealizable vision of himself as part of a South that no longer exists and in fact never did contributes to the despair that leads to his suicide (110). While the content of the books to which Mr. Compson refers may be less important than their borrowed status, it can be useful to imagine some of them as volumes of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels (1814–1831). Indeed, we find "a complete Walter Scott" as part of Colonel Sartoris's library in Faulkner's 1938 novel *The Unvanquished* (16). Mark Twain famously remarked in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) that "Sir Walter" with his "sham grandeurs … and sham chivalries … had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war" (375–376). Faulkner, though, explained Scott's popularity in the South as post- not antebellum: "[E]very Southern household … after Reconstruction … that [at] all pretended to be literate had Scott" in part because "you got more words for your money" (*Faulkner in the University* 135).[7] In this sense, Quentin fails to become a character in a set of romances. In addition to Scott, though, we might note that Colonel Sartoris's library includes law books, state records, religious volumes, and the peculiar "History of Werewolf Men in England, Ireland and Scotland and Including Wales" (16). Quentin may be a failed cavalier, but this does not fully explain what it means to lose a sense of oneself vis-à-vis media with romances and law books alongside the kinds of idiosyncratic volumes that can personalize a collection. *The Sound and the Fury*, the material production of which Faulkner sought to make central to its meaning, stages for us the issue of what writing as both text and thing can teach us about the role of media in our lives and how losing a connection to one can mean losing the other.

[7] Sarah Gardner has recently pointed out in "Bookless Mississippi" (2019) that Colonel Sartoris's library contains only "one bookcase," and, moreover, was hardly representative of Southern households, few of which "owned a library" of any sort even by Faulkner's time (3). The kind of book collection suggested by Mr. Compson, though, could be understood as a version of the library owned by Faulkner's friend Phil Stone with "floor-to-ceiling bookcases" and "hundreds of leather-bound books" (Snell 24). Faulkner's own family had "the large library" of his grandfather, J. W. T. Falkner, supplemented by his mother's books, all of which contributed not only to his early literary education but his sense of book ownership (Blotner 16). For a sense of Scott's popularity before the war, including an 1860 Virginia bookseller advertisement, see Wachtell and "Elegant Books."

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Second, this book demonstrates how race and gender look different once we begin to explore how Faulkner links them to physical texts. In *Light in August* (1932), Faulkner repeatedly describes his racially ambiguous central character Joe Christmas as having a "parchment" (34, 149) or "parchmentcolored" body (120, 123, 277). I connect this portrayal to Faulkner's description in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) of the "Confederate monument" at the center of his fictional town of Jefferson, Mississippi, as a "white pencil" (48). The metaphor of marking onto the surface of Christmas's body as if it were a material of writing serves as a way of articulating both the construction of Blackness and the manner in which it becomes part of the self. This sense of race as a social construct is consonant with Faulkner's statement in his 1955 visit to Japan such that "prejudice" should be understood as essentially an "economic" issue and "black skin" a "designation" used by "the white man" to "knock the greatest number of competitors for his job" (*Faulkner at Nagano* 169–170). At another event on this trip, Faulkner maintained that while some people "would tell you that a different kind of blood runs in the Negro's veins from the white man's veins," "[e]verybody knows that blood's blood. Any student in biology could tell them that" (*Faulkner at Nagano* 98). Faulkner's stand on civil rights was ambivalent at best, but I argue that to the extent he transposes social structures into written ones, he rearranges matters in such a way as to suggest more progressive possibilities than he himself may have been aware.

While race here comes from the outside onto bodies, Faulkner in his novel *Sanctuary* (1931) presents the inverse with regard to gender. Here he figures the "eyes" of the college student Temple Drake as "inkwells" as if ready to fill a phallic stylus in a description that prefigures her rape with a corn cob by the gangster Popeye (76). The logic of the novel, though, suggests that men make this ink for their own purposes. "It's us girls," says another young woman, "[m]en just cant seem to take us … for what we are. They make us what we are, then they expect us to be different" (254). By presenting Christmas's skin as parchment, Jefferson's Confederate monument as a pencil, and Temple's eyes as filled with ink, Faulkner turns Blackness and femininity not simply into texts but materials of writing that dramatize the process whereby law and custom become incorporated into bodies. To be sure, possibilities of freedom based on changeable texts rather than biological essences often go unrealized in Faulkner's works. Perhaps for the very reason that categories of race and gender are potentially more open in this way, Faulkner can be unrelenting in projecting all sorts of vitriol onto African Americans and women. Even still, the value of this work should not be underestimated. In 1935, Jerome Peterson argued

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in the African American newspaper the *New York Age* that Faulkner along with other "realistic Southern writers," including Erskine Caldwell, offer portraits of "Southern whites" that make it "easy to understand why lynching persists as the most popular sport or recreation below the Mason and Dixon line." Precisely this kind of realism, often expressed through a tangle of texts and bodies, offers us a diagnostic of his time.

Finally, *William Faulkner and the Materials of Writing* provides an opportunity to consider anew the existential and religious elements of Faulkner's work and how we might reimagine the concept of literature through an engagement with the physicality of art. "[T]he writer's … duty," Faulkner maintained in his 1950 address upon receiving the Nobel Prize, is to create out of "the agony and sweat of the human spirit … the props, the pillars" to help humanity "endure and prevail" (119–120). The nature of such material support can be grasped in his plan for the publication of *A Fable*. According to his friend and editor Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner wanted the novel titled "*The Cross: A Fable*" with just the "rebus" of the "cross" on "the jacket of the novel … with perhaps below it in the right-hand corner, and not in large type, the two words 'A Fable'" (*Faulkner–Cowley File* 105). In the first trade edition published by Random House, each chapter begins with a single cross. The jacket has a large cross and a large title, along with Faulkner's name; the front of the hardcover book underneath has neither the title nor Faulkner's name but rather three crosses shown from an angle such that each is actually two, one in front of the other. Stylized in this manner, they evoke not only the Christian symbol but a pair of human figures dancing or embracing. Faulkner dedicated the novel to his daughter Jill because, he later explained, she had just turned "twenty-one years old" and this was "a way of saying, 'Good-bye to your childhood, you are grown now and you are on your own'" (*Faulkner at Nagano* 130). On your own, that is, with this book, just as certain kind of Protestant is on one's own with the Bible.

Although this role for art and the artist can be understood as part of a sacralization that began with Romanticism and flourished especially in the high modernist period with Faulkner as one of its chief priests, I argue that he offers us a nuanced sense of art and literature that goes beyond a simple recuperation of an outdated model. From its earliest English uses in the fifteenth century, *literature* has been understood as a form of edification; John Skelton, for example, connects "lytterkture" with "vertu" ("Literature"). We might, though, table for now what counts as edification in favor of a subjective approach. Faulkner's views on the matter were less dependent on content than one might think. Recently, the

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high-profile lawyer and writer Scott Gaille lamented that "serious reading … is being displaced by social media," and he enlists Faulkner to back him up: "Read, read, read," he quotes from Faulkner's 1947 remarks to students at the University of Mississippi, "[j]ust like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master." But the full quotation from Faulkner's advice to students is illustrative: "Read, read, read. Read everything – trash, classics, good and bad" ("Classroom Statements" 55). Faulkner's lumber room turns out to include all sorts of materials, which can be deployed by writers for multiple effects. In 1960, Faulkner pushed back against decisions in the South to close libraries to prevent them from becoming integrated. "Books should be open to everyone," he said; "[i]n principle, I think everyone should not only have the right to look at everything printed, they should be compelled by law" ("Faulkner Laments"). My approach in this book should not be confused with one often associated with postmodernism where irony and medium dominate content and message, yet it is precisely the gathering attention to surfaces that enables us now, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, to work fluidly with writing as both text and thing.

Making Books

From the beginning of his career, Faulkner participated in multiple aspects of publishing. Wasson later recalled that "in the spring of 1921," Faulkner "told [him] he was writing a book, printing, illustrating and binding it himself" (53). Faulkner titled it *The Marionettes* and engaged Wasson to "try to sell it" (Wasson 53). Faulkner made several copies of the book, but at the time Wasson found only one buyer. Faulkner also used more traditional self-publishing strategies when in 1924 he and his friend Phil Stone collaborated on a project to subsidize printing Faulkner's volume of poetry *The Marble Faun* by the Four Seas Company. In 1926, Faulkner along with coauthor William Spratling underwrote the production of *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* issued by Pelican Press.[8] As Lothar Hönnighausen writes, the handmade *Marionettes* "is by no means an exception among Faulkner's early works, but belongs to an entire group of such booklets: *Dawn, An Orchid, A Song* (1918), *The Lilacs* (1919–1920), *Vision in Spring* (1920), [and] *Mayday* (1926)," along with

[8] See Blotner 116 and 195. Both were eventually reprinted. In 1960, Random House published *The Marble Faun* combined in a single volume with Faulkner's 1933 poetry collection *A Green Bough*. The University of Texas Press published *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* in 1966 prefaced by Spratling's essay, "Chronicle of a Friendship: William Faulkner in New Orleans."

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Helen: A Courtship and *Royal Street: New Orleans* in 1926 and *The Wishing Tree* in 1927 (*Art of Stylization* 11).[9] Faulkner presented these books to friends that included Helen Baird, whom he pursued romantically but who did not return his affections, and his childhood friend and his future wife Estelle who would first marry another man. Faulkner gave *Dawn, An Orchid, A Song*; *Vision in Spring*; and *Royal Street* to Estelle and *The Wishing Tree* to her daughter Victoria. In fact, he produced several versions of *The Wishing Tree* for other children, including one for the terminally ill child of family friends and another as a 1948 Christmas present for Stone's son Philip.[10]

Faulkner almost certainly composed more of these booklets than we know about today. In 2016, a small volume of poems written, drawn, and bound by Faulkner called *CHANSONS AU PRINTEMPS* surfaced on an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*. The owner of the booklet told appraiser Ian Ehling, now Director of Fine Books and Manuscripts at Bonhams, that a woman who was his "parents' first landlord in Memphis, Tennessee," and "like [a] grandmother" to him, gave him the book before her death in 1985 ("Appraisal"). In her youth, he told Ehling, she had a "fling with William Faulkner"; though it had not "lasted very long," she kept the volume of poems, dated March 1919 and signed "W. Faulkner, RFC," the abbreviation for Royal Flying Corps ("Appraisal"). Faulkner trained as a pilot in Canada at the end of the First World War. While he never deployed to Europe, this did not stop him from insinuating that he had and claiming a war injury. The First World War would play a major role in his later writing. In a 2017 essay, Thomas McHaney links the first poem, "One Who Was Left Living," from this "previously unknown booklet of poetry," to the "spiritually dead" former soldiers in Faulkner's 1931 short story "All the Dead Pilots." On the

[9] *The Marionettes, Vision in Spring, Mayday, Helen: A Courtship,* and *The Wishing Tree* were republished posthumously. References to each are listed in the Works Cited. All except *The Wishing Tree*, produced as a children's book with new illustrations by Don Bolognese, include apparatuses that discuss their history and composition. A reproduction of *Dawn, An Orchid, A Song*, which consists of a single folded sheet of paper with two poems and a drawing, can be found in Hönnighausen's *William Faulkner: The Art of Stylization in His Early Graphic and Literary Work* 87. Brodsky and Hamblin V, 35–39 provide the text and a description of *The Lilacs*. Noel Polk describes *Royal Street* as "a small but handsomely bound pamphlet" of "26 pages" with "the first letter of each sketch … elaborately decorated, in large blocks, and colored, like a medieval illuminated manuscript" ("'Hong Li' and *Royal Street*" 143). In *The Signifying Eye: Seeing Faulkner's Art* (2013), Candace Waid begins with a discussion of *The Marionettes* showing how Faulkner throughout his career "saw and wrote in pictures" (18).

[10] Random House based their 1964 edition of *The Wishing Tree* on the copy Faulkner made for Victoria. The text of the version Faulkner made for Philip Stone can be found in Brodsky and Hamblin V, 92–114. For a discussion of the differences between the texts, see Brodsky's "A Textual History."

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Antiques Roadshow episode, Ehling led viewers through a tour of the tiny book just several inches in height and width, handstitched with a purple vellum binding and a few paper pages with drawings and poems in a style that synthesized a number of influences, including the art nouveau illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and the work of Paul Verlaine and other symbolist poets.[11] One of the drawings in this booklet nearly duplicates one in *Dawn, An Orchid, A Song*, which Faulkner had presented to Estelle the year earlier, and depicts a piping satyr with an entranced flapper – both peered down upon by a devilish head in the corner. Faulkner used another version of this drawing, which became for him a kind of doodle, with the satyr and nymph figures further apart and without the devil's head, on the "verso of [an] early draft … of 'The Lilacs[']" (Brodsky and Hamblin V 16). He even sketched a copy "that slightly overlaps" the "side view" he drew of a "World War I biplane" (Brodsky and Hamblin V 17). Faulkner seems to have envisioned the booklets as a chance to display his talents in a way that combined writing and drawing but also walked a line between handmade and published works, both of which had an element of prestige he hoped his friends and potential lovers would admire. Indeed, the inherent materiality of texts can perhaps most easily be grasped when dealing with these kinds of artist books that combine stylized writing and drawing and so push the idea of a pure text to the level of absurdity.[12]

While Faulkner bound all of these himself, only some included drawings and hand-lettering while others had typed pages. *Vision in Spring*, writes Judith Sensibar, "looks as if it were meant to be commercially published" ("Introduction" x). The title page mimics the format of a book and

[11] When compared with Faulkner's other handmade books in terms of its production, *CHANSONS AU PRINTEMPS* most resembles *The Lilacs*. As Louis Daniel Brodsky writes, "F definitely *did* bind the little Lilacs booklet himself … it is of red velvet cloth; the pages were handstitched together with delicate thread … strands of the thread remain as does about half of the red-velvet cover … it was *not* printed on a printing press, rather lettered by hand by F on tiny sheets that he personally gathered and stitched with needle and thread and possibly even trimmed with a scissors" (qtd. in Hönnighausen, *William Faulkner* 191, n. 10).

[12] My position of course does not entail giving up on the semantic. In *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004), Walter Benn Michaels offers a far-reaching critique into what he calls "the transformation of text into material object" (8). While I maintain that such a transformation is impossible because texts are already material and could not exist in the world if they were not, part of the value of his position is that it serves as a rebuke to a too facile view of material textuality where only the medium matters. His argument, though, walls off texts from their mode of transmission rather than viewing the two as together producing meaning. Not only do artist books such as the ones Faulkner produced show the fallacy of trying to divorce text and thing but so do books like Dorothy Kunhardt's *Pat the Bunny*, originally published in 1940, as well as other touch and feel books for children. It is no accident that foregrounding the book explicitly as a thing is so apparent in these cases since they serve to bridge the tactile and the semantic.

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