‘WHAT GOOD IS A PRETTY FACE WITH NOTHING BEHIND IT?’:

THE SPECTER OF THE INAUTHENTIC IN

TRUE STORY MAGAZINE AND

LITERARY MODERNISM

by

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ABSTRACT

‘WHAT GOOD IS A PRETTY FACE WITH NOTHING BEHIND IT?’:
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Georgia Clarkson Smith

This thesis situates the narratives of *True Story* magazine in the 1920s within and against the context of their surrounding advertisements in order to reveal a popular resistance to the logic of consumption that was aggressively marketed to working class readers at the turn of the century. I argue that while the confessional narratives of *True Story* magazine explore the possibilities of self reinvention and upward mobility in market society, they paradoxically reveal an anxiety about the veracity of the mass market’s promises for sociocultural advancement via consumption. Further, I explore the trope of the self-constructed consumer persona in modernist fiction in order to tease out a thematic “preoccupation with inauthencity” that repeatedly begs attention not only in popular confessional magazines like *True Story*, but also in middle-market and canonical modernist novels such as Anita Loo’s *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, and William Faulkner’s *If I Forget Thee Jerusalem*.

All of these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded.

Virginia Woolf
"A Room of One's Own"

INTRODUCTION

> The pulp customers never allow social problems to intrude upon their flights of fancy; hence the magazines rigorously bar any touch of contemporary realism. Future scholars may wish to study these embalmed day-dreams to find out how the American Proletariat reacted to the Machine Age.
>
> -Marcus Duffield
> *Vanity Fair*, 1932

The anonymously penned confessional epistolary "Movie Mad," which appears in the January 1927 edition of Bernarr MacFadden's *True Story* magazine, derives its narrative trajectory from a crucial moment of popular reading that situates popular print culture as a central mechanism in the construction of the modern persona. The narrator, who calls herself Florry, is a sixteen year old girl from a rural ranch community out West. A product of her Victorian parents' reserved domestic universe, Florry describes herself as "silent, sensitive, reticent," a girl innocent to the ways of the world (32). Yet she admits to a desire for freedom and adventure. Florry finds herself bored with the unimaginative monotony of her parents' "business-like regularity" and is afraid of becoming a slave to the domestic realm like her over-burdened and sickly mother whose "[adherence] in her girlhood to that idiotic fashion of the wasp-waist [had] almost [cost her] her life" (76; 31).

Florry confesses that she has been storing away the meager amount of cash that she earns for her weekly chores for "some possible future trip to the City of Dreams" (76). With the change remaining from her earnings, she has taken up the habit of weekly trips to the drugstore to frivolously indulge in "face-powder, hair and skin lotions, magazines and candy" (76).

Entering the drugstore one day on her habitual weekly shopping excursion to town, young Florry is confronted with a vision of herself in the form of a movie starlet on the cover of a magazine:

> In my opinion she was exactly like myself—the same shade of golden brown hair—the same blue-black eyes with thick lashes—the same pert nose and sensitive mouth—an expression rather of wistfulness just like mine. That night I examined the publication thoroughly … and I found an enlightening article about "The Girl on the Cover." … I fairly devoured that article—swallowed it whole, "hook, line, and sinker." It fired my imagination—inflated my ambition—sent my desires skyrocketing; if that little obscure country girl so like me from a sister state had become a star, why not me? (76)

After reading the article for "about the dozenth time," Florry finds herself "visioning, as [she works], the heights of stardom" (76). She confesses that "the ambitious idea … planted in my mind by that magazine article kept right on growing, as steadily as that dollar a week which I added to my savings" (77). Florry becomes convinced that she has found the key to success in her performative appropriation of the movie star persona. She scrawls a brief note to her parents sharing her plans to "go into the moving pictures" and hops on a train to the city (78).

Florry's movie magazine, while fueling and enabling her ambitions for freedom, has not however adequately prepared her for the realities of the modern city. She finds herself, not unlike Flaubert's Emma Bovary, a "female reader caught between the delusions of the trivial romantic narrative and the realities" of modern life (Huyssen 45). With her duplicitous starlet performance, Florry blurs the boundaries of cultural mobility, gaining access to the "impregnable entrances of the palatial structures of the picture industry" solely through posturing and mimicry (79). But her idealistic star performance ends up being her very undoing. Too near in appearance

to the starlet Jasmine Silver, Florry is kicked off of the movie set as an imposter and a "rogue," a pirated copy of the authentic original, "too much alike for safety" (82). Later issues of *True Story* incorporate similar concerns with authenticity and legitimacy into their advertising strategies by implementing warranties about the artistic originality of their reader contributions. The October 1932 issue warns readers that "Plagiarism is Literary or Artistic Theft," and that those persons "bold enough [to] deliberately copy stories from other publications, and submit them as their own" will be "prosecute[d] to the limit of the law" ("Plagiarism"). Confronted with the politics of authenticity in the market of celebrity, Florry realizes that "no studio wants an actual living duplicate of a star that it has made [because] individuality is one of the strongest drawing cards" (82). Unable to harness her own individual and authentic persona, Florry finds her dreams dissolved and her wallet empty; her shallow posturing is not an adequate device to shelter a young girl who is "alone, friendless, penniless in [the] strange city" (82). Florry is forced to relinquish her dreams and her independence and is nearly raped by a "wolf in sheep's clothing" posturing as a film director (83). Confronted with the realities that lurk "behind the scenes" of mass culture's plastic dreamscapes, she at last returns home and finds her redemptive *denouement* in the familiar arms of her lost sweetheart (30).

In a modern universe of mass culture in which both the products of the market and consumers themselves had, for many artists and critics, become increasingly standardized and hollow, persona—the deliberate performance of identity—as enabled through consumption was suspect in the popular American imagination. The body of the individual—increasingly circumscribed by consumption and by practices of artifice and display—was painted across literary borders as a fictional conspiracy, a simulacrum not to be trusted and incapable of sustaining its masquerade. The confessional narratives of *True Story* explored the possibilities of

self-effacement and cultural fluidity, yet revealed an anxiety about the veracity of the mass market's promises for sociocultural advancement via consumption. This thesis situates the narratives of *True Story* magazine within and against the context of their surrounding advertisements in order to reveal a popular resistance to the logic of consumption that was aggressively marketed to working class readers at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF *TRUE STORY* AND THE CONFESSION MAGAZINES

The confession magazines were first introduced by publishing magnate Bernarr Macfadden (perhaps best known for his first publication, *Physical Culture* magazine) in 1919 with *True Story*, tag-lined "Truth is Stranger than Fiction." The confessions were monthly publications of around 112 pages that sold on urban newsstands for 25 cents (dropping to 15 cents per issue during the Depression). The magazines generally featured between 15 and 20 epistolary style short stores, which were purportedly culled from anonymous readers who were drawn with the promise of cash prizes for "the best" true stories. Contrary to the middle-class slick magazines which worked to construct their cultural saliency with the inclusion of more literary works, the confessions promoted a sensationalized—even tabloidesque—version of modern social realism. Critic George Gerbner described the confession formula as follows: "a simple, trustful human is faced with a complex, real and brutal world" (35). Titles like "The Salvation of a Bank Burglar" and "When Society Sins" explored the underbelly of social and economic exchange in urban modernity through the identificatory mode of psychologically evocative first-person narratives; the specters of crime, poverty, sexual victimization, pregnancy, divorce, and unemployment were central themes. While romance usually figured as a central element of the confessionals, they were starkly more sensationalized than the romance pulps, and even risqué by the standards of their period. A critic writing in 1938 remarked that the confessionals were markedly different from the "sweetheart" love pulps (such as Street & Smith's *Love Story*) in their more progressive acceptance of female sexual desire, noting that "it is accepted by the editors of the confession magazines that the bed must always precede the marriage, as if this were a natural rather than man-made law" (Uzzell 41). And while the dreamy

covers and, often, the titles of the confessions stories—like “Trapped by Destiny” and “She Couldn’t Escape Love”— in addition to MacFadden’s famously didactic editorials, such as “The Flirt’s Penalty”—directed contemporary critics to classify the form as a modern romance genre, working men figure prominently in the narratives. Several contemporary reader studies indicate that the confessions were also highly popular among working class men.

Visually mimicking the quality slicks, the large-format magazines featured colorful covers with portraits of glamorous, modern young women; pages with half-tone photographs that contributed to the confessions’ aura of veracity; and sections of celebrity photographs that played upon the individual magnetism of the celebrity persona. The advertisements in the confessionals reinforced the spectral world of the magazine—in which persona was registered as a subject of scrutiny in the modern visual field—and encouraged readers to harness their own “celebrity magnetism” through the consumption of beauty and leisure goods. Unlike the slicks, though, the confessions kept cover prices low by printing on low-grade semi-coated stock, only one grade above pulp paper. And the confessions were marketed to an entirely different audience than the slicks, an audience which is reflected both in the simple prose and in the content of the magazine.

The confessions strove to appeal to the less educated and the newly literate through their constructed image as a publication that was, in the words of one anonymous reader, a “literature for the people, by the people” (“True Story Readers”). Protagonists of the confession stories are almost always working class and their primary struggle—though often framed through the structure of heterosexual romance—is that of navigating and testing the limitations of changing class and gender roles. Reflecting the perceived values and literary equipment of their culturally marginal audience, the confessionals rejected outright any form of cultural snobbery or artificial

embellishment; editors deliberately encouraged simple prose and "honest" content, promising audiences "the story is the thing that counts—not literary skill": "editors are not swayed by the past success or even by the literary equipment of those who submit manuscripts to the magazine" ("24,000 Dollars in Cash"). This is not to say that all of the stories in the genre were of poor quality; it was not uncommon for stories rejected by the love pulp editors to be republished in middle-class slick magazines like *Cosmopolitan* (Uzzell 39). For the most part, though, the prosaic simplicity and gritty realism of the form created an aesthetic of unvarnished authenticity through which the confessional narratives self-reflexively rejected the artifice of fiction and interrogated the façade of public performance.

With cash prize guarantees that "every person having a real life story to tell, no matter what his or her sphere in life, or degree of education, has equal opportunity to profit," the confessions responded to the desire of working class audiences to be represented and empowered in the public sphere ("24,000 Dollars in Cash"). This audience-centered form created an interactive space of discourse for working class audiences by turning a new-found market of consumers—at least in theory if not in deed[1]—into producers of mass culture. In addition to the 10 to 14 epistolary style stories, editorial sections reinforced the form's aura of interactivity and engaged readership. "Problems" forums invited readers to offer personal responses to other readers seeking advice on marriage, work, and family. By the late 1920s, *True Story* also offered a space for reader-submitted literary criticism, providing readers with cash prizes for the best criticism of their stories. The confessions thus blurred the lines between writers and readers, creating a virtual community of discourse about the sociocultural concerns unique to its

[1] Handfuls of formula manuals attest to the fact that, at least by the mid-30s, the confessions had become a professionalized market; it has also been noted by critics that both the formulaic nature and the grammatical quality of the confession stories indicate that stories were either written or revised by MacFadden's large editorial staff or written by freelance professional authors. Despite these realities, the confessions were dependent upon maintaining their *aura* of legitimacy as the defining component of their "brand."

readership and calling into question the legitimacy of cultural privilege and the limitations of cultural advancement.

MacFadden's formula tapped into this previously unrecognized market with astute precision. Both critic Frank Rasche and historian Theodore Peterson noted that the confession magazines attracted newly literate audiences, many of whom had never before read for leisure purposes. *True Story* quickly hit an unprecedented annual circulation of over one million (Peterson 302). By 1926, *True Story* was the best selling magazine on newsstands and surpassed in subscription numbers only by *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal* (Peterson 303). Macfadden's new formula was soon followed with a string of imitation titles, many published by Macfadden himself: *True Confessions* (Fawcett Publications 1922), *True Romances* (Macfadden 1923), *Dream World* (Macfadden 1924), and *True Experiences Love Mirror* (Macfadden 1925) are but a few. Perhaps most starkly illustrative of the form's domination of the magazine market is the fact that the *Smart Set*, purchased by the Hearst corporation six months after H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan abandoned the prestigious title, was rebranded as a confession magazine and emblazoned with the subtitle "True Stories from Real Life." By 1926, the confession group numbered a dozen titles, the six most popular of which, in 1927, had a combined circulation of 3,250,000 per month (McKeogh 419). A critic writing in 1927 cites the Audit Bureau of Circulations in his calculation that the top six titles that year were distributing a total of 39,000,000 confessional magazines (McKeough 413).

MacFadden's confessional formula became a self-reinforcing cultural language. By 1928, MacFadden had broadened his confessional empire into film production, providing an additional draw for reader submissions by holding out the promise that the "best" confession stories would be scripted and cast on national movie screens. The December 1928 issue of MacFadden's *True*

Romances announces that "the first *True Story* picture 'Sinners in Love,' produced by FBO … is enthralling and entertaining a vast multitude of movie fans" and declares that the second *True Story* picture will "be based on a prize winning story, [and] will be even more lavish, more elaborate, and more stupendous" ("The Reality of Life"). The same issue advertises the "True Story Hour," "accurate, realistic dramatizations from backstage in the theatre of life," syndicated nationally on broadcast radio every Friday evening in 21 cities ("True Story Hour"). MacFadden Publishing further broadened its cultural reach in book sales, publishing everything from pamphlets on health and beauty—such as "Why Wear Glasses" and "Skin Troubles"—to the *True Story Series* of cloth-bound, illustrated novels. Number five in this series, published in 1925, is titled "The Truth about a College Girl." By 1926, MacFadden was offering public shares of his publishing empire in *True Story* advertising inserts ("Bernarr MacFadden's Offer").

Both the formulaic nature of the confessional and the lesser socio-economic status of the confessional audience has influenced critical reception among both historic and modern readers. It is generally accepted that the reader of the confession magazine was, in the words of magazine historian Theodore Peterson, of "a low level of sophistication," those persons "who could read but who, for the time being at least, were not disposed to think" (274). For Thomas Drewry, only those readers "with the literary tastes of a moron" could possibly be drawn to the sensationalized narratives of cheap magazines like *True Story* (353). Critic Thomas Uzzell, writing in 1938, referred to the love pulp audience as composed of "sub-mass female reader[s] [who] possess no fertile imagination," those "women whose lives are cast into a mold of dull routine—factory girls, housewives, domestics, shop girls, [and] office workers" (41).

Despite the obvious cultural elitism and the feminizing rhetorical flourishes of these anecdotes, recent scholarship agrees that the general audience for cheap fiction magazines was

composed of marginal readers whose literary or intellectual scope was hindered by their lesser social, cultural, or economic status: juveniles, wage laborers, immigrants, and young women.[2] Reader studies conducted in the 1920s and 30s confirm that the confession magazines were the favorite magazine format of the urban working classes in middle-American cities like Chicago and St. Louis and were particularly popular not only among young women but also among working class men—factory workers, immigrants, and African Americans.[3]

The confessionals were prone to the sort of hysterical critical reactions that are often common to popular forms during substantial transitions in the social and economic fabric of the nation. It was commonly feared near the turn of the century that either the American proletariat was being agitated to mayhem by violent and salacious pulp fiction or that it was being subdued into passivity by escapist literature and the dream factory of the new media. An array of sociological studies drew a direct correlation between "socially maladjusted" personality types and "third-class" magazines, including both the fiction pulps and the confession magazines within the scope of literatures that were the largest threat to the security of the nation and the sanctity of national literacy (Grace 266; Gray and Monroe 14). Educators and librarians, inaccurately perceiving that the confessions were based "entirely upon the sex impulse and desire," feared the potentially degenerative effect of "salacious" literature upon the masses, particularly upon young women (Ormsbee 86). Literary critics focused on the formula's narrative structure and expressed concerns about publishing magnate Macfadden's ultimate aims, implying that the confession magazines encouraged complacency and masked the larger

[2] See Ann Fabian. See also Erin Smith, especially page 205.

[3] See, for example, Alonzo G. Grace. Alonzo's study, which maintains that the confessions were among the preferred reading format for immigrants, young women, and the "socially maladjusted." She treats the confessions as suitable reading material for cultivating literacy and interest in reading among these groups; Lazarsfeld and Wyant, in a statistical analysis of magazine circulation in 90 cities, posit a direct correlation between the rate of circulation of *True Confessions* to the incidence of African-Americans and factory workers per capita. Also see William Frank Rasche, especially pages 68-70.

structural inefficiencies of capitalism by placing blame for social injustice upon the misdeeds of individuals.[4] This sort of critique of the incapacity of the popular reader to actively engage with the nuances or motives of literature will ring familiar to any scholar of modernity.

[4] See, for example, George Gerbner.

CHAPTER II

'RESISTANCE IN THE MATERIAL':

A STATEMENT OF METHOD

You can't have art without resistance in the material.

-William Morris[5]

The moralistic sensationalism and the sin-suffer formula of confessional narratives are two of the many reasons that the confessionals have been written off by critics—both contemporary and recent—for their conservative reinforcement of traditional class and gender roles. Hazel Grant Ormsbee, for example, concluded in 1927 that the confessions stories—which she found were the most popular form of leisure reading among her case-study group of young, working women—were "inane, stupid, sordid, full of unreal situations, impossible persons, and false attitudes, glossed over at the end with a smug let-this-be-a-warning-to-you sentence" (86). This thesis serves as an act of recovery and revision, reading more closely into the values constructed and reflected in the confession narratives in order to reveal that this hugely popular and neglected form performed a far more complex—at times radical—negotiation with the rapprochement between consumer culture and changing class and gender roles at the turn of the century.

Recent criticism repeats contemporary anxieties about the ultimate consequences of the mass market on identity by assuming both the ideological simplicity of working-class magazines and by constructing a passive readership that, many critics argue, was unwary victim to the

[5] Qtd. in "Composition as Explanation" by Jerome McGann. *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image, and the Body*. Ed. Margaret Ezell and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994): 101-138.

increasing influence of advertising and consumer culture in the twentieth century.[6] Erin Smith attempts to analyze the impact of advertising on working class audiences by thematically assessing the rhetoric of masculinity in the advertisements of early twentieth-century pulp fiction magazines like *Black Mask*. Smith argues that the bourgeois capitalist value of "self-improvement," the idea that social and professional success could be achieved through deliberate consumption, was used in the ads of cheap fiction magazines to draw readers of lower economic status into the purchasing market. For Smith, advertising appeals preyed upon the self-consciousness of working class men about appearance and bearing, and these appeals successfully trained working class audiences into unhesitating consumers. Through a similar lens of passive consumption, Ann Fabian reconstructs the cultural role of *True Story* magazine through an analysis of publisher Macfadden's personal and professional biography. Fabian argues that Macfadden used *True Story* magazine as a tool for his larger, "fascist" machinations of "unit[ing] readers in a great project of consumption" (66). The confession magazines were, for Fabian, "necessary foils for the invention of a middle-class mass culture" and, along the lines of Smith's study, the confession magazines, for Fabian, provide evidence of an orchestrated attempt to force advertising culture into the private lives of working class audiences who had historically been difficult to barter with (71).

The common thread among both twentieth-century and recent critical estimations of the cultural role of mass-market print rests on two assumptions: first, that working class audiences maintained a passive relationship with print forms that threatened to poison their minds, to pacify them, to mold them, or to deceive them; second, that the narrative function of popular fiction can

[6] See for example Richard Ohmann's "Diverging Paths" and, by the same author, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*, especially chapter 6; also see Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*; Matthew Schneirov's *The Dream of a New Social Order* offers a more balanced analysis of the rapprochement between market capitalism and the individual.

be wholly apprehended by a passing critical glance. It is easy to privilege the intent of mass-print producers (publishers, editors, advertising industries) through the analysis of bibliographic elements (such as ads and editorial matter) isolated from their context. But Smith and Fabian entirely divorce both advertising matter and publisher intent from the surrounding material elements of the text and, in doing so, they deny the agency of the popular reader and reduce the complexity of cultural struggle at work within texts that were innately dialogic in their inclusion of a diverse set of contributions from advertisers, editors, readers, and both professional and amateur authors and artists.[7]

Contrary to theoretical models that infer that modern mass culture operated as an uncontested vector of indoctrination through which the working classes were passively absorbed into the structures of modern capitalism, I borrow here from the assumptions of both British cultural materialist studies and women's Victorian periodical scholarship by approaching the popular form generally, and the popular magazine in particular, as one marked by its polyvocality: a prismatic collage of text and image originating from a boundless spectrum of contributors and, hence, incorporative of widely divergent ideological perspectives.

Raymond Williams has identified the operation of hegemony within cultural production as a dialectical process in which residual and emergent ideological forms oppose and contest the ethos of the dominant class (*Marxism & Literature*). Stuart Hall similarly sees the process of cultural transformation as a "double movement of containment and resistance" that is particularly evident in the carnivalesque of the popular form (65). Michael Denning's study of working class

[7] Roland Barthes has taught us that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4). In a post-structural academic culture which seeks to liberate the text, and certainly the reader, from any limitations imposed at the origin of production, critical work which revokes any possibility of reader agency and overlooks the ideological tension inherent to even the simplest of popular texts is participating in an academic violence that is ethically questionable at best. Responsible historical inquiries demand that we continue to probe and complicate the relationships between the market and individual identity, particularly in the present face of increasingly centralized, global forms of mass media.

dime novels similarly posits that mass culture is neither a form of "deception, manipulation, and social control nor [an] expression of a genuine people's culture," but is rather a "contested terrain" defined by cultural struggle and conflict between the values of the dominant and "lower" classes (3). Scott McCracken has similarly emphasized the ways in which "popular fiction is both created by and a participant in social conflict" (2).

Scholars of Victorian periodicals take up a similarly nuanced dialectical method that focuses upon the "contradictory attitudes and beliefs [that are] held together" within the borders of the popular periodical and recognize that popular magazine culture in the nineteenth century was a dynamic, unpredictable print network constituted by an array of competing voices (Heilmann & Beetham 3). The polyvocality of modern popular periodical culture, then, is a similarly fruitful material means by which to uncover the moments of rupture in mass culture that provide evidence of the ability of historic readers, writers, and audiences to "[circumvent] the economic aims of [their] producers and [reassert] an alternative site of values" (Beetham, *A Magazine* 12).

In order to fully compensate for the polyvocal nature of the magazine, I approach the magazine as a unified whole made up of often conflicting constituent material elements that contribute in sum to their overall rhetorical thrust. This sort of holistic reading approaches the implied consumer as constructed in the various rhetorical appeals of commodity advertising, as well as the implied audience as constructed in both fiction and non-fiction contributions by readers, editors, and both professional and amateur authors writing from a wide range of ideological perspectives. Viewing these material elements of the magazine as representative in total of a monad of discursive tensions between warring sociocultural positions and economic

motives results in a far more complex portrait of print culture and of the tensions of power at work within print production.

Several critics have pointed toward the confessionals' tendency to test the boundaries of the modern female role and have argued that it offered women readers a means by which to navigate the shifting gender norms of the period. Pamela Haag has argued that MacFadden's *Dream World*, a confession that followed *True Story*, encouraged female readers to identify with character roles that were, although idealized, often subversive to the norm, and that magazines like *True Story* worked to naturalize female sexual desire in the 1920s and on. Cornelia Butler Flora has provided evidence for the progressive nature of working class fiction magazines like *True Story*, which she found were more likely than their slick middle-class counterparts to portray women as active members of the labor force and as heads of household, implying that the confessions were more progressive in their adaptation to shifting economic and social realities than middle-brow magazines. Nan Enstad's monograph on working women and dime novels at the turn of the twentieth century argues that popular working class women's reading materials constituted a "subculture" of "interpretive communities" built through practices of consumption among working class readers, and that these very acts of consumption allowed women to carve out "public identities … that rejected both middle-class native born and some Old World proscriptions" (82). This thesis focuses in particular on the capacity of the confessional magazines—a popular mass market literature produced for and (at least seemingly) by working class women—to blur class and social boundaries in its repeated explorations of the limitations for social, cultural, and economic mobility for working class audiences.

In the following section, I locate a continuity of tensions between the confession magazine and more literary works of the period. John Fordham's work on twentieth century

working class fiction has established that "the formal paradigm of romance can be deployed to express both personal longing and political aspiration" and that working class fiction thus often emulates the modernist tension "between immutability and perpetual change" (137; 138). In this instance, I deploy the trope of the self-constructed consumer persona in order to locate a similar continuity of tensions between the popular and the literary. I locate at work in this trope of the consumer body what I refer to as a "preoccupation with inauthencity," a thematic of critique that repeatedly begs attention not only in popular confessional magazines like *True Story*, but also in middle-market and canonical modernist novels such as Anita Loo's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, and William Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee Jerusalem*. The trope of the popular consumer in both the confession magazines and these more "serious" literary forms marks a tension between the individual and the market that was registered across a wide spectrum of forms and genres, and across various cultural strata. This thematic genealogy locates a cross-cultural continuity of resistance to the rising dominance of consumer ideologies in the early twentieth century, a response symptomatic of a shared cultural trauma in the wake of great social, technological, and economic upheavals unique to modernity more so than unique to any particular culturally valued literary audience, form, work, or set of authors.

CHAPTER III

‘THE POSE AND EXPRESSION’:

ADVERTISING CULTURE AND ARTIFICE IN *TRUE STORY* AND IN JAMES JOYCE’S “NAUSICAA” EPISODE OF *ULYSSES*

Florry’s narration of her own experience with mass-market magazines in the story “Movie Mad” absorbs the period’s rhetoric of critique about the threat of popular reading, market culture, and the popular body. From Flaubert’s damning portrait of consuming women in *Madame Bovary* to Joyce’s similarly tortured sketch of Gerty MacDowell in *Ulysses*, modern literary discourse is polluted at its borders by the contaminating threat of the feminized popular form, the vacuous popular reader, and the corrupting popular body. The confessionals navigate this discourse about popular consumption with narratives that paradoxically revel in the pleasure and unease of social and cultural fluidity, and trouble the boundaries between the authentic and the inauthentic in an American cultural framework that was increasingly disrupted by the mass-scale reproduction and commodification of objects, of literature, and of bodies.

While advertisements in mass-market magazines pervasively inundated readers like Florry with promises that they could cultivate, through consumption, the sort of outward manifestation of “persona” that would lead one toward social and economic success, the narratives of the confessions explore this realm of artifice and its role in upward mobility with a tone of anxiety and distrust, revealing a subdued suspicion about the relationship between the individual and the market that discredits the promises of advertising culture. Themes of self-effacement and unreliable sociocultural posturing imbue Florry’s narrative with a radical anxiety about the limits of self-construction and a rejection of market capitalism’s idea that social and cultural advancement can be achieved through hollow acts of performative mimicry.

Young, working-class Florry, who has "discovered that the effect of the sandy dryness and bright sunshine [is] most trying to my complexion," internalizes the rhetoric of the mass market's world of visual surveillance (76). The "face-powders, hair and skin lotions" that she buys every week at the Baldwin drug store on her trips for fresh issues of the latest popular magazines are aggressively marketed alongside her narrative within *True Story* magazine. Princess Pat's Face Powder, which claims a full-page color ad endorsed by Universal Film Star Mary Philbin, promises to help "ordinary" readers like Florry achieve an "appearance of perfection" ("Princess Pat"). An ad for starlet Edna Wallace Hooper's White Youth Clay assures readers that all the "famous beauties" of the screen use her products ("Edna Wallace Hopper"). Mary Philbin claims an additional space in the magazine in a full-page photographic insert titled "Mirror of Beauty." The accompanying biography states that this starlet has "won her way into the hearts of film fans everywhere" ("Mirror of Beauty"). Beauty advertisements encouraged readers like Florry to perfect their own "magnetism," "charm," "radiance," and "electricity" through the consumption of goods specifically designed to cultivate the type of likeability and charisma, the sort of persona that became visually concurrent with success and celebrity. Florry is led to believe that her public persona—as dependent upon her successful "imitat[ion]" of the "pose and expression of the pictured star" and enabled and enhanced through her consumption of popular magazines and beauty goods—is a sure-fire road to social and professional success ("Movie Mad" 78).

The twentieth-century body became a vehicle for the consumption and display of personality, a mechanism for the performance of individual social worth, and also central to a growing self-consciousness and anxiety about authenticity. Historian Warren Sussman argues that the nineteenth-century "culture of character"—which rated the worth of the individual

according to their deliberate pursuit of measurable traits like industry, duty, and loyalty—was replaced in the twentieth-century with a "culture of personality" (*Culture as History*). Society grew to value the individual based on a measure of likeability that was manifested in appearance and social performance. For Sussman, the "social role demanded of all in the new culture of personality was that of a performer" (280). Similarly noting the rise of the term *personality* as differentiated from *character*, Raymond Williams suggests that the twentieth- century notion of personality gestured toward an essential nature externally manifested through specific individualizing qualities such as "weakness" or "strength"; one began to speak of "dominant" personalities, as if the "essential" traits necessary for success were perceptibly inscribed upon the body (*Keywords*). Mary MacAleer Balkun's recent monograph *The American Counterfeit* locates a related "culture of authenticity" that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Balkun defines this culture of authenticity as a twentieth century "concern with individual self-realization" (8), a conception of individualism dependent upon the outward manifestation of the authentic, interior self. Balkun convincingly argues that the "rise of market capitalism and the subsequent obsession with 'things' marked a new relationship between the self and the object world" that created a fascination in the American imagination with the significance of recreating or refashioning the self by way of public performance (8). The implications of mass reproduction and advertising culture on the body hence resulted in charged cultural debates that were saturated with "the concern for authenticity, the distaste for copies, [and] the unease about shifting class boundaries" (Balkun 10). Such anxieties about mass production and authenticity, importantly, were not limited to the field of print culture but in fact extended into philosophical reconfigurations of the body. For Balkun, the American obsession with authenticity "has a corresponding impulse: the desire to identify those who attempt to create a new self and pass

themselves off as genuine" (13). The measure of perceived authenticity of personhood in the twentieth century became a way to visually assess not only objects but also persons and was tied to a deeply ingrained self-consciousness about individual public performance.

This shift toward a cultural field increasingly polluted by façade and public performance and the resulting anxieties about the instability of the authentic self as well as the limitations of perception in pursuit of the real is most strikingly evident in the period's advertising. Twentieth century advertising culture both fueled and fed off of the modern "quest for personal authenticity" (Lears 347) and, importantly, became closely associated in the mind of the American public "with fraud and the inauthentic" (Balkun 3). The advertisements in the confession magazines specifically targeted reader anxiety about the successful performance of authentic class status through the sale of beauty and health supplements intended to aid one in the construction of a pleasing visual persona; products for professional training and education programs intended to help one advance in the social and business realms; and leisure products and services that promised one social and cultural advancement by way of posturing in speech and bearing. Sussman notes that "there was an insistence" in advertising culture that the right type of personality "could be learned and developed through careful practice," a practice that invested itself with an "emphasis on consumption" (280). Roland Marchand's foundational work on twentieth century advertising convincingly argues that advertisements played upon the "parable of the first impression" in which one's ability for self-advancement was defined by one's appearance (208). In an increasingly "mobile, urban, impersonal society," "first impressions brought immediate success or failure" (214; 208).

The confession magazines' advertisements constructed a universe of constant surveillance. A MacFadden group advertisement for the pamphlet "Skin Troubles" warns readers

that “the human eye is merciless” (“Skin Troubles”). “Life altering” tooth whiteners, nose adjusters, skin lighteners, and hair dyes promise to correct the visual markers of ethnicity and socio-economic status that cause “women [to be] neglected in social life [and] men [to be] refused advancement in business” (“Kolor-back”). An ad for “Lim-Straitner,” designed to correct knocked knees, responds to reader’s rising self-consciousness about public display by warning that “Your Personal Appearance is now more than ever the keynote of success, both in social and business life” (“Lim-Strainer”). Iron supplements promise to aid readers in the presentation of a “happy and vigorous” bourgeois persona as a means to success: “Why be a victim of other personalities? Why not compel others to do for you as you desire? Why not be the Master?” (“Three Priceless Secrets”). Music, dance, and speech training manuals and services promised increased popularity and social mobility. A graduate of the U.S. School of Music proclaimed that her piano and violin lessons had changed her life: “We are flooded with invitations … It has given us popularity.” (“U.S. School of Music”). Job training ads promised wealth and social respectability to those with little education; spare-time study was marketed as a guarantee to “lift a man out of a rut and make him a trained worker instead of just a ‘hand’” (“International Correspondence Schools” Ad. 1). Training graduates bragged that they were more “cheerful” and “confident” after honing their “natural ability” (“International Correspondence Schools” Ad. 2).

But the confessional’s relationship to market culture was not statically passive or in all cases mutually reinforcing. There was indeed, argues Balkun, a “growing tendency” among the American public at the turn of the century to “blame advertising for the rise of inauthenticity” (7). Sussman notes that the century’s first few decades saw a growing obsession in literary culture with “probing personality,” as the delineations between the authentic and inauthentic

became increasingly blurred in the spectral universe of commodity culture (280). And the popular confession magazines are no less a site that very acutely registers these anxieties about the relationship between identity and consumption. An ambivalent—if not anxiously suspicious—critique of the limitations of consumption are registered in the confession magazines in the thematic tension that arises between the spectral, utopian universe of the advertisements and the material realism of anonymously authored narratives. These narratives both absorb and critique the language of consumption that brackets them. The limitations of persona and the legitimacy of authenticity are directly questioned in confessional narratives like "Movie Mad."

Mimicking in content the confessional format's stylistic rejection of artifice and façade, "Movie Mad" seeks to disclose mass-mediated identity to be a fiction as unreliable and inauthentic as the act of confessional authorship itself. At the same time that Florry is enabled and empowered by mass magazines to visually reconstruct herself as an independent, decidedly modern woman, her consumption and appropriation of the visual persona of modern womanhood ultimately fails to aid her in navigating the real, material dangers of a complex urban sphere marked by structures of class hierarchy and patriarchy. Nan Enstad writes that the "capitalist industry caused a re-enchantment of modern life with the urban consumer spaces of arcades and amusement parks, in the city street plastered with theatre and movie posters, and in the cinema itself" (180). While the culture industries held forth the urban landscape as one invested with "myth and magic," and thus romanticized the urban sphere and encouraged the consumptive gaze (Enstad 180), working class fiction like that in the confession magazines often worked to deconstruct, or at least to de-mythologize, the position of the individual in modern society by reinvesting the urban narrative with economic and social realism.

It is precisely this staged tension between romance and realism that gives "Movie Mad" its rhetorical thrust. Lacking any authentic portrait of the "City of Dreams," Florry's idealized identification with "The Girl on the Cover" is shallow, based only upon posturing and imitation. In the real world with which she is confronted, she learns of material necessity; her physical appearance turns out not to be the social currency which she has been led to believe. Led by the market's standardized portraits of celebrity to envision "the heights of stardom never giving a thought to its depths," Florry is misdirected into believing that her ambitions can be best achieved by hollow acts of visual mimicry enabled by consumption and display (76). Florry's failure to sustain upward mobility in this instance relies upon an admission of the limitations of the American Dream and the boundaries of romantic escape in a world unavoidably ruled by economic and political structures of exclusion.

This pervasive anxiety about the possibilities and limitations of consumption also inundated the novels of high modernism with a similar hysteria about the sociocultural implications of self-fashioning, as well as with fears about the impossibility of assessing authenticity in a mass-mediated universe. James Joyce's "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses* is but a patchwork of discourse culled from the detritus of cheap women's fiction and advertising culture.[8] Gerty MacDowell's interior narrative voice absorbs the feminine epistolary form and is fashioned through the typical end-of-innocence tensions that frame the action of most any romance fiction: like Florry who is a "glowing country girl in every sense of the word," with "the

[8] As Joyce's most overtly "popular" episode, 'Nausicaa' has traditionally been dismissed by critics because of its incorporation of popular women's literature and advertising culture. Suzette Henke argues in *Women in Joyce* that Gerty has been "brainwashed by popular literature," and that her "embarrassing proximity to the heroines of popular romance many account for her surprising lack of popularity as a subject of critical attention among Joyce scholars,"; Marilyn French paints Gerty as a passive victim of mass culture in *The Book as World ;* Thomas Karr Richards asserts that Gerty is passively circumscribed by the degenerative rhetoric of consumer culture, hence becoming a "field for advertisements" that "exudes the commodity"; for Jules David Law, Gerty is a victim of the pornographic objectification of women in mass culture.

glowing health and firmness of form that comes from outdoor living" ("Movie Mad" 32), Joyce's Gerty Macdowell is "as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one who could wish to see … The waxen pallor of her face was almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity though her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow, Greekly perfect" (13.81; 13.87-89). The deluded romantic musings that populate Gerty's head during her famously pornographic seduction of Bloom on Sandymount shore are constructed by the cliché sentimental prose of the mass-produced formula fiction that she reads in women's periodicals: "No prince charming is her beau ideal to lay a rare and wondrous love at her feet but rather a manly man with a strong quiet face [who would] take her into his sheltering arms, strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long long kiss" (13.209-14).

Trained in visual performance by popular advertising culture and popular women's serial fiction, Gerty knows "how to cry nicely before the mirror" (13.191). Like Florry's performance of "the pose and expression" of stardom before her bedroom mirror, Gerty is circumscribed by a deluded narcissism through which she imagines herself to transcend her economic and social station through objectified posturing. Gerty's self-fashioning is both enabled and directed by commodity culture, as evidenced in her detailed attention to the beauty tips that she receives from the advice columns and advertising inserts in women's periodicals: dressed in "a neat blouse of electric blue selftinted by dolly dyes (because it was expected in *The Lady's Pictorial* that electric blue would be worn)," Gerty is bounded and frozen by consumption; she sits docile, "encased in finespun hose" (13.150-1). Her first-person interior dialogue discloses a hollow and crippled self-awareness through a narrative voice that is but a disjointed collage of the advertising slogans that bookend the penny weeklies she so avidly consumes:

> It was Madame Vera Verity, directress of the Woman Beautiful page of the Princess Novelette, who had first advised her to try eyebrowleine which gave that haunting expression to the eyes, so becoming in leaders of fashion, and she had never regretted it. Then there was blushing scientifically cured and how to be tall increase your height and you have a beautiful face but your nose. (13.113-14)

A young Irish girl from a working-class background who depends, like Florry, upon sales and second-hand stores to fashion her persona, appropriates her popular reading materials in an attempt to recreate herself through the visual markers of aristocratic ladyship. Florry, alike, uses her reading materials in a markedly political fashion, pouring through them for cues toward forwarding her own professional and cultural advancement.

Both Florry and Gerty are to some degree empowered by their deliberate construction of persona, which has been artfully cultivated through the consumption and performance of mass market literature and advertising. Liz Conor's study of visual culture in the twentieth century posits that women's visibility in public space at the turn of the century was ultimately empowering. For Conor, women's performative object status in the visual field "was deeply implicated in the parameters of modern subjectivity, which included cultural presence, public visibility, and participation in the exchange of looks in the urbanized and commodified urban scene" (2). Conor argues that popular visual culture allowed for new modes of modern feminine subjectivity that were "visually constituted" through "ways of appearing" (2-3). Both Florry and Gerty certainly use their bodies as cultural signifiers in order to inscribe themselves into the visual register in a way which is arguably empowering in its capacity to confuse the hierarchies between subject and object, spectator and spectacle.

Yet in the same way that Florry's dreamscape ultimately devolves against the material pressures of reality—a formal tension which de-romanticizes the artifice of her constructed universe—the threat of violence and victimization seeps into Gerty's sentimentalized fantasy of Bloom. As she gazes upon "her dreamhusband, because she knew on instant it was him," her narrative is increasingly interrupted by a destabilizing counter-recognition of the limitations of her fairy-tale fantasy (13.431). She reflects upon the disappointments and dangers of her real life as memories of her ex-boyfriend, Reggy Wylie, initiate a rejection of the romantic fantasy, a hyper-realistic assessment of the economy of sexual exchange: Reggie Wylie is "a lighthearted deceiver … fickle like all his sex" (13.584-5). The threat of domestic violence further destabilizes her romantic escape: Gerty's retreat into "the sound of voices and the pealing anthem of the organ" disintegrates in response to the flow of her rational consciousness, and she begins to reflect upon the continued threat of real violence in her daily life: "if there was one thing of all things that Gerty knew it was that the man who lifts his hand to a woman save in the way of kindness, deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low" (13.301-2).

Gerty's interior dialogue, while striving for romantic escape, is continually restrained by the same anti-romantic undercurrents of economic hardship and violence that break from under the surface in Florry's final scenes of poverty and sexual violence. Bloom's pornographic fantasy of Gerty's visual performance is similarly shattered upon seeing the "real" Gerty: a crippled and impoverished simulation of authentic womanhood, a sham, a fake. Just as the limitations of Florry's posturing are revealed when she is discovered to be a "rogue," a cheap imitation of the real, Bloom's recognition of Gerty's inauthenticity deconstructs the romance of the visual: "See her as she is spoil all. Must have the stage setting, the rouge, costume, position, music. The name too. *Amours* of actresses. Nell Gwynn, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Maud Branscombe. Curtains up"

(13.855-57). It is a similar moment of "curtains up" for Florry, whose confrontation with material reality "behind the scenes" deconstructs the romantic undertones of her narrative and forces an overt tension between romance and realism, a gritty and disquieting confrontation with the real. Florry's interrogation of the limitations of self-constructed persona, as well as the formal tension that the narrative builds through its ironic juxtaposition of romance and realism, registers the confessional's tendency to pressure the passively consumptive position of its popular audience.

Ultimately though, both "Nausicaa" and "Movie Mad" take to task the limitations of performance and of the inauthentic. Self invention as enabled by consumption is proven to be a hollow and ineffectual means of advancement. Gerty is left standing alone, crippled, on the Sandymount strand, and Florry is returned to her humble and imprisoning rural domicile. Peggy Ochoa asserts that Gerty, although empowered by her internalization of desirable sexuality, is read as a tragic character because she "misrecognizes the reality of her situation, seeing herself as a personal object of desire" (789). Ultimately, then, while Gerty's "position in Irish society as a consumer seems to offer some choice and empowerment … her consumption is limited to those items that serve only to make her a more attractive commodity on the sexual market" (Ochoa 789-90). Like Gerty, Florry quickly learns that there is no use to "a pretty face with nothing behind it" (79); she falls victim to the sexual advances of men because of her misrecognition of the limitations of sexualized objectivity as well as her ignorance of the economic realities of modern life (82).

Both "Movie Mad" and Joyce's "Nausicaa" ultimately critique the inauthenticity of a mass-market society in which identity was increasingly circumscribed by and constructed upon the values of appearance and public performance within a romanticized spectacle culture that left

readers entirely “ignorant of life behind the scenes” (“Movie Mad” 76). Both Florry and Gerty are ill prepared by consumer culture, the standardized products of which are interrogated in their narratives as an ineffectual means of training readers with the appropriate tools necessary to navigate the complex social and cultural terrain of modernity. *True Story*’s thematic preoccupation with the inauthentic nature of persona as a willfully constructed device of artifice fed by consumption belies our notions of the mass magazine’s static complicity with consumer ideology. Florry’s narrative, like Joyce’s “Nausicaa,” self-reflexively calls into question the authenticity of the very vehicle within which it is disseminated. This modern “preoccupation with inauthenticity,” of both objects and bodies, marks a point of entry through which to locate thematic similarities between popular and experimental literature that exist beneath their contrary formal attributes. These similarities, or thematic homologies, reveal a modern literary ecology defined as much by a continuity of sociological and experiential responses to modernity as by the formal and aesthetic discontinuity of literary modernism, despite the fact that the latter is often privileged as the truest reflection of the modern experience.

CHAPTER IV

‘PERSONALITIES OF PAPER’:

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL PASSING IN *TRUE STORY,* FORD MADOX FORD’S *THE GOOD SOLDIER*, AND ANITA LOOS’ *GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES*

In the previous section, I established a tension between the romance of modern advertising and the social realism of *True Story* magazine in order to underscore the magazine’s paradoxical entanglement with and resistance to consumer capitalism and the commodification of identity. Further, I established a point of thematic homology with Joyce’s *Ulysses* in order to illustrate that the modern “preoccupation with authenticity” reflects a broader cultural anxiety about the implications and the limitations of commodity culture in relation to individual identity, an anxiety which can be located at play across literary tiers. In this section, I extend this thematic genealogy in order to elaborate upon and provide proof of my argument by way of illustration.

Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier,* originally published as “The Saddest Story” in the first issue of Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast* magazine in 1914, similarly navigates the limitations of sociocultural posturing and registers the period’s anxieties about the inauthenticy of the self-constructed persona and the effects of market culture on marginal readers. Despite its formal complexity and impressionist aesthetic, *The Good Soldier* marks another point of commonality between the confessional form’s preoccupation with authenticity and what Jackson Lears refers to as the “modernist discourse of authenticity” (348). Ford’s narrator, John Dowell, sketches a portrait of the sociological experience of modernity that is best defined by the inability for epistemological certainty in the face of the great facade of modern performative persona. His

narrative structure obsessively circles around an attempt to grasp at the interiority of the human psyche, an interiority that is perpetually evasive and masked by elaborate social conventions and postures. Dowell recognizes persona as a great sham, recognizes the limitations of knowing the "real" identity of any person:

> I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone—horribly alone. No hearthstone will ever again witness, for me, friendly intercourse. No smoking room will ever be other than people with incalculable simulacra amidst smoke wreaths. (3)

Dowell's wife, Florence, is the embodiment of this "incalculable simulacra." Florence, a middle-class American, has constructed her continental bourgeois persona through a grand masquerade enabled by her avid consumption of cheaply reproduced texts—books and newspapers which she uses to aid her in her quest to acculturate her persona to that of the upper classes. An avid reader of the *Daily Telegraph* and *Baedeker's* travel guides, Florence pours over the surface of digest literature as a means to acclimate herself to a sociocultural position above that granted her by her birth. However, she never "really learn[s]" from her rational use of literature but rather, like the narrator himself who is continually thwarted in his quest for depth and meaning, "gives the impression of having only picked up" disjointed pixels of opaque information (23). Her depthless and calculated habit of reading guides her not toward the sort of profundity of character and sentiment which defines the literary but, rather, aids her in a series of "carefully arranged, frightfully emotional … theatrical displays" through which she gives the impression of "always play acting" (70). Florence's appropriation of the performative cues of class standing offer her the ability to navigate a social class above her own station. But her re-invention of self is ultimately revealed to be a hollow performance, fleeting and inauthentic. She is presented, like

the vacuous and ephemeral print forms from which she constructs her performance, "as a matter for study, not for remembrance" (71). Like Gerty MacDowell, Florence's elaborate displays paint her as a static and opaque object of inauthentic performance, a frozen tableau circumscribed by and frozen within the rhetoric of consumption.

Her eventual suicide borrows from the narrative structures of romance fiction, providing at once repentance and suffering for her extramarital transgressions. Her death underscores her temporality: "She just went completely out of existence, like yesterday's paper" (71). John Dowell's confrontation with the sheer meaninglessness of modernity and the opacity of persona comes to a crisis when he admits that Florence was nothing more than "a personality of paper": she "represented a real human being with a heart, with feelings, with sympathies and emotions only as a bank-note represents a certain quality of gold … she wasn't real; she was just a mass of talk out of guide-books, of drawings out of fashion plates," an elaborately contrived and standardized commodity, as much a manipulative fiction as the constructed persona of Joyce's Gerty Macdowell (71).

I would like here to deploy Ford's "personality of paper" as a modern literary trope that saturated low, middle, and high brow literature in the first two decades of the twentieth century. These caricaturesque "personalities of paper"—a common iconography used to explore the rapprochement between the market and the evolving public identities of young working-class women—conflated the boundaries between cultural and economic capital by exploring the politics and limitations of literary consumption as a means of access to both the public sphere and the public gaze and also as a means to sociocultural advancement. The class fluidity that was enabled by women's appropriation of elite knowledge and culture as increasingly accessible through new print media and the consumption of leisure goods resulted in cultural anxieties

about the real-ness of both individual and literary identity that was registered at varying levels of literary production.

The trope of the "cultural counterfeit"—to borrow from Balkun—in twentieth century literary culture reflects a growing obsession with the fluidity of social and cultural boundaries, a fluidity which was enabled by the market economy. As I have established in the previous section, mass audiences were directed and encouraged by advertising rhetoric to deftly re-fashion the performative, external self through products that promised to help one achieve the visual markers of privilege that were allegedly crucial to class passing. Roland Marchand has argued that the social "tableaux" of the period's advertisements were "aimed at depicting settings at least 'a step up' from the social circumstances of the readers" and relied upon reinforcing—even exaggerating—class boundaries in order to stimulate purchasing desire (166). He writes that "advertisers simultaneously stressed both the clarity of [class] boundaries and the ease of crossing them—the first to enhance the exclusiveness and desirability of the life of the rich, and the second to suggest how easily the advertised product would eliminate barriers to upward mobility" (195).

I locate in this section a category of advertising appeal in the confession magazines that held out the promise of cultural passing through acculturation to the inflections and intellectual trends of the elite. The possibility of acculturation was sold in the confession magazines in the form of speech lessons, etiquette manuals, and cheap reprints of literature. As I have shown in the previous section, however, the confessions' relationship to the tropes of advertising was not simple. I draw here from a number of confession stories that, like Joyce's "Nausicaa" and Ford's *The Good Soldier*, question the legitimacy and authenticity of this brand of cultural passing through acculturation. The narratives of the confessions reject social emulation, labeling it as an

ineffective tool for advancement, and thus run contrapuntal to the advertising rhetoric by which they are bracketed, despite the fact that this rhetoric is absorbed into the very language of their narrative.

"The Love Racket"—subtitled "The romance of a girl who triumphed over the handicap of a wrong start"—is published in the December 1931 issue of MacFadden's *Dream World*. The teen female narrator's story begins "in a drab, dreary tenement near the waterfront in one of our thriving Mid-western cities" (16). A remarkably astute and ambitious young woman, the narrator recalls that "I began to feel a disgust and strange dissatisfaction with the place and manner in which we lived. I longed […] for us to get away from the sordid surroundings; for us to be like other people. People who lived in the West End. People who flashed before me on the movie screen. People whose faces and names appeared on the front page of the papers" (17). Like Florry, she is drawn to American cultural narratives of affluence and progress. She saves up for her post- grade school education with a series of drudge jobs, finally landing a respectable gig as a companion to the invalid Mrs. Schmist-Kroger-Wiseberg. Her ascension into elite society is enabled first by her education. More importantly to her social mobility, though, is her ability to make "authentic" her self-reinvention. The ailing Mrs. under whom she is employed teaches her how to discern between authentic and inauthentic consumer objects:

> At her direction and instigation I learned to read good literature; to admire beauty of material and design more than tawdry brightness; to like good pictures rather than cheap prints with showy frames; to discriminate, in a measure, between actual beauty and synthetic, cheap imitation. (20)

It is precisely this acculturation to elite discernment that eventually leads to her progression above her born station and aids her in becoming the wife of a wealthy and well-bred man. The narrator makes her way through society by learning the nuances of "authentic" taste.

The title alone—as well as accompanying titles such as "Was He Too Far Above Me?" and "Millionaire's Son"—underscore the form's conflation of sexual and cultural capital. Advancement for women in these narratives is entirely dependent upon learning to read and perform in a "tasteful" manner. Importantly, though, the confession formula requires that the authenticity of this acculturation is tested and, ultimately, proven false. These romantic and abstracted "personalities of paper" are incapable of buttressing themselves against the social and economic realities of modern society. Thus, the narrative structure of these tales underscores the form's resistance to the commodification of individual identity that is encouraged in the confessions' advertising strategies.

The deliberately crafted modern bourgeois persona is critiqued in *True Story* as a superficial and ultimately ineffective means by which to maintain upward mobility. "The Wife Who Didn't Tell," published in the February 1923 issue of *True Story,* offers narrator Lena's first-hand account of her flirtation with high society. Lena's story of cultural passing reinforces the ephemeral nature of the mass-produced persona, critiques cultural mimicry as an ineffective means for self-advancement and, perhaps most importantly, counteracts the logic of the surrounding advertisements that market sociocultural advancement by way of consumption. As a child of South Street Philadelphia Russian Jews—her father a factory worker and her mother a street peddler—Lena Cornewitz was raised as an "outcast from society" and has seen firsthand "what poverty [does] to people" (54). By the age of 18, Lena is employed at 15 dollars a week as a salesgirl in a "cheap department store" (54). Lena is tempted by public displays of wealth: she

is envious of “the social life [she reads] about in the papers” (64); she wonders why she “shouldn’t do as well or better” than women who are married to men with “twenty-thousand dollar a year” salaries (54). Lena admits that she loves “luxury, good food, pretty clothes,” and decides that she wants “to be a lady” (54). She begins to wonder whether it is worth it to “keep straight,” and finally sets her mind to “make a big catch” with a rich man (54). In a gesture of shallow sociocultural mimicry that underscores the period’s obsession with co-opted identity, Lena changes her last name from Cornewitz to Falterson in order to disguise her ethnicity. She makes quick work of “playing the game” and is soon swimming in “furs and jewelry” from “prominent lawyer[s]” and “very rich merchant[s]” (54).

Lena’s “game” is constructed on cultural passing through performance; she artfully cultivates a bourgeois personality by posturing in speech and manner, a posturing that is enabled by her vapid yet artful consumption of “cultured” literature. Although she “never had much schooling,” she “read[s] magazines and novels” and thus can “hold [her] own in talk” (54). When she meets the “educated, well -bred, [and] handsome” millionaire Arthur Abbott Wendell, “one of the best catches in Philadelphia,” she puts her tools of cultural performance to use for her benefit (54):

> I impressed him with my knowledge of books. I had the latest novels lying open on my table. I read little articles in magazines that reviewed briefly current literary events and when I talked carelessly about Bergson, Nietzsche and Eucken, he was bewitched and bedazzled by my ‘intellect.’ (55)

Lena’s sarcastic paraphrasing of the concept of intellect figures her as an astute consumer, well aware of the inauthenticity of elite culture. She admits that she never does in fact read any of these more literary works which she mines for cultural cues; she has always preferred the “pile of

cheap novels" that she keeps in secret in a curtain-covered bookcase, such as her mass-market copy of Edward Fitzgerald's English translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (55).

Lena's cultural façade, enabled by the deliberate consumption of reading materials that she uses to cultivate an aura of culture, allows her to "[be] charming, and [talk] brilliantly, and [win] over [her] critics" (56). Her deliberate posturing is a success: millionaire Wendell admits that he finds her "refinement and nobility of character [to] enhance the value of [her] beauty" (55). Lena's shallow and artful consumption of intellectual culture allows her to buy her way into Philadelphia society. She quickly finds herself married to Wendell, "roll[ing] in riches," and is left "with nothing to do but charm [her] husband, buy pretty things, make love, see sights and eat" (68; 56). Her performative personality is a currency with a very particular "value" in the game of social and cultural achievement. Popular literature had, for marginal readers—like Florry, who "guarded that magazine as carefully as if it had been printed on gold leaf with platinum type"—a measurable value as handbooks of modernity that were capable of empowering readers toward new modes of individual and political subjectivity ("Movie Mad" 84). Cheap reprints of literature and middlebrow magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* served to instruct middle-class audiences in the tastes of the elite.

Raymond Williams has established that the great "critical revolt of the 1920s" ended in a solidification by critics like I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis of the concept of "culture" as a product of "high civilization," intended to guard against the anarchy of mass society and industrial reproduction (*Culture and Society* 245). "High" art took on an imagined role, through the work of literary critics, of training society in the ways of "culture"; thus literature took on a role central to the health of civilization, and leisure reading, such as the confessionals, became marginalized and shunned as a devolved activity of consumption. This institutional framework of

literature has resulted in what many critics have identified as a three-tiered system of literary production in which the high, middle, and low brow products of literature are presented as culturally equivalent with elite, middle class, and working class audiences and, importantly, each tier of which is marketed by its alleged capacity to "train" readers in an upwardly mobile acculturation to "tasteful" literatures, thus broadening the market for serious and experimental literature. Thus, reading above one's station was a political act which navigated the borders of sociocultural fluidity and resulted in a broad swath of literary and critical attacks against the popular reader as well as in more liberal discourses which upheld literary culture as a means of access to high society for marginal readers.

Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, initially serialized in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1925, brought the confessional formula to middle-class culture with the serialized diary of Lorelei Lee. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, while satirizing the confessional mode and the popular reader's tendency to misappropriate culture, builds its narrative tension by complicating the delineations between economic and cultural capital.[9] Like Lena, Lorelei Lee undermines both class and

[9] John T. Matthews argues that Lorelei, as a diarist, embodies the emancipatory potential of women writing in forms not controlled by men. The diary form, for Matthews, was an important tool for women writers in terms of fashioning a personal subjectivity not dominated by the traditional male institutions of literature; Laurie Cella focuses on Lorelei's spectacle performance as a critique against the commodification and objectification of women within the male gaze which paradoxically empowers Lorelei through her ability to take advantage of the gaze through the manipulation of her image. For Cella, Loos, like Lorelei, veils the more sinister nature of her critique within the degraded language of the marketplace, a tactic which points toward Loos's conscious manipulation of image and narrative as both a critique and celebration of imitation, masquerade, and performance.
Similarly, Rhonda Pettit argues that Lorelei inverts the tenets of capitalism by fashioning her own commodity status as a means by which to forward her own agency. For Pettit, Lorelei, an embodiment of the American Dream, not only thrives in a capitalist economy by using its very mechanisms against itself, but ridicules cultural and social practices of the bourgeois, such 1) marriage and romantic love; 2) valued forms of education and intelligence; 3) British aristocracy, capitalism, the American judicial system; 4) feminism; 5) the diary form and authorship itself. While the political implications of Lorelei's inversion of economic, cultural, and social codes are subsumed by the humorous nature of the genre with which Loos was working, *Blondes* is, for Pettit, (inadvertently) a radically subversive text ; Jean Marie Lutes argues that Lorelei, as an unusually scrupulous consumer, uses beauty culture as a site of resistance, consuming selectively in order to forward her own goals. Lorelei, then, blurs the categories of expert and consumer through turning consumer culture into her own form of cultural capital; Sarah Churchwell reads *Blondes* through the framework of its serial context and the advertisements that surrounded its initial publication, and argues that novel reveals contemporary anxieties about cultural capital and imitation.

gender hierarchies by inhabiting a cultural milieu beyond the proscribed range of her working class Southern background. An aspiring Manhattan socialite relocated from an unremarkable, poor Arkansas family, Lorelei recounts her navigation through the elite strata of cosmopolitan society, eventually becoming the wife of Mr. Henry Spoffard, the hugely wealthy, hypocritically pious yet socially esteemed leader of the motion picture censorship board. Her ability to inhabit the upper echelon of society, like Florry's access to the "impregnable entrances of the palatial structures of the picture industry," is enabled by her conscious and directed appropriation of the sociocultural markers of privilege, in this case framed through her deliberate consumption not only of the visual markers of female desirability but also through her ability to adopt a falsely-constructed "cultured" intellect by reading—or at least pretending to read—the most cultured of novels.

> Well I forgot to mention that the English gentlemen [Mr. Cellini] who writes novels seems to have taken quite an interest in me, as soon as he found out that I was literary. I mean he has called up every day and I went to tea twice with him. So he has sent me a whole complete set of books for my birthday by a gentleman called Mr. Conrad. They all seem to be about ocean travel although I have not had time to more than glance through them. (8)

Lorelei's self-improvement is but a hollow tool for her narcissistic goals of financial comfort. She plays the game of sociocultural passing as a means of access to cultural and economic capital, dating a never-ending series of brokers, authors and artists, cinema directors, judges, and politicians. Her talent for social adaptation is cultivated by reading the sort of "good books" that are crucial to "improve[ing her] mind" (12; 19). And it is this deliberate cultural "improvement" that aids Lorelei, as it does *True Story*'s Lena, in her access to high society. Lorelei mines her

reading materials for basic cues of cultural posturing, entirely missing the nuances and sentiments of the literary:

> I decided not to read the book by Mr. Cellini. I mean it was quite amuseing [sic] in spots because it was really quite riskay but the spots were not so close together and I never seem to like to always be hunting clear through a book for the spots I am looking for, especially when there are really not so many spots that seem to be amuseing after all. So I did not waste my time on it but this morning I told Lulu [the maid] to let all of the house work go and spend the day reading a book entitled "Lord Jim" and then tell me all about it, so that I would improve my mind was Gerry is away. (13)

Lena's *True Story* narrative of vamping the elite men of Philadelphia is surrounded by advertisements that encourage readers to "improve [their] mind[s]" with speech lessons, etiquette manuals, and collections of low-priced literature. Cheap reprints of "classics" are marketed in the confessions as an affordable means for achieving a mark of distinction, for training oneself for the company of high society. Boccaccio's *Decameron*, "lauded by the most discriminating critics," is marketed for its value of self-improvement: "No one can know literature or call himself truly sophisticated, truly a master of life in all its infinite variety, until he has" purchased this cultural treasure. The ad offers entryway into (or training for) the works of "the world's greatest masters of literature—Shakespeare, Chaucer, Keats, Tennyson, Dryden and Longfellow," who have allegedly been influenced by Boccacio ("Decameron Tales"). The Franklin Publishing Company guarantees to deliver a "landmark of literature, which must not be passed over, if you would broaden your vision—make yourself truly cultured." Speech training

and etiquette ads promise to enable "swift advancement" through society by providing the tools for constructing an "educated and cultured" personality of "real distinction" ("Speech Lessons").

Lena's perpetual self-consciousness about the artificiality of her performance absorbs the rhetoric of the surrounding etiquette manual advertisements that insist that vigilance is needed in the game of sociocultural passing. She admits that in her sleep she sees her fellow socialites "pointing accusing fingers at [her]" (69). An ad for the *Book of Etiquette* similarly warns that "Every day people who are not used to good society make the mistake he is making. Do you know what it is? Can you point it out?" ("Book of Etiquette"). Despite her vigilance, Lena, like Florry, is found out to be a rogue and an imposter. When her husband discovers her illustrious past of "playing the game" for money, he kicks her out into the streets and pulls the rug of economic security directly out from under her, telling her, "you came to me a beggar and I'm going to send you away a beggar" (70). Lena finds herself broke and alone and is forced to return to her job as a salesgirl.

Yet despite the title's insinuation of fault in "The Wife Who Didn't Tell," the author ends on a note that is conspicuously sympathetic with Lena's material conditions. Lena remarks in closing that she only "made one mistake; I didn't put away enough money when I had the chance" (70). Lena's misfortune is the result of wholly misapprehending the material realities of modern life, in building her identity upon a mass-cultural façade incapable of sustaining itself in the "real" world. It is the fictions of consumer culture that fall to blame as central to the delusions that lead to her downfall.

CHAPTER V

HAUNTING THE BORDERS:

FORMAL HYBRIDITY AND THE CONFESSION FORMULA IN FAULKNER'S *WILD PALMS*

The confession magazines were fraught with the submerged tensions between private life and corporate interest in the twentieth century and imbued with a sustained ambivalence about the veracity of the market's promises for self-advancement, as well as with a thematic insistence about the inauthenticy of the self-constructed personalities that were offered up for consumption in the period's advertising. While the sensationalized fiction of working class magazines is traditionally read as a grotesque elaboration of the logic and values of the consumer market—in which passive consumption is encouraged and rewarded—the anonymous confessions forced readers to confront the inconsistencies endemic to a culture that was increasingly circumscribed by the culture industries' utopian portraits of modernity. Both popular and high literary culture were, as Andreas Huyssen explains, involved in a "fierce struggle" with commodity culture, a struggle which often resulted in hybrid forms that paradoxically absorbed and rejected their commodification (18). The confessional form was marked by the type of hybridity which Huyssen locates in the sense that they both absorbed and rejected the consumer market and, hence, registered complex changes in the very fabric of individual and literary identity in the transition to market capitalism.

The confession narratives' preoccupation with artifice and inauthenticity as well as their sustained suspicion about the intention and effects of advertising and the mass market on modern identity forces us to reconsider the prevalence of thematic similarities between popular and literary forms in the early twentieth century. For while I hope to have shown that the

confessional form constituted a narrative field both dependent upon and antagonistic to consumer culture, so has the language of the commodity similarly seeped into the language of modernism even as modernism has positioned itself against the market. As modernist revisionist scholarship has over the last thirty years increasingly established, "mass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project" (Huyssen 18). The same subdued anxiety about and resistance to "the reign of the commodity" that is found in the confessional form was "often recorded by the modernists who eagerly incorporated themes of popular culture into the modernist vocabulary" (Huyssen 18).

Pierre Bourdieu's model of the "field of cultural production" offers a structural critique of literary production which deconstructs the boundaries between high-, middle-, and low-brow tiers of production by revealing the ways in which "the essential explanation of each work lies outside of each of them, in the objective relations which constitute this field" (30). For Bourdieu, every cultural position-taking, "even the dominant one, depends for its very existence … on the other positions constituting the field," a field which is marked not only by "forces" but also by "struggles" of power between the dominant and dominated classes (30). This power struggle was played out in the twentieth century most overtly between the popular form and modernism "in the guise of an irreconcilable opposition" (Huyssen vii). Modernism strategically positions itself against mass culture, "constitute[ing] itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture" (Huyssen vii). Huyssen identifies this reactionary polarization of literary culture to have resulted from fears of cultural degeneration in the face of mass culture's ever-widening influence. For Bourdieu, the ideological undercurrents of cultural production are most clearly revealed during moments in which "the play of homologies between fundamental oppositions" becomes clear (44).

Thus, genealogical similarities, in this instance thematic similarities between high and low culture, reveal larger structural forces at work in the production of the literary field, and thus in the (re)production of dominant ideologies. In the early twentieth century, cultural and economic shifts in the literary field were caused by swift and massive technological and social developments, and these shifts were registered in the period's literary field through a homologous "preoccupation with inauthenticity." This preoccupation with the inauthentic marks a thematic continuity between the popular and the literary and, thus, reveals this anxiety to be a cultural phenomenon endemic to market capitalism.

Although Erin Smith argues that the fiction and advertising in working class magazines worked in tandem via a "reciprocal influence" on the logic of modern readers (225), the confession narratives are rife with ideological struggle between the emergent class values of market capitalism and the residual values of a traditionally self-contained working class audience. The stories in the confession magazines range a wide spectrum of literary styles and span divergent levels of complexity. They are the product of a broad and unrestrained popular print market which is best defined by its innate polyvocality and, thus, by the inherent ideological tensions that are the result of a wide diversity of contributing producers. Many of the confession stories overtly reject the very premise of purchased success that is marketed in the accompanying advertising and reveal middle-class life to be a shallow universe of empty consumption.

"The Two Women He Married," published in the January 1927 issue of *True Story*, is narrated by Robert, a "common labor[er]" (45). Robert admits to the envy he feels for the "leading banker[s]" and "merchant prince[s]" whose wives are seen being "driven about the streets in [their] sedan[s]" (45). He becomes increasingly frustrated that he is not able to provide

his wife, Ellen, with "the many luxuries" he desires her to have (45). Increasingly angered by a world that seems at every turn "against me, unwilling to give me a chance" (44), Robert rails against the inconsistencies of class:

> All was not right somewhere. While the majority were compelled in the fight for their daily bread to work almost day and night, there were yet others who, seemingly doing nothing at all, were able to live on the fat of the land. Their daily lives were made up only entirely of the quest of their daily rounds of pleasures. (45)

The radicalism of this passage cannot be overstated, particularly in light of the critical bias against this form which has caused critics to insist on its pacifying and escapist overtones. To borrow from Michael Denning, the "concerns and accents" of working class audiences are embedded in no subtle way within confession stories that directly position themselves against the same rising culture of consumption which they are often presumed to endorse (4).

The advertisements that surround Robert's narrative provide a framework through which to contextualize his anxieties. Published just pages from Robert's narrative is a quarter-page advertisement for the International Correspondence School that rhetorically mirrors Robert's own frustrations with "not getting ahead" in life:

> What will you be doing one year from today? …Will you be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary—worried about the future—never quite able to make both ends meet—standing still while other men get ahead? … There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life. ("International Correspondence School" Ad 3)

The ad promises that "with just a little effort, [you] could bring large success within [your] grasp." The International Correspondence Schools (I.C.S.) ads will ring familiar to any reader of modern working class fiction magazines; pulp publisher Harold Heresy remarked that the I.C.S. ads were "as familiar as the fiction sheets themselves" (qtd. in Smith 212). Other I.C.S. ads ask: "Why don't you … get ready for a real job at a salary that will give *your* wife and children the things you would like them to have?" ("International Correspondence School" Ad 4). Similarly toned ads for electrical schools, drafting schools, and secret service courses promise that study-at-home job training is the surest means to become a real man, to provide a better life for your family, to make yourself more competitive in an increasingly white collar economy. They promise to "help you have the happy home," to provide your family with "more money—more comforts—more of everything worthwhile" ("International Correspondence Schools" Ad 6; "International Correspondence School" Ad 5).

Robert's own preoccupation with providing a life of luxury for his wife reveals his absorption of the rhetoric of capitalist individualism and competition that the I.C.S. ads and others like them rely upon. Robert laments that he is not "progressing in the world" as he should be (44); he worries about "standing still in the business life" (44). Pressured by the demands of an increasingly fragmented universe of social and professional competition, Robert begins to believe that his son "someday will be ashamed of me unless I advance in the world of business" (46). Despite Robert's radical bent, he is unable to unite his fellow workers and is repeatedly rebuffed in his requests for a raise in wages. Eventually, "spurred on [by the] "power of achievement" that is marketed in the correspondence school ads, he capitulates to the pressures of a competitive market (44). Robert's boss, himself mirroring the rhetoric of the I.C.S. ads, promises Robert a "real promotion" upon "completing a course of study" in a correspondence

school (46). Robert accepts the offer and six months later receives "the raise [he has] been fighting for" and is offered a "big promotion" (121). As promised in the training ads, his whole world swiftly changes: "The sun never shone any brighter, nor have the grass or trees ever appeared greener than they did to me at that moment. It seemed to me as if it truly was the entrance of a new world" (121).

But Robert's romantic portrait of American progress quickly devolves against the stark social realism that I have pointed toward in other confession stories. Robert soon finds that "life [is] not entirely made up of roses and other good things" (121). In his transition to middle class life, Robert's quest for individual self-improvement is followed by a sense of alienation and fragmentation, a loss of community and familial bonds that is hyperbolized by the almost immediate death of his wife. Robert finds himself alone, a "helpless [man] loose in the sea of life; much the same as a real ship on a real sea without a rudder" (121). Robert's new life of success is met with his marriage to Amy, a vain and greedy young woman who finds in Robert "a chance for entering the stratum of society to which, heretofore, she has been denied entrance" (123). He soon finds his marriage as dead as "the city morgue" and his new wife "as cold as ice" (123). His new home is no longer "a home of mutual love and understanding, [but] merely a home by agreement" in which "I supply the money for the household expenses and for [Amy's] personal desires" (123). He distracts himself by "throwing myself into my work" as his wife throws "her every energy into the game of society" (123). He finds that "as fast as [his] earnings increase, her demands [are] able to absorb them" (123). After several years of Amy's social climbing, she runs away to Spain with an illustrious socialite.

Robert's acquisition of success as purchased through the commercial industry of self-improvement ends in a life that is shallow and artificial; his capitulation to the competitive

individualism in the ads leaves him without community, without family, without basic human comfort. Bemoaning the loss of his old life, Robert grieves for the days when his "joy in life" came from "daily association with the ones [he] love[d]" and admits that the only joy and comfort in his new life is that of "piling up the shares of the company" (124). The comforts of middle-class life as marketed in the surrounding advertisements are portrayed in this instance as empty accoutrements incapable of providing true satisfaction, and the bourgeois lifestyle that is so aggressively marketed in mass culture is critiqued for its barren materialism and vain individualism.

William Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939) provides perhaps the most clear elaboration of my argument that the confessional genre not only registered the cultural tensions between individual identity and the mass market in a tone similar to many modernist novels but also that the confessional form itself, both hugely popular and regularly the subject of critical scorn, was registered in the very language of experimental modernism. This overlapping between tiers of literary production marks a site of homology between the popular and the modern which complicates the ideological position and effects of both forms. Faulkner's *Wild Palms* novella presents the melodramatic, indeed pulpish, tale of Henry and Charlotte. Young, poor, and desperately in love despite the fact that Charlotte is married, the couple hops on a train to Chicago and sets up their own decidedly risqué love nest. After running away together, the young couple struggles to afford rent and basic necessities; their idealized romance becomes ever more tainted by economic pressure and by the consequences of their rebellion from convention. Eventually, Charlotte dies from an abortion performed by Harry, and Harry is imprisoned for her death. David Earle has argued that "the couple's love itself is a romantic idealism of the kind that was usually thought of as a product of romantic pulp fiction" and that the tragedy of the novel is

the couple's "unsuccessful navigation through popular romantic idealism" (205; 206). The novel is not only marked by the paradox between economic realism and romantic idealism but also the plot structure decidedly follows the same sin-suffer-repent narrative trajectory of the confessions. Further, the narrative is saturated with the same ideological tensions between romance (the transcendence of both material reality and the deceptions of mass culture) and realism (the material conditions of modernity) that is endemic to the confessions. The economic tension that undergirds Faulkner's tragic romance is remarkably similar to *True Story*'s "The Two Women He Married." Harry's diatribe against the pressures of material society in *The Wild Palms* registers anxieties similar to those embedded in the emasculating rhetoric of *True Story* magazine's job training ads—anxieties constructed among male wage earners whose desires were increasingly mediated by commodity culture and the social and economic pressures of self-advancement:

> I have even caught myself twice … thinking "I want my wife to have the best" exactly any husband with his Saturday pay envelope and his suburban bungalow full of electric wife-saving gadgets and his table cloth of lawn to sprinkle on Sunday morning that will become his very own provided he is not fired or run down by a car in the next ten years—the doomed worm blind to all passion and dead to all hope. (112)

The social and material pressures of modernity which define success by the acquisition of capital and confer social distinction on those best at "piling up the shares of the company" destabilize any possibility for romantic escape for both the characters and the reader of *The Wild Palms* ("The Two Women He Married" 121).

Most strikingly, Harry Wilbourne turns to hack writing for discretionary income. Harry Wilbourne, indeed, writes for the confession magazines.

> he wrote and sold to the confession magazines the stories beginning "I had the body and desires of a woman yet in knowledge and experience of the world I was but a child" or "If I had only a mother's love to guard me on that fatal day"—stories which he wrote complete from the first capital to the last period in one sustained frenzied agonizing rush … then go to bed himself … waiting for the smell and echo of his last batch of moron's pap to breathe out of him. (103)

Faulkner's absorption of the confessional form registers at once the form's impact upon the larger literary field and the resulting critical backlash through which the confessions became symbolic for the degeneration of language and literature in mass culture. Faulkner's parody of the confessional magazine here belies its relational position to a tier of literary production allegedly antagonistic to experimental literature. For Pierre Bourdieu, literary parody, which "arise[s] in the presentation of a work corresponding to one extremity of the field before an audience corresponding structurally to the other extremity" is intended to "presuppose and confirm emancipation" of an artist and his work from that which is absorbed into it (31). Hence, Faulkner's passage at once registers and denounces the popular form "by repeating and reproducing it in a sociologically non-congruent context, which has the effect of rendering it incongruous and even absurd" (Bourdieu 31). Vincent Allen King has written that Faulkner's absorption of pulp fiction into his own experimental narrative style reveals an "unstated fear that he would be perceived as (or actually become) a huckster of pulp fictions" (qtd. in Earle, 205). Faulkner's use of the confessional form is little more than a defensive gesture of parody through

which he asserts the worth and immortality of his own literary genius above and against the cheapness and temporality of the popular form with which his own work is polluted.

However, the experimental form, as is especially clear in this instance, grew out of the same economic and social conditions as the popular form from which it desperately seeks to disentangle itself. Nancy Bentley argues that such "momentary convergences between [the] otherwise opposed domains" of literary and mass culture highlight the fact that "both are products of the same modern conditions" (5). Huyssen, and many critics following him, have elaborated on the fact that "modernism was deeply implicated in the processes and pressures of the same modernization it so ostensibly repudiates" (56). Harry's "moron's pap," which he writes "without effort and without especial regret for the anesthesia of his monotonous inventing," is composed on a second-hand typewriter, purchased from a seedy pawn shop:

> Charlotte would go to bed and he would sit again at the typewriter at which he had already spent most of his day, the machine borrowed first from McCord then rented from an agency then purchased outright from among the firing-pinless pistols and guitars and gold-filled teeth in a pawnshop. (104)

The very act of mass literary production in this instance, mediated as it is by a writing machine nearing the end of its exchange circuit, is contaminated with the inauthenticity of mechanical reproduction, with the detritus of industrial society, and with the ephemerality of the commodity. The "firing-pinless pistol" sold in the pawn shop from which Harry purchases his typewriter underscores the emasculating effects of hack writing and portrays popular literary production as lacking in virility and potency. The loosely scattered "gold-filled teeth" bring to mind the impotent, pulpy gums from which they have been extracted. The mouth—the site of consumption—is injected with debased capital in the form of dental gold, conflating the act of

consumption with a degrading commodification of the body. The pawn shops items mark Faulkner's anxiety-ridden parody of popular readers and writers as imbued with submerged fears about the threat of degeneration, inauthenticity, and effeminacy that the mass market poses for the serious author. These anxieties, importantly, stem not from aesthetic concerns but from the changing material structure of the literary market.

The image of the typewriter is central to the several narrative portraits of Henry's process of composition: Henry "began to dispense with lunch altogether, with the bother of eating, instead writing steadily on … staring at but not seeing the two or three current visible lines of his latest primer-bald moronic fable" (104). His lack of appetite coupled with his mechanical persistence carry the implications of dehumanization caused by his dependence upon the machine. Morag Shiach notes that for many modernist writers, the typewriter represented an "unwelcome mediation in the creative process" and was commonly used as a literary trope "either metaphorically or descriptively to explore changing relations to writing, both as a literary form and as a technology" (68; 69). The act of literary production—of hack writing for Faulker's Harry Wilbourne—is entirely mediated by mechanization. Faulkner's novel underscores the materiality of modern literary production, in which technology—speed, mechanization, mass reproduction—increasingly acted as an impersonal intermediary between the writer and the pure idea, disrupting the romance and idealism of creative transcendence. The typewriter's centrality in the process of literary production in *The Wild Palms* calls attention to the materiality of process, as opposed to the interiority of authentic inspiration and thus establishes a tension between authentic and inauthentic modes of literary production.

Modernism's complex relationship to technology creates a number of paradoxes that have been well-established in modernist criticism and are far beyond the scope of this thesis.

Suffice it to say in this instance that Faulkner's conflation of the of mediated, inauthentic, mechanized, and commodified modes of literary production with the confession magazine belies a very particular anxiety about the economic threat that mass production posed for more "serious" artists. Huyssen notes that anxieties about market commodification were not limited to literary modernism but were, in fact, endemic to popular culture as well: "As modernism hides its envy for the broad appeal of mass culture behind a screen of condescension and contempt, mass culture, saddled as it is with pangs of guilt, yearns for the dignity of serious culture which forever eludes it" (17). Faulkner's *Wild Palms* certainly carries a high enough tone of "condescension and contempt" to force us to question the motives of such posturing against the confession magazine. It is not, however, the confession magazine alone that is the subject of scorn and derision in this instance, but also the ever-increasing mass accessibility to cultural production as enabled by the technologies of modernity, as cultural production was central to the production and generation of both knowledge and power and, as such, was possessively guarded by the dominant culture.

The advertising pages of the confession magazines—a veritable pawnshop themselves, littered as they are with cheap commodities—register the power that print technology held in the eyes of the marginal reader. Each confession magazine issue published anywhere from three to six advertisements for refurbished, late-model Underwood, Remington, and Oliver typewriters. They are generally marked at affordable "price cuts," some with prices "smashed in half," most at around two or three dollars down on an 18-month payment plan, usually with a free trial offer and typing course included ("International Typewriter Ex."). Erin Smith has noted that since mail-in coupons, such as the typewriter ads, included a coded number that indicated to advertisers from what magazine or magazine group an advertisement had been pulled,

advertisers could “pinpoint which advertising appeals were most effective for a particular reading public” (207). The prevalence per issue and the durability (over the run of many years) of typewriter ads in the confessions, then, indicate that advertisers were met with a good deal of success in selling used typewriters to confession magazine audiences. The International Typewriter Exchange advertisement for refurbished Underwood typewriters makes their market clear: this offer is “ideal for business and professional men—teachers, students, story writers” (“Underwood”). The marketing toward potential amateur story writers is of the most interest here. A number of historians have pointed toward the relationship between the typewriter and the empowerment of marginal, particularly of female, audiences because of its capacity “to [erode] the authority of the author,” thus “opening up a space for women’s writings” (Shiach 52). Morag Schiach notes that “for a number of historians the typewriter becomes a figure of women’s labor and their increased participation in the public sphere and as such is read as a tool of social emancipation” (63). Friedrich Kittler has taken this historical relationship between female emancipation and the typewriter so far as to argue that “apart from Freud, it was Remington who granted the female sex access to the office” (qtd. in Shiach 52). The confession magazines, which relied at least upon the aura of reader contribution, are integral to this concept of sociocultural and economic emancipation by way of access to authorship. And they underscore the power and the appeal—in Faulkner’s case, perhaps, the threat—of unrestrained mass participation in literary production.

Confession magazine ads for screenplay and short story writing courses and booklets further illustrate my argument that modernist anxieties about mass participation in literary production were based, at least in part, on the eroding cultural authority of professional authorship. While the typewriter made production faster, cleaner, and more static, it opened at

least in theory a cultural space for marginal audiences to entertain the idea of amateur and professional writing. And this opportunity for democratic participation in the public sphere, whether real or perceived, was registered in the confession magazines' advertising. Publishing firms capitalized on mass audiences' desires for the alleged cultural and economic capital that was to be had in the field of professional authorship. Ads for firms like The Hollywood Academy, Cosmopolitan Photoplay Studio, Palmer Photoplay Corporation, and Bristol Photoplay Studios quite literally litter the confession magazines with pamphlets and training courses that promise to teach the "priceless formula" for screenplay writing ("The Key to Hollywood"). "The Key to Hollywood" advertises a training course that informs readers that until just recently, professional writing has been "the closest of secrets, and confined to but a few" but that the demand for new ideas and new writers is high. The cultural and economic capital of authorship is similarly flaunted in Palmer Photoplay Corporation's ad, which promises to deliver cash prizes and royalties to amateur screen writers and urges potential new writers to "capitalize on their powers of creative imagination: these opportunities will not be filled by well-known authors … Most of them have failed in the past to write the most successful photodramas" ("We Offer $1,000 and Royalties"). The Authors' Press ad for a book titled "The Short-Cut to Successful Writing" positions authorship as an economic trade and promises to show readers "how easily stories are conceived, written, perfected, and sold." This ad contextualizes modernist anxieties about market competition and the threat of the popular writer: "Editors will welcome a good story or photoplay from you just as quickly as from any well-known writer. … It is rapidly becoming a regular business among people who formerly thought they had to be literary geniuses in order to succeed." Of course these advertisements are hyperbolizing opportunities for wealth and fame in order to capitalize on readers' idealism, but

their rhetoric still registers the vast economic and cultural shifts in the literary field that were the effect of rapid technological developments, increases in literacy rates, and public access to affordable reading materials.

The threat of sociocultural slippage enabled by mass contribution to the literary field was registered in a countless number of critical backlashes against popular magazines and hack writers. Literary critic Arthur McKeough, writing in 1927, compares the writers for the confession magazines to the "sob sisters," "glory girls," and "tear jerkers" that write for the newspaper "problem" columns (414). The misogyny of these labels is certainly not necessary to dwell upon; the following anecdote, though, is noteworthy, as McKeough exudes an overt unease about the increasing popularity and prevalence of those writers marginalized by both class and gender hierarchies in the production of print culture:

> A writer of some of our best magazines was staying at the Grammercy Park hotel in New York. One day her chambermaid said to her, rather diffidently: "I couldn't help but notice that you write stories, Miss, and I thought I'd tell you that – er – I'm a writer, too!
>
> Well, now, isn't that interesting! And what do you write?
>
> Oh, I wrote up [some people always 'write *up*'] several of my experiences for a true story magazine. They sent me twenty five dollars. Imagine that! And now all the other girls in the hotel are writing up theirs! (McKeough 415)

Not unlike Nathaniel Hawthorne's infamously disparaging complaint against the Romantic era's "damn mob of scribbling women," the rhetorical flourishes of both Faulkner and McKeough belie an anxiety about the sociocultural fluidity enabled by the consumption and production of

mass market texts. For Faulkner, this anxiety is decidedly economic. His hack writer, Harry, registers mass market print production as a debased yet economically threatening project:

> I can make all the money we will need; certainly there seems to be limit to what I can invent on the theme of female sex troubles. … We have radio in the place of God's voice and instead of having to save emotional currency for months and years to deserve one chance to spend it all for love we can now spread it thin into coppers and titillate ourselves at any newsstand, two to the block like sticks of chewing gum or chocolate from the automatic machines. (115)

And it is on this changing literary field that the confessions staked their claim. MacFadden Corporation created an entire media empire founded on the idea that marginal audiences could both be represented in and capitalize upon a swiftly transforming literary field.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

While it is impossible to assess what number of confessional stories were in fact written by readers, the form's sustained popularity was dependent upon maintaining at least the aura of reader participation. The confessions offered a radical resistance to the class and gender hierarchies of literary production, and the relationship of the confession magazines to consumer culture, I hope to have shown in reading the narratives against the ads, was no less tortured, paradoxical, or complex than was the relationship of modernism to mass culture. Perhaps most importantly, the power of mass authorship is registered on multiple levels in the form itself. In closing, I would like to share an advertisement for the Palmer Institute of Authorship, from the August 1926 issue of *True Story*. This ad promises to train talented amateurs in professional writing. The quarter-page illustrated ad begins, "Her mind was crowded with beautiful stories, shut in; like butterflies in a box"; her impressions, without guidance and without an outlet, were "shut in so tight and with no door open" ("Her Mind"). With the guidance of the Palmer Institute, she finally has gotten her stories published on paper: "'My work,' she called them proudly, "My work." Marginal audiences were as thus hugely empowered by the confessional form, which was a product of the changing technological and economic conditions of authorship in the twentieth century market economy. As elucidated by Virginia Woolf in a series of lectures in 1929 on women writers, republished as "A Room of One's Own," writing for women was radically liberating both in its capacity to provide economic independence and in its ability to carve a space of feminine subjectivity in the public sphere. As in the above ad, mass publication and writing technologies in the twentieth century opened doors for marginal writers to be represented in the public sphere and provided a space for women readers and writers to step

outside of the confines of the domestic sphere. And this freedom is registered in the form both literally, at the level of content, and figuratively, in its construction of a virtual public space for marginal readers to interact. Thus, the confessionals opened the door, at least imaginatively, to entirely new modes of subjectivity for a mass readership. The confession magazine was in itself a material space, a “room of one’s own” so to speak, which registered the promise and the power of mass print in the twentieth century as well as the complex relationship of the popular form and the popular body to market capitalism.

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