Diffused Feeling: Threat Environments and Affective Labor in William Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*

Jim Coby
Indiana University, Kokomo

An odd and understudied piece in William Faulkner's (1897-1962) canon, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, contains two novellas, "Old Man" and "The Wild Palms," presented in alternating chapters throughout the book. After its publication in 1939, at the end of a decade of career-defining work, "reviewers were left," writes Michael Gorra, "even more baffled than usual" (339). Faulkner rarely earns high marks for accessibility, but this novel proved particularly vexing since it possessed "only the faintest of connections between" (339) the two plot lines. "Old Man" details the misadventures of a wayward convict, labeled only "Tall Convict," and a pregnant displaced woman, called "Woman in the Tree," who battle against nature's fury as the Great Flood of 1927 decimates the Mississippi River Valley. "The Wild Palms" offers a parodic, Hemingway-like narrative about a man and woman in an illicit love affair who travel around the country in search of a home. Tragically, their story ends with the woman's death from a failed abortion.

Certain unifying elements initially emerge between the two stories: both deal with trauma and both include a deep concern for their respective environmental settings: "Old Man" is set in the flooded, detritus strewn landscape of the Mississippi Delta and the Atchafalaya Basin; "The Wild Palms" takes place largely in Western and Midwestern locales.

Ultimately, though, several scholars eschew the connective sinew between the pieces, focusing instead on one story or the other. In one of the first calls for a more robust reading of the text, Irving Howe notes that "Most of Faulkner's influential critics have agreed that *The Wild Palms* is a failure and that its two intersecting stories . . . need not be printed together as they were in the original edition" (93). Howe disagrees with these critics and counters that "the two parts of

the book are genuinely bound through theme and atmosphere;" yet he neglects to state what such a bond might imply (93). Eventually, Howe unsatisfactorily concludes, "*The Wild Palms* merits our respect" (99). In this essay, I seek to expand Howe's nascent conceptualization of "atmosphere" by arguing that *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* may be best understood as a complete and unified whole based on the affective tendencies embedded within the text.

Two notes of clarification are necessary: a brief summary of the novel and an explanation of affect theory. As rising waters precipitate the Great Flood of 1927, the Tall Convict is released from Mississippi's Parchman Prison with orders to search for two victims of the storm, the pregnant Woman in the Tree and the Man on the Roof, whom he never finds. When he eventually locates the Woman in the Tree, strong currents sweep both of them off course, and they end up in the swamps of Louisiana's Atchafalaya Basin. After befriending a Cajun fur trapper, the pair eventually recover from their drifting and make their way back to Mississippi, where the Woman in the Tree leaves to meet her family; the Tall Convict returns to Parchman of his own volition, weary of the ambiguities of a life without the regimented schedules and structures of prison. The second narrative, "The Wild Palms," explores the relationship between Charlotte Rittenmeyer and Harry Wilbourne. After a summer of flirtation in New Orleans, the two find themselves romantically entangled. They travel across the country to escape Charlotte's husband and to impel themselves to keep their romance adventurous. After spending time in Michigan, Utah, and Illinois, their escapades end when Charlotte dies from a botched abortion near Galveston, Texas; Harry receives a life sentence in Parchman Prison for his collusion in the illegal abortion.

Although the two stories initially appear wildly different, they are linked by their "affective capacities." Rachel G. Smith, in "Postmodernism and the Affective Turn," explains that literary and sociological theories took the "affective turn" in the mid-to-late nineties as a response against the perceived "general critical consensus that postmodernist literature tends to be tonally—and therefore affectively—cold" (423). Simply stated, affect theory examines those shared emotional bonds between readers and characters. The theory combines psychoanalytic criticism, trauma theory, and reader response in which readers attempt to construct parameters for discussing both the char-

acter's feelings and their own. My definition of "affect" most closely aligns withAnn Cvetkovich's in *Depression: A Public Feeling* where she "tend[s] to use *affect* in a generic sense, rather than in a more specific Deleuzian sense, as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (4). I favor her inclusive, malleable approach since it allows for the greatest range of understanding and usage.

In this essay, I employ Brian Massumi's two models of affect theory, the "threat environments" and "disaster," to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Faulkner's stories. I first apply "threat environments" to connect Harry's experiences to those of the Tall Convict. Massumi argues that living in an environment of persistent and unending threat (self-imposed or otherwise) leads one to make rash and often wrongheaded decisions. Threat environments abound in both stories: the Tall Convict's desire to return to prison is constantly thwarted by situations outside his control, while Harry believes that if he and Charlotte remain in one place too long, their love will become stagnant and fade. Nevertheless, both characters find themselves motivated by these environments and, in the end, these environments create a unified text. Second, I study the Woman in the Tree and Charlotte through the lens of affective labor. Loosely defined as any sort of occupational work that does not produce a tangible or utilitarian product, affective labor encompasses the Woman in the Tree's homemaking tendencies along with Charlotte's artistic pursuits. In closely focusing on the affective faculties of each story, Faulkner creates a work that not only stands as a complete unit, but also demands such a reading.

According to Massumi, disaster, or at least the threat of disaster, is a major overarching theme that connects individuals and communities across the globe. In "The Half-Life of Disaster," he argues: "The environment of life is increasingly lived as a diffuse and foreboding 'threat environment". . . . Natural disaster and terrorism define the poles of disaster. In between stretches a continuum of disaster, a plenum of frightful events of infinite variety, at every scale, coming one after the other in an endless series." In "threat environments," inhabitants possess an internalized, unconscious awareness that something terrible *might* be lurking around the corner. Indeed, "the fear doesn't stand out clearly as an emotion. It is more like a habitual posture, an

almost bodily bracing for the next unforeseen blow," which is to say, on an entirely unconscious level, that all of the planet's residents exist in a state of perpetual almost-disaster. In "Affective Attunement in the Field of Catastrophe," Massumi goes on to note that "rather than personally positioning each individual, it [disaster] braces them into a kind of differential attunement with others. We're all in on the event together" (115). His concept of "threat environment" is predicated on the proliferation of media and round-the-clock news coverage, but we need not think that the threat environment is a particularly new idea. In fact, Faulkner embeds threat environments within the very texture of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*. The prevailing air of menace pervades the Tall Convict's canoe journey to find the Woman in the Tree and his subsequent return to Parchman Prison. Though there are no ecological disasters, threat also blankets Charlotte and Harry's lofty romance as they flee from city to city in an attempt to capture and maintain the initial thrill of their illicit affair and deal with inhospitable climates in Utah, Chicago, Wisconsin, and the Gulf Coast. In weaving this affective thread between the two stories, Faulkner evinces the concept that will surface some seventy-five years later in Massumi's article—disaster and threat of disaster are the great unifiers in life and literature.

Early in the "Old Man" plotline, the narrator reveals the circumstances that placed the Tall Convict in prison. Because of the heroes' influence in pulpy, Western-themed novels, the Tall Convict begins to fancy himself as one of "the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such" who populate these works (20). Having falsely believed the pen-named authors to have "placed the stamp of verisimilitude and authenticity" on their sensational stories, the Tall Convict cherishes his worn paperbacks, "reading and rereading them, memorizing them, comparing and weighing story and method against story and method, taking the good from each and discarding the dross as his workable plan emerged" (20-21). Beyond simply critiquing mass culture, however, this scene also speaks to the nature of improvisational skills necessary to survive in a state of perpetual threat. Anthony Hoefer, in ""They're Trying to Wash Us Away': Revisiting Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* and Wright's 'Down by the Riverside' After the Flood," argues persuasively that we understand the Tall Convict's "muddled, shifting understanding of himself as the victim of fate, not as further evidence of his simplicity or comic confusion but

rather as an authentic expression of the disorientation of modernity and the confusing multitude of forces weighing upon a modern subject" (546). This description rightly points to the overwhelming dynamisms that regularly befall the Tall Convict, leaving him both physically and mentally exhausted and grappling to make sense of this cosmic comedy. Such comments, however, could fruitfully also apply to Harry. In fact, in describing these characters' blind frustration with the world as "impotent rage," Faulkner affectively connects the Tall Convict and Harry and, in doing so, comments on an overarching and universal frustration.

Inherent to the Tall Convict's character is his feeble and precarious position in the world. Faulkner first introduces the physicality of the Tall Convict, a man of "about twenty-five, tall, lean, flat-stomached, with a sunburned face and Indian-black hair" (20). This description points to the Tall Convict's laborious life, one of toil in the sun that has kept his skin reddened and his stomach free from excess weight. The attention towards the Tall Convict's corporeal state is quickly abandoned in favor of a discussion of his interiority, as the Tall Convict possesses a deep and pervasive "outrage" by which his entire life is seemingly dictated (20). Unaware of the logistics of the publishing industry, the Tall Convict's outrage is ludicrously and humorously misplaced. His fury is: "directed not at the men who had foiled his crime, not even at the lawyers and judges who had sent him here, but at the writers, the uncorporeal names attached to the stories, the paper novels—the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such—whom he believed had led him into his present predicament through their own ignorance and gullibility regarding the medium in which they dealt and took money for" (20).

Blindly adhering to the supposed verisimilitude of these pulp Westerns,[1] the Tall Convict strategizes a train robbery in which he follows "his printed (and false) authority to the letter" (21). By "weighing story method against story method, taking the good from each and discarding the dross," eventually a "workable plan emerged" (21). On the fated day of his robbery, however, the Tall Convict "did not even have a chance to go through the coaches and collect the watches and the rings, the brooches and the hidden money-belts, because he had been captured as soon as he entered the express car where the safe and gold would be" (22-23). For all of his vigilance and planning, the Tall

Convict ultimately fails to factor in the human and other unpredictable elements that exist outside the pages of his fiction.

"In short," writes Vincent Allan King, "the Tall Convict has been hoodwinked" (515). Unsurprisingly, he ends up sentenced to fifteen years in Parchman Prison and with a tremendous axe to grind. What is surprising about the ordeal is toward whom the Tall Convict devotes his "sense of burning and impotent outrage" (Faulkner 22). Indeed, the police officers who apprehend him, the judge who convicts him, and the prison guards who oversee him all escape his furor. Instead, he directs his rage at the authors behind the formulaic pulp fiction, "at what he did not even realize were pen-names, did not even know were not the actual men but merely the designations of shades who had written about shades" (22). The cruel irony of the situation is that, should the convict ever wish to lash out at them, he would be unable to do so for they do not exist. By creating such a scenario for the Tall Convict, Faulkner establishes the parameters for what this "impotent rage" might entail—an anger directed at subjects who do not exist, or who would not receive the aggression with any detriment to themselves, ultimately leaving the aggressor's anger as totally meaningless, merely throwing affect into a void. His own unpreparedness in a heated moment of crisis, despite confidence and knowledge of potentialities and outcomes, ultimately dooms the Tall Convict to a life of incarceration within Parchman's walls. Harry, in the novel's other plotline, finds himself under similar conditions.

Harry, the Tall Convict's counterpart in "The Wild Palms," at first seems an odd character to possess a deep-seated impotent rage. Unlike the Tall Convict, he is initially a free man. He is also ostensibly in a powerful position, working in a hospital. Yet, a close reading of Faulkner's initial remarks about Harry also yields evidence of a subjugated position: "When the man called Harry met Charlotte Rittenmeyer, he was an intern in a New Orleans hospital" (27). Here we see Harry denied a last name, which Charlotte, a more fully recognized character, receives. Notably, he is an intern, *not* a doctor; Faulkner thus presents him as something *less than*. Furthermore, like the Tall Convict, his first name follows the anonymity of "the man." He is, first and foremost, a man. Faulkner then appears to position him as a spokesperson for all humanity, a figure upon whom we can project any number of possibilities. Faulkner, however, denies him the autonomy of

freely practicing medicine, differentiating him early on as "an intern in a New Orleans hospital" (27). As such, Harry is less of a physician than he is a student. We can here begin to connect him with the Tall Convict in terms of their relative positions in society.

Early in the novel, Harry is introduced to Charlotte, a married woman, at a New Orleans party. The two are immediately smitten with one another and quickly begin a love affair. Oddly, Charlotte's husband, a man "not particularly remarkable" who "insisted that Harry call him Rat" (36), reacts amicably to the prospect of Charlotte and Harry's relationship, even after learning that they have consummated their affair. The danger and sneaking that typically surround illicit affairs now dismissed, the two must manufacture their own danger and a register of crisis in order for their relationship to thrive. To sustain the thrill of their early romance, they must continually recreate the risky circumstances that surrounded their initial consummation. Early on, Charlotte explains the conditions under which she believes their relationship might flourish: "the second time I ever saw you I learned what I had read in books but I never had actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it cheap you have cheated yourself" (41). For Charlotte, love contains an intrinsic element of instability and uneasiness. Indeed, she will later alert Harry that their relations must be "all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It can't be anything else" (71). Harry's charge is to maintain the relationship by constantly keeping affections sufficiently amorous.

The volatility that Charlotte expresses is also evidenced through Harry's conversations. After leaving New Orleans, the couple finds relative security and stability in the frosty Chicago winter. Charlotte works as a window dresser for a local department store, while Harry struggles to find work within the medical profession. Although all evidence points to the couple remaining deeply in love, Harry begins to feel uneasy. As if remaining in a place too long would destroy their relationship, Harry demands frenetic relocation. One evening, while having drinks with his friend McCord, Harry explains how hearing about Charlotte's job security spurred his desire to move: "that night before Christmas when she told me about the store and realised what we had got into, that the starving was nothing, it could have done nothing but kill us, while this was worth more than death or division

even: it was the mausoleum of love, it was the stinking catafalque of the dead corpse borne between the olfactoryless walking shape of the immortal unsentient demanding ancient meat"(118).

With job security and financial stability, Harry worries that his relationship has become as lifeless as the mannequins in Charlotte's department store windows. Indeed, he fears not only love's demise, but that its festering, rotting remains will haunt him indefinitely. Harry, like the Tall Convict, is subjected to a life lived in a crisis register. Their crises are of their own making, predicated on notions of narrative and storytelling. But whereas the Tall Convict blames authors of dime-store Westerns, Harry's crisis stems from a false conceptualization of storied romance, of love on the run. In both cases, unsustainability and faulty expectations lie at the heart of the characters' understanding of the world.

The conclusion of "The Wild Palms" sees Harry, the medical intern, performing and botching Charlotte's abortion, thereby creating the most tumultuous event of their affective crisis. Having made their way south from the snowy landscapes of Utah, the couple greets the warm climate of Texas with something resembling happiness. But their happiness is short-lived, as the potential of a child hinders their freewheeling romance and necessarily retards the breakneck pace of their relationship. After Harry realizes that something is terribly amiss with Charlotte, he seeks the assistance of a physician, his upstairs neighbor and landlord. Ultimately, the doctor cannot save Charlotte and calls an ambulance and the police. Upon their arrival, he leads them to a grief-stricken Harry: "This is your prisoner. . . . I will prefer formal charges as soon as we get to town" (246). Like the Tall Convict, Harry finds himself facing an extended stay in prison and, also like the Tall Convict, Harry senses a break from a life lived in the register of crisis and potentially free from additional impending traumas. Following Charlotte's death, Harry goes to trial where the District Attorney assures that he "can prove murder" charges against him (267). Just as the Tall Convict, Harry refuses to argue or to plead his case. He is exhausted. Before the prosecution and the defense can state their cases, Harry pleads, "Guilty, Your Honor" (267). Harry's impropriety causes momentary confusion as the judge asks, "Is the accused trying to throw himself on the mercy of the Court?" (267). Harry simply responds, "I just plead guilty, Your Honor" (267). By accepting re-

sponsibility for his lover's death, he shows that he no longer has the emotional energy to continue struggling. His plea, therefore, parallels the Tall Convict's acceptance of his extended sentence.

At the novel's conclusion, the Tall Convict and Harry are exhausted and traumatized. Affective crisis effectively drains all their resources, leaving them susceptible to any punishment or negative circumstances that come their way. By resolving both stories thus, Faulkner implicitly argues that the crisis register, the pervasive affect of unknowing and unease is far from unique. Indeed, these affects diffuse themselves throughout different cultures and economies, making themselves, if not acknowledged or explicitly recognized, at least *felt* on some affective plane. The Tall Convict and Harry exist within a perpetual state of real or threatened catastrophe. From the comparatively lesser life-altering circumstances of Harry's joblessness and necessity for adventure, to the more overtly devastating conditions that the Tall Convict endures during the Great Flood of 1927, a persistent, unwavering sense of instability pervades the lives of these men. It is not solely through crisis registers, however, that Faulkner works to demystify the two plotlines. Faulkner connects Charlotte and the Woman in the Tree, two vastly understudied characters, through their participation in affective and immaterial labor. Through their participation, Faulkner not only further links the stories, but also comments on the inherent, necessary value of traditionally undervalued forms of market participation.

Broadly speaking, affective labor is often considered as necessary work for which no financial compensation is received. Indeed, all compensation for this type of work is generally intrinsic and affecting. One immediately thinks of childcare, housework and, often, artistic pursuits. In Michael Hardt's aptly named article, "Affective Labor," he suggests that occupations in this field will somehow produce affects; ideally, affective labor produces positive affects such as "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community" (96). Of course, the affects produced in such pursuits are by no means necessarily positive, nor are all modes of affective labor performed without financial compensation. Nevertheless, the hope is that the person in the field of affective labor will be able to manipulate the subject's feelings in a way that is beneficial to both parties involved. Some examples of affective labor will prove

helpful for better establishing a definition. David Staples cites work as varied as "patenting genetically modified food, to the shaping of appetites, to the marketing of fast-food franchises" as contemporary sites of affective labor (125). Perhaps most conclusively defining the concept, Elizabeth Wissinger, explains that "affective labor is the labor of interaction and human contact" whether direct or indirect (234). "Workers in the health services and the entertainment industry," she continues, "produce feelings of ease or excitement. These industries are dependent on outputs of affective labor such as caring and emoting" (234-35). The production of affect and affective labors is peppered throughout *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* and further evinces how affective capacities thread the novel's dual narratives together.

Shortly after arriving in Chicago, Charlotte and Harry discuss their potential income opportunities and how they will sustain their fast-paced relationship. Charlotte chastises Harry's ambivalence about having stolen money beside a park bench in New Orleans, money on which the couple plans to live. Appealing to Harry's sense of commitment, Charlotte harshly questions him: "You stole the money we've got now; wouldn't you do it again? Isn't it worth it, even if it all busts tomorrow and we have to spend the rest of our lives paying interest?" (75). Acknowledging the power and necessity of money, Charlotte asks Harry to consider how they can earn income while maintaining the lovers-on-the-run lifestyle they have fashioned for themselves. Harry wavers, unable to lay out a plan or justify his economic worth. Charlotte, on the other hand, maintains, "I like bitching, and making things with my hands. I don't think that's too much to be permitted to like, to want to have and keep" (75). And, indeed, Charlotte does make things with her hands—tiny figurines, "deer and wolfhound and horses and men and women, lean epicene sophisticated and bizarre, with a quality fantastic and perverse" (74). In this scene, Faulkner creates a unique blend of affective and material labor. It is true that Charlotte crafts the figurines by hand and that the finished product is just that, a physical product, and that it points toward a material labor. However, these figurines do not serve any explicit use beyond their decorative function; their purpose is solely affective, for it makes the buyer or viewer feel something when looking at them. Charlotte thus bridges the gap between material and affective labor.

Her figurine, the "Bad Smell," showcases this bridging. One

afternoon while living in Chicago, Harry comes home to find that Charlotte has crafted a small figurine that is "not three inches tall—a little ancient shapeless man with a foolish disorganized face, the face of a harmless imbecile clown" (81). The tiny and absurd figurine, with its chaotic implications, serves as a reminder of the type of life that Charlotte demands that she and Harry have, an absurd life of constant excitement and stimulation. She dubs it the "Bad Smell" (81), which shows a lack of concern about potentially threatening situations. Charlotte explains, "It's a Bad Smell . . . That's all it is, just a bad smell. Not a wolf at the door. Wolves are Things. Keen and ruthless. Strong, even if they are cowards" (81). To her, the Bad Smell symbolizes worries that can be easily assuaged, or threats that are less dire than they appear. The figurine, despite its material construction, contains a powerful affective dimension because it possesses an affective charge that reminds the two of them to face each challenge on its own terms and to avoid rushing to resolve issues that will, like an unpleasant and lingering smell, eventually resolve themselves.

Upon arriving in the snow-blanketed, frigid Utah terrain, Harry begins to understand and appreciate Charlotte's affective labor. After being dropped off at the train station, they proceed to the mining camp where Harry will work as resident physician. The couple haphazardly "chose a house, not at random and not because it was largest, which it was not . . . but simply because it was the first house they came to and they had both become profoundly and ineradicably intimate with cold for the first times in their lives" (153)—their earlier stay in Chicago allowed the couple to experience bitter cold temperatures. Not only is the land inhospitable, but their new accommodations are unwelcoming. The gloomy nature of their cabin ultimately provides Harry with an opportunity to appreciate Charlotte's affective sculpting work. Indeed, regarding Harry's inspection of their cabin, Faulkner writes, "On either side rose wooden shelves, gloomy and barren save for the lower ones, as if this room too were a thermometer not to measure cold but moribundity, an incontrovertible centigrade (*We should have brought the Bad Smell* Wilbourne was already thinking)" (155). In the destitute cabin, Harry considers the affective quality of the Bad Smell. Moreover, he observes that the sculpture will be a relief to the stark cabin conditions. Through this observation, he validates the importance of Charlotte's affective work, specifically the craft of imbuing

a static object with affective powers to provide solace and comfort in unwelcoming conditions. While the Bad Smell is perhaps Charlotte's most obvious foray into affective labor, it is not its only example.

Despite her flirtation with material labor, shortly after beginning her figurine production, Charlotte finds that her opportunities with this type of labor start to dry up. Earlier in the story, as winter descends upon Chicago and both find themselves closer to poverty, she begins "window- and showcase-dressing" (101). Window dressing, a job that entails decorating and positioning mannequins and simulating scenes and landscapes, is an inherently affective type of labor. The sole purpose of Charlotte's later job is to create affect; in this instance, the affect that she hopes to create is desire, which in turn will impel the impacted customer to inquire about the mannequin's clothing and to purchase some items.

Although the Woman in the Tree's role is much less prominent than Charlotte's, she also partakes in meaningful and affective work. Hers, however, is the more typical "caring work" of childcare and household maintenance, as opposed to Charlotte's, which is affective labor for which she will receive financial compensation. Shortly after floodwaters miraculously run his skiff into the tree in which the Woman is waiting, the Tall Convict notices that she is pregnant. In a typically Faulknerian sardonic twist of fate, the Tall Convict finds himself involved with a woman for whom he has no particular attachment and whose pregnancy he believes will prove an insurmountable obstacle to returning to the prison. He laments that "*This is what I get. This, out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with*" (126), a turn of phrase that might remind the reader of a more sentimental quotation from the film *Casablanca*. The Tall Convict's remark here is fairly indicative of the treatment that the Woman in the Tree will receive throughout the text. That is, when appearing in the narration, she is largely ignored or chastised for her overly emotional states. Even though it is debatable whether emotional outbursts at the sight of large snakes are cause for criticism, the Tall Convict consistently derides his companion for such outbursts. Despite her prevailing mistreatment, Faulkner, for his part, imbues the Woman in the Tree with an agency that is quite obvious during her brief appearances in the text. More importantly, Faulkner highlights the Woman in the Tree's contributions to the story in showcasing her affective labor.

While residing in the Atchafalaya Basin, the Woman in the Tree performs the household chores in the small shack where she lives with the Tall Convict and the Cajun. Upon returning home from an alligator hunt one evening, the Tall Convict and "the Cajan[2] returned at dark the garments were clean, stained a little still with the old mud and soot, but clean" (212). The garments in question are the pants and shirt that the Tall Convict was issued upon registering at Parchman Prison and that he has subsequently worn throughout his journey. After weeks of sleeping in forests, canoes, and other inhospitable places, the clothing was stained with dirt and mud. Upon landing in the Atchafalaya Basin, the Tall Convict removes this clothing that he finds too cumbersome and warm to wear while hunting. The Woman, left alone at the cabin, washes clothes, a type of immaterial affect labor. Massumi, in describing the affective qualities of computer software, another form of immaterial production, provides an analysis that helps illustrate the important function that the Woman provides. He notes that when purchasing software, one is "basically buying the right to be able to do things, ways of affecting and being affected—word processing capacities, image-capture, processing capacities, printing capacities, calculation capacities" ("Navigating Moments" 22). Massumi's assessment of the seemingly limitless affective capacities afforded through software might initially seem distant from the Woman's affective labor. However, the two ideas do operate quite similarly, for, in the washing of the Tall Convict's prison uniform, the Woman performs a symbolic act that operates on at least two contrasting, affective levels—on the one hand, we can read this act as one of repentance and cleansing, freeing the Tall Convict of the emotional and ecological stains; on the other hand, removing the clothing stains effectively exposes the Tall Convict as an escaped prisoner when the Parchman lettering becomes discernable. Ultimately, both ideas hold true and are important to the Tall Convict's perception of the good life. For the purposes of the discussion here, however, what is important is that through affective labor, the Woman restores potentialities for the Tall Convict—the potential of being able to safely return to prison and the removal of some evidence of the turmoil of prior weeks.

In the end, Faulkner softens his appraisal of the Woman in the Tree and the Tall Convict's relationship. He writes that the couple "had jointly suffered all the crises emotion social economic and even mortal

which do not always occur even in the ordinary fifty married years" (213). Indeed, because of childbirth, displacement, and economic stability followed by loss, these two characters undoubtedly experience an entire array of marital strife and civility. Throughout their misadventures, the Woman evidences the importance and necessity of affective labor, particularly regarding how it can open up possibilities and new ways of thinking for the Tall Convict. Throughout *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem,* Faulkner provides examples of affective labor. From the cultural production of emotionally endearing sculptures and provocative show window displays, to the domestic concerns of childcare and laundry, Faulkner reveals that affective labor pervades the fabric of American society. By effectively diffusing these concerns across varied landscapes (the Atchafalaya Basin, downtown Chicago, and rural Utah mining camps), Faulkner speaks to the importance and presence of these pursuits in a variety of landscapes. In doing so, the labor pursuits of Charlotte and the Woman in the Tree further intertwine the stories and diffuse the novel's affective content.

Ralph Ellison, Faulkner's contemporary, wrote that it is "shocking for some to discover that for all his concern with the South, Faulkner was actually seeking out the nature of man[3]" (98). Over the course of *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*, Faulkner exhibits these concerns and presents, through the lens of affect, the innate interconnectedness of the human experience. Despite this rather remarkable achievement, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* remains an understudied work. According to Fred Hobson, "Faulkner's great period is generally conceded to have been between 1929 and 1936, the span during which his four great tragedies appeared: *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)" (158). If we accept this assessment as the standard critical approach to Faulkner's canon, then *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]*, published in 1939, falls just outside of Faulkner's pinnacle period. To his credit, Faulkner seems to have been aware of this assessment as he commented, "I think there's a period in a writer's life when he, well, simply for lack of any word, is fertile and he just produces. Later on, his blood slows, his bones get a little more brittle . . . but I think there's one time in his life when he writes at the top of his talent, plus his speed, too" (qtd. in Ruland and Bradbury 311). Even so, Faulkner's immense ambition and clever narrative techniques

make this text a strong case for critical consideration, regardless of the brittleness of Faulkner's bones when he composed it.

Notes

[1]Faulkner's criticism of the mythos of the American West and of the gullibility of the Tall Convict, while starkly emphasized in this text, is not unique to him. Brinkmeyer and Cohen explain that "Writers of the Southern Literary Renaissance . . . characteristically represented the West as a dangerous place embodying the illusory dream of unchecked freedom. To go west was to step free from history and responsibility, and southern fiction almost always revealed the naïveté of that dream, charting paths west as paths to self-destruction" (252).

[2]Although Faulkner spells the word "Cajan" (212), I revert to the traditional and correct spelling outside of direct quotations from Faulkner's novel.

[3]Faulkner made a similar remark in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, when he stated that his life's ambition was "to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before" ("William Faulkner—Banquet Speech").

Works Cited

Brinkmeyer Jr., Robert H. and Debra Rae Cohen. "Forward into the Past: California and the Contemporary White Southern Imagination." *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies*. Eds. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, Duke UP, 2004, pp. 251-67.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Duke UP, 2012.

Ellison, Ralph. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Random House, 1994.

Faulkner, William. *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*. Vintage, 1990.

---. "William Faulkner – Banquet Speech." *Nobelprize.org: The Official Website of the Nobel Prize*, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/biographical/.

Gorra, Michael. *The Saddest Words: William Faulkner's Civil War*. Liveright, 2020.

Hardt, Michael. "Affective Labor." *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1999, pp. 89-100. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/303793.

Hobson, Fred. "'To talk, to tell': Southern Literature in the Twentieth Century." *The American South in the Twentieth Century*. Eds. Craig S. Pacoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose. U of Georgia P, 2005, pp. 154-71.

Hoefer, Anthony Dyer. "'They're Trying to Wash Us Away': Revisiting Faulkner's *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem [The Wild Palms]* and Wright's 'Down by the Riverside' After the Flood." *Mississippi Quarterly*, vol.63, no. 3.4, 2010, pp. 537-54. *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/mss.2010.0009.

Howe, Irving. "*The Wild Palms.*" *Modern Critical Views: William Faulkner*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House, 1986, pp. 93-99.

King, Vincent Allan. "The Wages of Pulp: The Use and Abuse of Fiction in William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms.*" *Mississippi Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 3, 1998, pp. 503-28. *JSTOR,* https://www.jstor.org/stable/26477082.

Massumi, Brian. "The Half-Life of Disaster." *The Guardian.com*. 15 Apr. 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/15/half-life-of-disaster

---. "Navigating Moments: Interview by Mary Zournazi." *Politics of Affect*. Polity Press, 2015, pp. 1-46.

Massumi, Brian and Erin Manning. "Affective Attunement in the Field of Catastrophe." *Politics of Affect*. Polity Press, 2015, pp. 112-45.

Ruland, Richard and Malcolm Bradbury. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*. Penguin, 1992.

Smith, Rachel G. "Postmodernism and the Affective Turn." *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 57, no. 3.4, 2011, pp. 423-46. *ResearchGate*, doi: 10.1215/0041462X-2011-4008.

Staples, David. "Women's Work and the Ambivalent Gift of Entropy." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social.* Eds. Patricia Tincineto Clough and Jean Halley. Duke UP, 2007, pp. 119-50.

Wissinger, Elizabeth. "Always on Display: Affective Production in the Modeling Industry." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social.* Eds. Patricia Tincineto Clough and Jean Halley. Duke UP, 2007, pp. 230-60.