

Introduction: The Novel and the Symbolic

American Obscenity Law and Literature, 1900–1940

A wave of sex hysteria and sex discussion seems to have invaded our country. Our former reticence on matters of sex is giving way to a frankness that would even startle Paris. . . . Has it struck sex o'clock permanently or will time soon point to another hour?

—*Current Opinion*, Nov. 1913

It is through sex—in fact, an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality—that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility.

—Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. I

The “conspiracy of silence” in regard to sex matters which has been so characteristic of earlier periods is being succeeded by a marked tendency in the opposite direction. At the present moment, novels and plays may be said fairly to reek with sex.

—*Current Opinion*, Nov. 1913

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, American novelists faced an acute conflict: how might they represent characters as sexual without also inviting the legal charge, obscene? This era in American culture, whose wholesale rejection of Victorian sexual prudery is chronicled in newspapers and other popular media, also produced novelists who were inspired to write about sex.¹ At roughly the same time, between 1900 and 1940, the increasingly powerful ideal of free speech came to weaken obscenity law, and American courts began to lift the ban on formerly obscene literary

works. We have tended to think of American literary modernism as participating in the culture's general rejection of prudery, and how else are we to read modernists' forthright representations of sexual characters? It was indeed a new attention to sexuality in novels that inspired the observation in my third epigraph—that a “conspiracy of silence” in regard to sex matters” was coming to a close.² But the relationship between American modernism and “sex matters” is more complex than we have yet understood. *The Novel and the Obscene* challenges our vision of the era as sexually progressive by identifying a resonant silence at the heart of the modernist American novel. Even as they flouted legal censors by thematizing explicitly sexual issues like rape and homosexuality, American novelists began to employ what I describe as a negative mode of narrative representation. In their sexual novels, American modernists create absence to produce a sense of presence, organize plot by structuring events around a central void, and define characters in terms of sexual prohibition. In what follows, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which this “negative narration” reproduces censorship, renders it symbolic at the very moment of its legal demise.

Why do we find narrative reticence in a moment known for its “frankness” about sex? *The Novel and the Obscene* accounts for the novelistic silence in American modernist novels by illuminating a reciprocity between legal and psychoanalytic modes of censorship in four canonical novels. Negative narration emerges in these novels as a subtle sexual conservatism produced by an unacknowledged logic of sexual difference. This formal conservatism crucially contrasts the increasingly open culture that produced it and thus raises important questions about the idea of the novel as a cultural artifact. And although Michel Foucault is arguably critical theory's most influential critic of psychoanalysis, *The History of Sexuality* makes way for understanding psychoanalytic categories

as crucial to an analysis of the novel in light of these questions. Indeed, one of Foucault's most important contributions to contemporary theory has been to suggest that legal categories are not originary. He asks, for example, why "are the deployments of power reduced simply to the procedure of the law of interdiction?" (86). He identifies "new methods of power" that go beyond law, "whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus" (89). Historians of the novel, most notably D. A. Miller and Nancy Armstrong, have taken Foucault's observation about "control" that exists in "forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus" as a basis for understanding novelistic representation as itself one of those "forms" of power that exceeds the "law of interdiction," and this has led to an idea of the novel as purely ideological.³ My study makes a quite different use of Foucaultian philosophy, suggesting that we have limited our understanding of the novel by interpreting its primary function as one of participation in—or rejection of—its socio-political context.⁴

Fredric Jameson is of course foundational in this legacy. He begins *The Political Unconscious* arguing for the "priority of the political interpretation of literary texts." He asserts, indeed, that "political perspective" is "the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation" (17). Nancy Armstrong, as well, argues—following Foucault, in fact—that it is when we "indulge" in the "repressive hypothesis" that "our thinking is most completely inscribed within middle-class sexuality" (13). She asserts that Foucault's skepticism about repression allows us "to understand desire as inseparable from its representation and understand its representation, in turn, as part of political history" (13). For Armstrong as for Jameson, it is primarily "political history" that novelistic represen-

tation yields to its interpreters.⁵ In Armstrong's account, "desire" indicates the novel's role in the instantiation of "middle-class" politics, and in Jameson's, the novel's reliance on the "centered" subject similarly exposes the novel's political function. In particular, Jameson theorizes that the "centered subject," which he specifies as the bodily subject defined by psychoanalysis, is "a mirage which is also evidently in some fashion an objective reality" (153).⁶ The psychoanalytic subject is one of the fruits of the "objective" function of the novel," which in Jameson's account is to make the "very life world" (152) of capitalism appear neutral and objective. The novel thus produces the bodily subject in its contribution to a bourgeois epistemology. For Jameson and Armstrong alike, then, politics grounds the essentially ideological work of the novel, and for both, it is the historicization of the sexual body that reveals this fact.

We owe the dominant critical idea of the novel as performing cultural work to the novel theorists of the 1980s, and while *The Novel and the Obscene* in part affirms this idea, it suggests that the novel performs another kind of work as well. Armstrong and Jameson theorize that novelistic sexuality expresses bourgeois ideology and thus contributes, in Armstrong's words, to the distinctly conventional values of "middle-class love" (6). In a similar vein, my book argues that the novel confirms the conventional gender norms expressed in nineteenth-century obscenity law. But *The Novel and the Obscene* demonstrates that there is more to it: neither Armstrong's "domestic" nor Jameson's "political unconscious" can account for the endurance of gender categories in a culture so clearly committed to dismantling them. Building upon Armstrong's reading of novelistic "desire" as "domestic," we might ask why, in a moment notable for the novel's challenge to domestic ideology, do we still find representations of sexuality that conform to the gendered principles of feminine chastity and mascu-

line sexual aggression that she describes as particular to the domestic?

The novels of American modernism, as my readings show, oppose the emerging social convention of open sexuality to a phallic sexual logic. Feminist scholars working in deconstructive and psychoanalytic traditions would identify this logic as the sign of a phallic order, a “symbolic” constraint that exceeds the social convention expressed in law. And indeed, in the readings that follow, I explicate the relevant work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan—as well as feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theory, by thinkers like Judith Butler and Barbara Johnson—to demonstrate that the novel’s social contributions are mitigated by its construction of a binding phallic logic. This is not to assert, however, that phallic logic is an inevitable truth, but instead to show the ways in which the novel contributes to an idea of the phallus as true. Building upon Jameson’s elaboration of the novel’s “political unconscious,” *The Novel and the Obscene* incorporates contemporary theories of sexuality into its literary readings to account for a gendering that persists in spite of political interventions—in particular, in spite of the weakening of obscenity by free speech in American courts. Jameson’s claim that the novel’s instantiation of a “centered subject” is accomplished in the interest of bourgeois capitalism, that subjectivity in novels inevitably expresses politics, is crucially revised by the observance of a phallic logic that persists even within the broad cultural dismantling of traditional sex roles.

Neither Jameson nor Armstrong would be surprised that I discover a confirmation of phallic gender in the logic of these novels. Each would find in the logic of sexual difference an expression of “centered subjectivity,” and for each this would be evidence of the persistence of bourgeois ideology. While my study draws much from this line of thinking, it diverges at the point of equation between what Miller has described as the “liberal subject” (x) and

the biological subject. To put it another way, *The Novel and the Obscene* rejects the idea that the Foucaultian “deployment of sexuality” is fully explained in Marxist terms, or by ideology. Rather than accepting the political motivations of capitalism as the sole force in the constitution of the novelistic body, *The Novel and the Obscene* keeps open the possibility that there might be contributing factors not subsumed by politics. This allows for readings of the novel that exceed any “absolute horizon” at all. And this is indeed to contradict Jameson, to reiterate the idea that literature cannot be reduced to any reliable system of meaning, even—perhaps especially—politics.⁷ *The Novel and the Obscene* thus brings both studies of the novel and the “gender of modernism” into new theoretical terrain.

Scholars who argue that gender is a defining feature of modernism have taken an ideological tack. Instead of reading gender as a literary effect, scholars in gender and modernism have focussed, by and large, on what Bonnie Kime Scott describes as “the project of recovering women writers” (2). Indeed, Scott, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Marianne DeKoven, and Cassandra Laity—to name the most influential scholars in this critical strain—take the inclusion of women in the modernist canon as the central task in assessing the contribution of gender to modernism. In redrawing modernism’s canonical boundaries, moreover, these scholars have sought to consolidate what Elaine Showalter calls a “female literary tradition” (Showalter 12).⁸ *The Novel and the Obscene* is not engaged in this enterprise. Rather, incorporating the cautions of poststructuralist feminists, *The Novel and the Obscene* begins with the idea that a study of literature is in fact an examination of those constitutive sexual categories that scholars like Gilbert and Gubar assume. Within feminist and gender theory, the idea that a “female literary tradition” might proscribe the very idea of gender that it purports to describe

is not at all new.⁹ But current studies of gender and modernism remain notably resistant to this concern.¹⁰ With *The Novel and the Obscene*, then, I seek to fill a gap in literary criticism. In what follows, I take the crucial changes to gender theory that have taken hold over the past few decades as a theoretical basis for a study of American modernism and gender.¹¹

The Novel and the Obscene offers a new understanding of gender and modernism in readings of four key American novels—Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (1931), and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940)—all of which produce a silence that attends representations of sexual characters. Each of these novels holds inaugural status in a turn away from sexual prudery in American culture, and each registers this emerging openness in terms of a distinct and paradigmatic version of illicit sexual desire: feminine, homosexual, masculine, and interracial. My readings show how the apparently open depiction of sexual desire in these novels is in fact restricted by negative narration—reversals, elisions, and absence in the narrative logic. As I have been suggesting, however, my readings do not anchor this narrative mode in a “political unconscious” or trace it to the enforcement of “domestic desire.” More crucially, these novels seem to ask—and then to pose surprising answers for—a question that might be said to define psychoanalysis itself: the question, as Jacques Lacan puts it, of “the assumption by man . . . of his sex: why must he take up its attributes only by means of a threat, or even in the guise of privation?” (75). In the absence of political interest in literary censorship, American modernists create characters whose sexuality is censored by virtue of a model of subjectivity that erases that sexuality.¹² American modernists do represent divergent forms of desire, I argue, but only in castrated subjects—their desire construed as a prohibited, negative aspect of civic

identity. If “sex” is an “imaginary point,” to use Foucault’s words, American modernists might be said to “imagine” and thus to instantiate phallic dominance at that “point.”¹³

To describe these four novels as modernist, to claim in fact that they are exemplary of American modernism, might at first glance seem odd. Jennifer L. Fleissner has argued, quite forcefully, that Dreiser is more properly a naturalist, and Cather, the author herself, claims to be engaged in a type of realism. William Faulkner, an American modernist from any point of view, is said to have diverged from modernism once, when he wrote *Sanctuary*, and Richard Wright owes an obvious literary debt to Dreiser, suggesting that his work is as much naturalist as modernist.¹⁴ Why, then, describe these works as modernist? In Eric Sundquist’s analysis of *Sanctuary*, he traces “naturalism’s paths as it moves toward a variety of modernisms” (46). *The Novel and the Obscene*, similarly, observes a crucial progression from American literature at the turn of the century to modernism, and takes modernism as a general term encompassing—and emphasizing overlap among—the distinct literary movements of the twentieth century. Sundquist observes a link between a naturalist “intensification of detail” and what might be described as a paradigmatic feature of modernism: “aestheticism of expression” (45). He links the “intensification of detail” to “social criticism,” and suggest that these quintessential features of naturalism characterize modernism as well.¹⁵ As I argue in chapter two, Cather describes this “intensification of detail” as “enumeration,” distinguishing her “realism” from a “cataloguing of a great number of material objects” (“The Novel D^émeubl^é” 46). Although Cather thus distinguishes her fiction from this feature of naturalism, she also tellingly aligns herself with another: “social criticism.” In particular, she allows that modern fiction should concern itself with modern vice—“greed and avarice and ambition and vanity and lost innocence of heart” (47)¹⁶ *The Novel*

and the Obscene argues that the literary movements of twentieth century American fiction share this focus on “modern vice,” and that if “social criticism” began as a naturalist goal, it came to fruition as a modernist presumption.

We have missed something about the relation between social criticism, whether realist or naturalist, and those features of modernism that have been taken as purely aesthetic. My readings show that the aesthetic tendency in modernist writing is inseparable from modern vice, and that the American modernist novel is indeed shaped by it. But vice—what Dreiser calls “the rudeness and bitterness of life” (Elias, *Letters* 62)—is not incorporated into literature by any simple process of inclusion. Rather, those details about modern life, particularly sexual details, are attended by a prohibition that expresses itself formally. In describing these authors as modernist, then, I seek to emphasize the extent to which the modernist novel was shaped by this ambivalent relation to “sexual subjects.” Recognition of the overlap among these movements, however, is not motivated by a desire to rescue modernism from the charge of aestheticism—to argue that its literariness is in reality social. If it were, the prohibitions would have vanished along with the various legal bans on sexual novels. On the contrary, *The Novel and the Obscene* seeks to describe the American modernist aesthetic as shaped by its ultimate failure to accede to the social impulse to incorporate “sexual subjects” into American letters.

In recent years there has been an explosion of intellectual and cultural interest in the law: from popular television to legal scholarship, from films about the death penalty to forums dedicated to the possibility of ethical justice, the law has undeniably captured our cultural attention. There is a growing body of work in American literary scholarship that partakes of this interest: Gregg

D. Crane's *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (2002); Peter Brooks' *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (2000); Nan Goodman's *Shifting the Blame: Literature, Law, and the Theory of Accidents in Nineteenth-Century America* (1998); and Laura Hanft Korobkin's *Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery* (1998). Earlier titles include *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* by Brook Thomas (1997) and *Residues of Justice* by Wai Chee Dimock (1996). In contemporary scholarship in law and literature, the relation between the novel and politics espoused by Jameson, Armstrong, and Miller appears to have been rewritten as a relation between literature and law. Current work in this field tends to break down into two types: in the first, law is constituted as the omitted fact—the historical key that will unlock the ambiguous literary text. So for example Brook Thomas, “legal history can help us measure how accurately literary works portray legal issues” (*Cross-Examinations* 7); and for Laura Hanft Korobkin, literature is an “imaging” of “law” (“The Scarlet Letter of the Law” 194).¹⁷ In the second strain, which examines the actual historical impact of literature on law, the two categories collapse: literature becomes a historical document that has formed law, and law, conceived as constituted by narrative, plot, or story, becomes a kind of literature.¹⁸ So, for Robert Ferguson, the “eighteenth-century lawyer possessed literary impulses . . . He was, in fact, professionally dependent upon a fusion of law and literature” (6), and for Gregg D. Crane, the literature of Harriet Beecher Stowe matters insofar as its “contribution” to contemporary political debates about “higher law constitutionalism” (55).¹⁹

The Novel and the Obscene does not seek to demonstrate that American literary modernism changed obscenity law. Nor does it find in the novelistic silence an allegorical “portrayal” of the legal obscenity prohibition. Rather, taking Foucault’s caution about an

overemphasis on “the state and its apparatus” into account, *The Novel and the Obscene* examines the way in which each of these discourses—the novel and obscenity law—instantiates sexual identity, and observes an assertion of phallic power in that instantiation. The silence in modern American novels does not simply reflect obscenity law. Rather, as my readings show, a negative narrative mode structures both the literature and the law, so that even as obscenity law is loosened by free speech, it reproduces a censorial logic—the very logic that the new laws seek to revise. Because American courts define obscenity in negative terms, as we shall see, those obscenity laws that function to relax censorship thus have the same effect as modernist American novels depicting sexuality. Both ironically produce sexuality as a prohibited feature of subjectivity. Beyond its expression in the American novel, then, negative narration expresses a double bind affecting all cultural expression about sex: to uncover sexuality is to discover its persistent elusiveness, and to “speak” about it is to create a silence. In thus explicating the law’s narrative implications, *The Novel and the Obscene* aligns itself with the work of Peter Brooks, who identifies a relation between law and “story.” But my study does not set out to prove that law is embedded in narrative. Indeed, in repeatedly closing the purported divide between law and narrative, scholars in law and literature seem unwittingly to establish that divide, producing the very gap they seek to bridge. *The Novel and the Obscene* begins with the assumption that law performs symbolic tasks, and in this way strives to escape the general tendency to suggest that law grounds literary meaning. Readers of *The Novel and the Obscene* will not find in obscenity law an originary point, then, nor will they discover that law is a source of ideological meaning in the novel. Instead, they will find an examination of the roles of both the novel and obscenity law in establishing a sexual basis for American civic identity. While I thus intend my argument to

change our understanding of American modernism by demonstrating the true relevance of obscenity to its emergence, I also seek to contribute a new perspective to contemporary gender politics. *The Novel and the Obscene* provides insight into the very questions of civic identity motivating current debates about pornography, sexual harassment, the overturning of *Bowers v. Hardwick*—and the crucial role of race in shaping these conversations in an American context.

In 1933, the ban on James Joyce's *Ulysses* was lifted in the United States. The case, *U.S. v. One Book Called "Ulysses,"* dismantled the prevailing obscenity test, which U. S. courts adopted from the 1868 British case *Queen v. Hicklin*. *Hicklin* asserted that any text would be obscene if it might "corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall" (371). *One Book* defined a new standard for obscenity: after 1933, any text that might excite "lustful thoughts" in a "person of average sex instincts" (184) would be obscene.²⁰ Alongside readings of the novels, *The Novel and the Obscene* examines this shift from *Hicklin's* "open minds" to *One Book's* "person of average sex instincts," and shows that the change in obscenity law participates in the turn toward sexual frankness at this moment in American culture; indeed, laws against sexual novels were relaxed as a result of the shift. On first glance, the new standard seems to reflect this more open attitude toward sexuality: the idea of "average instincts" appears to legitimate the idea that legal subjects are sexual. But the assertion that "average sex instincts" should be the deciding factor in determinations of obscenity turns out to preserve key assumptions about suppressing sexuality expressed in the "open minds" standard. Like the silences in the literature, there is a subtle sexual censorship in the new, looser version of the obscenity standard, and in the law, too, this censorship is construed as an explicitly masculine power. As with sexual char-

acters in novels, in obscenity law there is an erasure of sexuality at the moment of its recognition. The “person of average sex instincts,” that is, is a legal figure that turns out to signify the absence of sexuality. It is in the interest of a preservation of masculinity that we find a re-emergence of *Hicklin’s* proscriptions at the very moment they have been undermined, as we shall see, and it is in the interest of questioning that masculinist presumption that *The Novel and the Obscene* undertakes these readings.

In my first chapter, on Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, I analyze the trope of the stupid girl in terms of a logic of obscenity. The editors at Harper and Brothers turned down the first edition of *Sister Carrie* in part because the “illicit relations of the heroine” might cause “offense” to “the reader.” In this chapter, I argue that the figure of the offended reader engages the question of censorship, and that indeed obscenity is at the core of Dreiser’s fictional project. Dreiser scholars have established the importance of censorship to *Sister Carrie’s* history, but my reading demonstrates that censorship as significantly structures the novel formally. I argue that Carrie Meeber—American prototype of the unapologetic sexual woman—is also “one who feels rather than reasons” (369) a “pretty” girl who cannot “arrange her thoughts in a fluent order” (188). Her stupidity, it seems, is a vestige of that increasingly irrelevant tenet of obscenity law, feminine purity. In the novel’s logic, for Carrie to be free of a moralizing view of her sexual innocence, she must be constrained by a new set of principles—principles of objectivity that reformulate sexual purity as feminine stupidity. If her own sexual purity does not prevent her from “reading” sexual subjects (including, significantly, her own sexual body), her mental incapacity will. Feminine stupidity is thus an unanticipated assertion of conventional gender norms within Dreiser’s purportedly renegade novel.

In chapter two, on Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, I ana-

lyze the eviscerated homosexual male in terms of the logic of obscenity. *The Professor's House* might initially seem anomalous in the tradition I examine: what could be further from obscenity than Cather's idealized American landscapes? Yet what makes this novel crucial for my study is the persistence of obscenity's logic, even in Cather's seemingly decent representations. Eve Sedgwick changed the course of Cather scholarship when she asserted the importance of Cather's infamous censure: the author derided Oscar Wilde's homosexuality as a form of "indignity." I show that in keeping with her ironically homophobic statements, *The Professor's House* figures illicit sexual identity as an absence that makes dignity possible. The homosexual male, in particular, is Cather's figure of sacrifice in the task of restoring dignity, and his evisceration, like Carrie's stupidity, is a reconstitution of the prohibition against obscenity, one that appears outside the law. But unlike Dreiser, I argue, Cather does not set out to write a novel that would flout sexual norms. Even in this conventional context, however, we find that dignity entails epistemological absence. In Dreiser and Cather alike, it seems, a subtle prohibition against obscenity preserves propriety by insisting on absence. Cather's novel construes homosexuality as that irrepressible absence, and even in her conspicuously tasteful novel, modernist dignity turns out to require a silence surrounding sexuality.

I argue in my third chapter that William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* explicates this prohibition in terms of an illicit form of masculine sexuality: rape. My reading shows that the unsaid yet central horror of Faulkner's gruesome tale, the rape of Temple Drake, is yoked by a metonymic logic to feminine genital lack. I show that as a consequence of eliding this lack, the world of *Sanctuary* is characterized by a bizarre epistemological mode—a visual mode of knowing without saying that expresses prohibition in the same terms as the legal definition for pornography, "I know it when I

see it." Examining the case law leading up to Justice Potter Stewart's 1964 decision, I show that "I know it when I see it" is not an idiosyncratic assertion of authority, but rather a defining aspect of obscenity in American law. Obscenity, by definition, cannot be described in positive terms; it is a vessel, an empty nothing that assumes identity from the outside. I argue that it is this exteriorizing logic—in which everything is "known" when "seen"—that organizes *Sanctuary's* weird world. What characters "know" when they "see" in *Sanctuary's* visual world is thus not only the rape, but also the castrated female. I read Temple's curious attempts to chant herself a penis and Popeye's impotence as classic representations of Freudian castration. In psychoanalysis, the phallic stage is a foundational moment in subject development; in Faulkner's novel, Freudian phallic reverie is shown to be instrumental in preserving licit forms of sexuality. Similar to Cather's evisceration of the homosexual male, Temple's chanting herself a penis is a rejection of the illicit male body that constitutes a turn to propriety. In *Sanctuary*, that is, the phallus is a rejection of rape. Like dignity in Cather's novel, negated by the denied presence of homosexual bodies, Temple's chanting fails; it quite clearly invokes the sexual organ that she is trying to cover over and thus the rape. Obscenity's logic, in Faulkner's fiction, is phallic logic, and the novel's "cultural work" thus emerges as the work of aligning the phallus with a social idea of dignity.

My final chapter examines obscenity in relation to interracial sexual desire in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. In his effort to sound an alarm about the inevitable effects of Jim Crow segregation, Wright ends up dissecting obscenity in terms of the myth of the black rapist. More significant than *Native Son's* expurgated masturbation scene, I argue, the dismemberment of the white girl at the moment of her imagined rape by the black man is the culminating moment in this modernist tradition of surprising novelistic

restraint. Like Dreiser's stupid female, Cather's eviscerated homosexual, and Faulkner's castrated subjects, Wright's novelistic bodies violate sexual taboo and are thus subject to violence. My reading shows that Mary Dalton's death ironically works in accordance with social convention in preventing "miscegenation," and interracial sex thus turns out to be a surprisingly suppressed element—both of obscenity law and of Wright's otherwise overtly shocking depictions. I conclude by showing that the mutilation of Mary's body figures an implicit bodily destruction at the heart of American civic freedom. The figural parallel between Mary's body and Bigger Thomas's—culminating in his dream that it is he who is decapitated—suggests that it is not only white women who are threatened by the representation of sexually illicit bodies. Bigger's body almost literally freezes from exposure, Dreiser's *Hurewood* commits suicide, Cather's Professor almost chokes, and, perhaps most tellingly, Faulkner's Popeye has lost his penis. This tradition of bodily violence in the turn to the illicit suggests that to be sexual in American civic culture is to be free, but it is also, disturbingly, to break apart. To be sexual, that is, these characters must break off from their social worlds. But these characters also figure the sexual body as essentially broken, suggesting that to achieve this kind of independence is to be broken. For American modernists, bodily coherence requires participation in a social order—the very social order these authors seek to challenge in their explicit opposition to obscenity law. The discovery of phallic logic in these laws and in these novels suggests that we should continue to cultivate skepticism wherever the body appears to have at last been revealed.