ANONYMOUS GLORY

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“My fates long since by Thetis were disclosed, / And each alternate, life or fame, proposed; / Here, if I stay, before the Trojan town, / Short is my date, but deathless my renown: / If I return, I quit immortal praise / For years on years, and long-extended days.”¹ That is Achilles, in Pope’s translation of the *Iliad*, responding to the entreaties of his comrades to join the siege of Troy, and reflecting on the choice he faces between a long life and undying glory, *kleos aphthiton*. Twenty-six hundred years later (undying glory indeed) another poet looked back unsentimentally at Achilles and his ilk from the hungry, dangerous Europe of the early thirties: “Ancient tale and epic story / Tell of heroes’ lives un tarnished / Like the stars they rose in glory / Like the stars they set when vanquished / This is comforting and we should know it / We, alas, who plant the wheat and grow it / Have but little share in triumphs or disasters. / Rise to fame or fall: who feeds our masters? / Yes, the wheel is always turning madly / Neither side stays up or down / But the water underneath fares badly / For it has to make the wheel go round.”² Those lines are from Bertolt Brecht’s “Ballad of the Waterwheel,” written just a few years after the poet advised his readers: “See when you come to think of dying / That no gravestone stands and betrays where you lie / With a clear inscription to denounce you / And the year of your death to give you away. / Once again: / Cover your tracks.”³

Against the background of these poems, and the starkly opposed stances they express—the attraction to undying individual fame, on the one hand; partisanship for the anonymous laborers whose exploitation keeps the heroes fed, along with an impulse toward self-effacement, on the other—the phrase I have used as my title, “anonymous glory,” will probably sound nonsensical. In this essay, however, I suggest that the expression “anonymous glory” is more
than merely contradictory, that its uneasy combination of stances toward the deeds of named individuals and their memorialization is politically and theoretically meaningful, despite—or perhaps even in virtue of—the opposition the phrase seems to contain. And I pursue this argument on the unlikely terrain of Hannah Arendt’s political thought—unlikely, because the phrase “anonymous glory” seems like it ought to be an especially glaring contradiction in terms from an Arendtian point of view. After all, Arendt’s phenomenology of “action” is sufficiently strongly informed what she took to be the archaic and classical Greek orientation toward achieving earthly immortality through memorable deeds and words that she could declare that “action without a name, a ‘who’ attached to it, is meaningless”; and we are accustomed to thinking of her both as an exemplary mid-century defender of the individuality of action against its dissolution into the anonymous social behavior of the mass or the crowd, and as unremittingly hostile to the confusion of authentic politics with “the urgencies of the life process.”

Still, there are hints in Arendt’s own writing that matters are more complicated. It may be surprising to learn, for example, that Arendt regarded “The Ballad of the Waterwheel” as an example of Brecht’s poetry at its aesthetic and political best, a poem that genuinely “took the side of the oppressed” through its adoption of the ballad form, and which was concerned, as she put it, with “the production of a world in which all people are equally visible, and with the planning of a history that does not remember a few and forget many, that does not produce forgetfulness under the pretense of memory, that does not involve some as participants and make others into the instrument of whatever happens.” On its own, that praise of Brecht still seems to come down firmly on the side of glory against anonymity, even as it aligns Arendt with Brecht and against the hierarchies of status that have made the achievement of immortality available only to a few. But Arendt goes further: she also notes and lauds what she calls “Brecht’s strange
inclination toward anonymity, namelessness,” which she presents not simply as an expression of the tendency of artists to hide behind their works (as opposed to the political actor’s urge toward self-display), but as part of an apparently admirable political impersonality. And, most importantly, at certain moments Arendt zeroes in not just on the writerly inclination toward anonymity but on the thematic presentation of anonymity in writing, as when she comments—shifting from a European to an American modernist—that “William Faulkner’s A Fable (1954) surpasses almost all of World War I literature in perceptiveness and clarity because its hero is the Unknown Soldier,” or when she twice cites a passage from a different novel of Faulkner’s that brings anonymity and glory into unexpected and puzzling proximity, referring to each person’s “own one anonymous chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle.”

In the next two sections of this essay, I explore this web of comments and citations, focusing especially on Arendt’s citations of Faulkner, and returning at some length to the novels on which she draws. My aim in doing this is not to demonstrate Faulkner’s influence on Arendt, nor to prove that the readings I offer of Faulkner’s novels correspond to Arendt’s own: her written comments about Faulkner are simply too few and too brief for that. Instead, I treat Arendt’s citations of Faulkner as invitations to read her work in the productively unfamiliar light of his fiction, with the conjoined themes of glory and anonymity serving as the link between them. My wager is that the explication of the phrase “anonymous glory” through Faulkner’s work (though it is my phrase, not his or Arendt’s) will help highlight something important and otherwise overlooked about Arendt’s conception of “action,” which, I’ll propose, is not simply associated with the heroic deeds of named individuals and opposed to the indistinct social behavior of masses, but instead incorporates within itself, and crucially depends on, the
productive relation and tension between the named individual doer and sufferer, and the anonymous, processual flow of human activity, including both the the embodied activity Arendt is often thought to exclude from action and politics and consign to the category of “labor,” as well as large-scale, “historical” developments or tendencies. As I’ll explain in the final section of the essay, this reading is part of a larger, revisionist account of Arendt’s categories in *The Human Condition* that—against the tendency to see her as what I call a “territorial” thinker, committed to the conceptual differentiation and institutional segregation of the various human activities—focuses instead on Arendt’s resistance to conceptual reduction, a resistance that, for her, was not just an intellectual but a political scruple, closely tied to her critique of the conflation of politics with *Herrschaft*, domination or rule. The surprising, perhaps even scandalous consequence of this way of reading Arendtian “action” is that it becomes impossible to distinguish action decisively from behavior, to guarantee its purity or to secure its normative status—but this, I’ll suggest, is also what gives “action” whatever small capacity it might have to respond to the operation of large-scale, impersonal structures of social power in the modern world. And this is a politically significant insight even outside the frame of Arendt-interpretation: it shows how the task of representing and engaging social power can be caught between the imperative of “putting a human face” on that power—of disclosing its meaning for those who are implicated in and/or subordinated to it, and thus of showing it to be not an inhuman force or fate but as something to which first-personal action might meaningfully respond—and the imperative of truthfully capturing the sheer scale of that power, and thus its relative indifference to the individual case and the single deed.12

It is important to stress, before proceeding, that I am not advancing the idea of “anonymous glory” as a novel solution to a well-recognized political problem, either in my own
voice or on behalf of Faulkner or Arendt. Both in the history of modern political thought and in contemporary political theory, glory, like other “aristocratic” goods such as honor or greatness, has often been treated as a necessary spur to political action, which draws citizens out of the quiet pursuit of private satisfactions and into public affairs, and which modern politics neglects at its peril. At the same time, the pursuit of glory has also been cast as a threat to politics—or at least to the broadly egalitarian commitments professed though never adequately fulfilled in modern democratic politics—by virtue of its unembarrassed elitism, its proximity to the potentially tyrannical if not deadly vice of pride, and its historical association with violence and domination. This combination of promise and threat has inspired theorists to ask how the idea of glory might be retrieved and made productive while checking the dangers it poses;\textsuperscript{13} indeed, Arendt herself has sometimes been read in these terms, either as a straightforward partisan of an old, aristocratic ethos of glory-seeking, or, more subtly, as a defender of a reconstructed ideal of glory, reassuringly detached from the “sovereign violence” and “individual and collective sacrifice” to which it had long been connected.\textsuperscript{14}

But “anonymous glory,” as I use it here, is not the name for one especially salutary type of glory among others, nor does it refer to a mixture in which glory has been tempered by some other good or virtue and thereby made safe for democracy. The exemplary fictions through which I parse this phrase will turn out to be exemplary \textit{failures}, not successes. Indeed, in keeping with her insistence in \textit{The Human Condition} that her aim is not to give an “answer” or “solution” to the perplexities her book identifies, I do not read Arendt as a political moralist, exhorting her readers to pursue certain goods or to adopt a particular orientation toward collective life.\textsuperscript{15} I take her, instead, to be engaging in the critique and transformation of an inherited conceptual vocabulary—a vocabulary that she criticizes not because it compels us to
value the wrong things or to act in the wrong way, but because it does not help us adequately represent, to ourselves and to each other, the shape and the stakes of our political situation.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, if the phrase “anonymous glory” is an attempt at what, in another context, Arendt calls “thinking together and combining meaningfully what our present vocabulary presents to us in terms of opposition and contradiction,”\textsuperscript{17} its meaning nevertheless lies in the persistently unsettling roughness and strangeness of the phrase, which, off to the side of the more familiar question of the costs and benefits of various subjective orientations toward individual fame and glory, helps disclose, without resolving, a different problem: the problem of a social world in which the very idea of an efficacious subjective orientation seems to be at risk of breaking up on the shoals of the impersonality it also requires.\textsuperscript{18}

2.

William Faulkner’s 1954 novel, \textit{A Fable}, is set not in the thinly fictionalized Lafayette County, Mississippi of his best-known stories, but in and near the trenches of the Western Front in northern France, late in the First World War.\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{The Human Condition}, Arendt offers a brief but important comment about the novel in a footnote, where it serves as a supplement to the following sentences from the main text, which come early in the chapter on “Action,” in the course of her discussion of “the disclosure of the agent in speech and action”: “The monuments to the ‘Unknown Soldier’ after World War I bear testimony to the then still existing need for glorification, for finding a ‘who,’ an identifiable somebody whom four years of mass slaughter should have revealed. The frustration of this wish and the unwillingness to resign oneself to the brutal fact that the agent of the war was actually nobody inspired the erection of the monuments
to the ‘unknown,’ to all those whom the war had failed to make known and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity.” And her note, as I indicated earlier, adds that Faulkner’s novel “surpasses almost all of World War I literature in perceptiveness and clarity because its hero is the Unknown Soldier.”

To say as Arendt does that the hero of <i>A Fable</i> “is” the unknown soldier is not wrong, but it condenses quite a lot. The “corporal” at the center of the story, whom Faulkner leaves unnamed, at least during his life, plants the seeds of a mutinous refusal to fight among a regiment of French infantrymen—and possibly also among the Germans across the trenches, who mysteriously fail to take advantage of the French mutiny, thereby bringing the whole machinery of war to a grinding halt until the generals of the contending armies can restart it; after his death, through a series of accidents and unbeknownst to anyone, his remains are substituted for the “nameless bones” that were supposed to have been retrieved from the makeshift ossuary at the Verdun battlefield, and are interred in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Strikingly, Arendt’s gloss fails to mention what might be the most obvious aspect of Faulkner’s <i>Fable</i>: the fact that the corporal appears to be a Christ figure, the head of a squadron of twelve other soldiers, one of whom betrays him, and who is eventually bound to a wooden post in a town square between two common thieves and executed by a French firing squad. Still, as one of Faulkner’s more sensitive reviewers had already observed in the fifties, a reader who focuses on these parallels at the expense of the “numerous points at which the Gospel pattern is ignored, avoided, contradicted, or modified” is likely to misinterpret the novel either as a “hideous parody” of Christianity or as a “religious affirmation.” Faulkner’s real concern is not with Christianity <i>per se</i>: instead, he seeks to exploit both the resonances and especially the
disconnections between the Christ story, as an inherited cultural form, and the experience of twentieth-century warfare to disclose something about the late modern situation.23

At the beginning of the novel (which drops the reader into the middle of the story) an anxious crowd swarms into the streets of a French city to witness the arrival of the cars carrying the Allied generals, and the trucks carrying the corporal and his squadron and all the members of the mutinous regiment—most of whom are from the area, and thus relations of the crowd. This crowd scene, like many of Faulkner’s, is spectacular, both in the sense of “brilliantly written” and in the sense of “cinematic”; indeed, some Faulkner critics speculate that his birds-eye description of this crowd—of “hovel and tenement voiding into lane and alley and nameless cul-de-sac, and lane and alley and cul-de-sac compounding into streets as the trickles became streams and the streams became rivers, until the whole city seemed to be pouring down the broad boulevards”—shows the influence of his years supporting himself as a Hollywood screenwriter, not to mention the work of Eisenstein and others.24 The crowd is energized by the rumor that the French divisional commander, Major General Gragnon, wants to have the whole regiment—all three thousand men—shot for their disobedience, as the rules of military discipline and responsibility allow, and this suspenseful prospect of violence hangs over the novel as it hangs over the crowd. In the end, however, the corporal, but not the regiment, is executed. In its broadest arc, then, and given the Gospel parallels, the story may seem to invite us to read the corporal’s death as a redemptive sacrifice—and perhaps also as the agency by which the unruly, flowing crowd might be reconstituted as a nation through its collective mourning of all those war dead for whom the corporal’s body comes to stand. Indeed, in the last pages of the novel, the “anonymous” crowd reappears, but now “humble” and orderly and incorporated into a postwar funeral procession for the old supreme general who had turned out to be the corporal’s father,
ending at the Arc de Triomphe, and thus also at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Father and son are reunited in death.²⁵

Yet Faulkner denies us the satisfaction he tempts us with. Importantly, these two results—the corporal’s death and the regiment’s reprieve—have little or nothing to do with each other. The corporal’s execution saves no one and redeems nothing; the regiment’s survival, which is not even stated but merely implied, seems to have been the utterly accidental side-effect of the generals’ calculations about how best to contain the reverberations of the mutiny and to restart the war; from their point of view, as one of Gragnon’s superiors puts it, “it has already ceased to matter” whether the regiment lives or dies,²⁶ and Faulkner underscores this point by making it clear that the attack in which the regiment refused to participate had been meant to fail from the beginning. Moreover, if any of Faulkner’s crowd scenes express an anxiety about the violence of the disordered masses, it is not the liquid crowd of the first chapter, but the nationalized peuple that attends the commander’s funeral, whose solemnity is disrupted in the book’s final two pages by the sudden appearance of a character whom the reader had left for dead earlier in the novel, now hobbled and disfigured by his war injuries, who bitterly tears a French medal from his jacket, flings it at the c cassion carrying the general’s casket, and laughs, mockingly, as he is nearly beaten to death by a mob of his compatriots.²⁷ In Faulkner’s story, the burial of the corporal as the Unknown Soldier is a meaningful failure: it lays a falsifying veneer of national pride over the reality of a war in which military hierarchy and the violence it so efficiently produces have become self-reproducing ends in themselves, feeding on the ambition of individual officers and the fears and hopes of individual soldiers, while casually destroying them. (The water has to make the wheel go round.) And when Arendt refers to memorials to the Unknown Soldier as manifesting a “still existing need for glorification,” it is crucial to see that
she maintains the same ironic distance from that “need” and its supposed fulfillment as does Faulkner, in and through whose novel, she insists, “nothing at all” was “mastered.” Such monuments, from her perspective, don’t actually restore the dignity of memory to the dead; but in their failure to do so, they dramatize the obsolescence of the idea of achieving immortality through the memorable individual deed in an age of “mass slaughter” led by “nobody”—“rule by nobody” being Arendt’s shorthand for the late-modern domination of politics by a thoughtlessly rigorous, unaccountable, and impersonal bureaucracy.

One kind of theoretical and political work done by the fraught notion of “anonymous glory,” then, might be to help disclose the lack of fit between some of the aspects of our inherited political vocabulary that Arendt admires—such as the language of immortality and the emphasis on the unique “who” borne by each person—and the nature and scale of the social powers she thinks people now face. It is no accident that this disjunction should be tied historically to the First World War, whose shocking novelty Arendt associated with the “abyss” that marked the end of the old European order, and whose survivors, she writes, felt themselves “unfit to lead normal lives.” (She makes this comment about Brecht and his generation; Faulkner was four months older.) Yet while this way of understanding Arendt’s citation of A Fable captures the negative force of the phrase “anonymous glory,” we might still ask whether there is anything productive in that phrase, and in the failure of the ideology of redemption that it figures; and that will take us from A Fable to the second of Arendt’s Faulknerian citations.
In the “Concluding Remarks” to the first edition of The Origins of Totalitarianism, published in 1951, Arendt counterposed two possible attitudes toward “givenness,” or toward “the very fact that he [modern man] is not the creator of the universe and himself.” One possible attitude is resentment, which she calls “the psychological basis of contemporary nihilism”; the other is gratitude, which, she says, “expects nothing”—that is, it not rooted in any kind of faith in the goodness of God or the rationality of human beings or the purposiveness of history—“except” (and here she quotes Faulkner) “one’s ‘own anonymous chance to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle . . . in gratitude for the gift of [one’s] time in it.”32 She returned to the phrase “man’s enduring chronicle” in the last paragraph of the “Concluding Remarks,”33 and again in a notebook entry from shortly after the publication of Origins, in which she was beginning to think through the difference between “work” (Herstellen) and “action” (Handeln) in terms of the indelibility of their results: whatever human beings make, she suggested there, they can also destroy; but what they do cannot be undone: it becomes a part of “man’s enduring chronicle.”34 (It is worth noting that this formulation appears to reverse The Human Condition’s association of “work” with durability and permanence, and “action” with fleeting ephemerality; I will return to this point later.)35 Neither Arendt nor her editors provide the source of this passage, but it turns out to come from a crucial moment in Faulkner’s 1948 novel Intruder in the Dust—which is not now regarded as one of his best works, but which was a turning point in the solidification of his literary reputation and commercial standing in postwar America, and which also helped him recover his confidence in his writing in the middle of the long decade during which he was laboring over A Fable.36

Intruder in the Dust is also one of Faulkner’s most explicitly political novels. Written in a rush in early 1948, in the wake of the report of Truman’s Presidential Committee on Civil
Rights, and as the stage was being set for the Dixiecrat revolt that would erupt at that summer’s Democratic National Convention, Intruder is part detective potboiler, part Bildungsroman, but mostly the tense and fraught story of a lynching barely averted—the mood of anticipated violence is even thicker here than in A Fable—though one would never get any sense of the setting or plot from Arendt’s brief citations. At the center of the novel, set (in what was clearly meant to be the present day) in Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, are Lucas Beauchamp, an independent and independent-minded black farmer whose refusal to conform to Jim Crow’s everyday rituals of submission keeps his white neighbors’ rage at a slow boil, and Chick Mallison, a white teenager (and nephew of the educated, relatively liberal lawyer Gavin Stevens) whose understanding of himself and of the racial order in which he lives are transformed when Lucas is accused of murdering a white man, and, from the relative safety of a jail cell, enlists Chick to prove his innocence by literally digging up the victim’s body before the mob can reach him. Remarkably, Intruder in the Dust was almost immediately made into a well-regarded Hollywood film, shot on location in 1949 in Faulkner’s hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, with—somehow—the support both of local whites and the NAACP, and which, its limitations notwithstanding, Ralph Ellison described as the only one of a series of postwar racial problem films “that could be shown in Harlem without arousing unintended laughter.”

Understandably, much of the critical writing about Intruder has been caught up in judging its racial politics—sometimes crudely, as though that issue were at bottom a question of whether Faulkner had good intentions, or wrote admirable black characters; and sometimes with sophistication: as when Eric Sundquist, reading the long, didactic speeches of the lawyer Gavin Stevens as the closest thing the novel offers to Faulkner’s own voice, indicts Intruder as a symptomatic attempt to retain for white Southerners the paternal privilege of freeing black
Americans themselves, at their own pace and without federal interference; or when Noel Polk points to the ways in which *Intruder* establishes its distance from Stevens, not least by repeatedly suggesting, through the prop of a corncob pipe, that the pontificating Stevens is “blowing smoke to hide behind.”39 The critics largely agree, however, that Faulkner himself, while enough of a supporter of desegregation to have alienated many white Southerners, sounded a lot like Stevens in his public statements on civil rights and racial politics in the 1950s, particularly in the famous 1956 “Letter to the North,” in which he urged civil rights activists to “go slow now,” or in his infamous and possibly drunken declaration, later recanted, that while he preferred the middle of the road, if he “had to choose between the United States government and Mississippi,” he would fight for Mississippi, “even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes.”40 (“Why,” James Baldwin asked in response, “if he and his enlightened confreres have been boring from within to destroy segregation, do they react with such panic when the walls show any signs of falling?”41) And it is this Stevens-like Faulkner who seems to have helped shape Arendt’s perceptions and judgments of Southern racial politics in the fifties.42 But my interest, at least here, is not in Faulkner’s or Arendt’s political pronouncements about desegregation and civil rights,43 nor even in the political meaning of *Intruder* taken as a whole, but rather in the specific force of the one passage in the novel to which Arendt repeatedly refers, with its reference to our “anonymous chance” to add something to “man’s enduring chronicle.”

That passage comes shortly after the climactic moment in the story in which Lucas’s innocence is decisively established, and immediately after another one of Faulkner’s remarkable scenes of a crowd in motion. In this scene, Chick, returning to the town square along with his uncle and the sheriff and the news of Lucas’s innocence, first sees the white locals, who think they are about to witness the spectacular violence they have been waiting for, “flow back toward
the Square like the turn of a tide.” And then, as they learn the truth, he sees them reverse their flow and rush out of town,

the Square not empty yet because there were too many of them but getting empty, the khaki and denim and the printed cotton streaming into it and across it toward the parked cars and trucks, clotting and crowding at the doors while one by one they crawled and climbed into the seats and beds and cabs; already starters were whining and engines catching and racing and idling and gears scraping and grinding while the passengers still hurried toward them and now not one but five or six at once backed away from the curb and turned and straightened out with people still running toward them and scrambling aboard and then he could no longer have kept count of them even if he had ever tried, standing beside his uncle watching them condense into four streams into the four main streets leading out of town in the four directions, already going fast before they were out of the Square, the faces for one last moment more looking not back but out, not at anything, just out just once and that not for long and then no more, vanishing rapidly in profile and seeming already to be traveling much faster than the vehicle which bore them, already by their faces out of town long before they had passed from view....

Precisely at the point of transition between these two movements, between the crowd converging on the square, and then the crowd dissipating, Chick experiences a subtle change of perception, which Faulkner signals with a word he had already used once to indicate insight: the “flick!” with which “something like a skim or a veil like that which crosses a chicken’s eye and which he had not even known was there” was retracted from Chick’s own eyes. Almost hallucinating
from exhaustion, Chick first sees the crowd compound itself into a single, monstrous entity as it gathers, “not faces but a face, not a mass or even a mosaic of them but a Face,” which he will later identify as the “Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own”;\(^{47}\) but then—“flick! it was gone, not only the Face but the faces,” as the crowd begins to retreat and dissolve, no longer a monstrous unity, but a merely a dispersing mass of fearful white men and women whose rapid flight from the square is also a disavowal of what they have just learned.\(^{48}\) (“They could stand anything,” Chick says, recalling something his uncle had said to him, “provided they still retained always the right to refuse to admit it was visible.”\(^{49}\)

As Chick begins to work through what he has seen, which he repeatedly sums up by saying simply: “they ran,” Faulkner gives us a long segment of indirect internal monologue in which Chick seems to be trying to come to terms with what he regards as a failure, his failure. It’s not that he had had excessively high hopes: he “no more expected Lucas to be swept out of his cell shoulder high on a tide of expiation and set for his moment of vindication and triumph on the base say of the Confederate monument...than he had expected such for himself” or for the others who had helped him reveal Lucas’s innocence; he “not only had not wanted that but could not have accepted it since it would have abrogated and made void the whole sum of what part he had done which had to be anonymous else it was valueless.”\(^{50}\) Why did it have to be anonymous? Chick might simply have been heeding Jesus’s admonition to “do not your alms before men, to be seen of them”;\(^{51}\) but things are more complicated, for he goes on to articulate anonymity not onto goodness or righteousness but onto the urge toward glory and immortality: he had “wanted of course to leave his mark too on his time in man but only that, no more than that, some mark on his part in earth but humbly, waiting wanting humbly even, not really hoping even, nothing (which of course was everything) except”—and here, finally, is the passage Arendt
quotes—“except his own one anonymous chance too to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man’s enduring chronicle.”52 And what had made his course of action a failure? Not that Chick wasn’t personally “worthy” of his chance, but that, as he seems to realize, nothing much has changed: the crowd may have dispersed for the moment, but the racial order of Yoknapatawpha has hardly been transformed, even if Chick’s way of seeing it has.53

As in Arendt’s reference to A Fable, then, the passage she quotes from Intruder has to do with a meaningful failure; and, much like A Fable, this part of Intruder thereby resists some tempting but facile forms of political-theoretic solace. (It is significant that Chick’s refrain, “they ran,” along with his own interpretation of the crowd’s dispersal as a disavowal, constitute his repeated rejoinder to, and refusal of, his uncle’s long-winded attempts to teach him something by fitting the events of the story into a tidy, abstract narrative of gradual racial progress.54) It would have been easy, for example, for Faulkner to counterpose the heroic, named individual to the monstrously anonymous crowd, its participants “curiously identical in their lack of individual identity,”55 but he resists this pattern on both sides. On the one hand, he lets Chick see—flick!—that the white crowd, though genuinely threatening and destructive, is also no monster: it is not a single entity but an interacting assemblage of his white neighbors, and he does not stand apart from and against it, but is tied to it, to them, by a history and status that he cannot simply wish away.56 At the same time, this deflation of the crowd’s monstrosity doesn’t make it any more tractable, especially given that Faulkner also and on the other hand has Chick insist on a kind of anonymity and impersonality for his own action, too, which he understands isn’t his alone but is something in which he has, at most, a “part.”57 Action in concert and crowd behavior are not qualitatively different kinds of thing, like noumena and
phenomena, but are made of the same cloth, which is both why the former might ever be able to touch or transform the latter, and why it so frequently doesn’t manage to. (And I take this to be a relevant insight even if, contra Faulkner, and contra Arendt too, we refuse to frame the emancipation of black Americans as first and foremost a job for white people.) The meaning of the failure in *Intruder* is thus slightly more complicated than the meaning I found earlier in *A Fable*’s memorials to the Unknown Soldier. The seemingly contradictory combination of anonymity and glory isn’t simply a sign that the aspiration to individual glory has been made obsolete by social power on the scale of modern bureaucratic rule or white supremacy; instead, it’s the condition both of any possible action that could effectively transform either of those structures, and of the its extraordinary difficulty and unlikelihood. That double condition inspires one of the few sensible pieces of advice Gavin Stevens gives his nephew—advice that is both uncharacteristically brief, and exactly the opposite of Faulkner’s own plea to Civil Rights leaders, a few years later, to “go slow now” or to pause for a while: “just don’t stop.”

4.

How might Arendt’s citations of Faulkner, read in these terms, inform a wider-ranging interpretation of a work like *The Human Condition*? At the beginning of this essay, I suggested that we might be likely, at least at first glance, to align Arendt with Homer—or, more precisely, with the pursuit of individual distinction through glorious deeds that the *Iliad* puts on display—and against Brecht’s concern for the injustice suffered by the unending procession of anonymous laborers whose efforts enable the exploits of the few; yet Arendt’s own responses to Brecht’s poetry, I briefly indicated, confound this easy alignment. This is, in miniature, a reorientation
that I think we can also perform with respect to the general political stance and central
contemplational structure of The Human Condition writ large.\textsuperscript{59} Although we often think of The
Human Condition as, at bottom, a celebration or defense of the distinctive kind of human activity
that Arendt calls “action,” in contradistinction to “labor” and “work,”\textsuperscript{60} it is important to see that
Arendt’s appreciation and recovery of action is embedded within a larger project whose guiding
political sensibility lies in its hostility to the ideology of rule—already expressed, as we have
seen, in her praise of Brecht’s vision of a world that does not “involve some as participants and
make others into the instrument” of events.\textsuperscript{61} Put differently, Arendt’s central concern in The
Human Condition is not with how each of us ought to live, should we have the privilege of
choosing: when she writes about the traditional theoretical discourse about the best way of life,
she does not herself inhabit that discourse, but treats it as a symptom (which is one important
marker of her distance from more familiar conversations about the virtues and dangers of glory-
seeking). Her concern, instead, is with the shape of the relationships that constitute the human
world, with their symmetry or asymmetry, and with pathologies of the “freedom” that people all
too often seek to achieve and preserve through hierarchy. Moreover, what offends Arendt in the
ideology of rule is not only the injustice of the hierarchical relationships it has helped to justify,
though that is part of the story, but also the dangerously simplified or “reductive” picture of
social reality, of the relationships between rulers and ruled, on which it relies in doing so. One
might say that the The Human Condition’s guiding theoretical sensibility lies in its resistance to
certain kinds of reductive thinking.

“Reductive thinking,” however, is a tricky phrase. It can refer to what has come to be
known as reductionism, the idea that “certain things might be shown to be nothing but certain
other sorts of things”;\textsuperscript{62} and Arendt was indeed hostile to this sort of reductionism in social and
political thought: think of her critique of the “comprehensive pretension” of mid-century social science to “reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal,” whose conduct across what at first appeared to be several different domains of life could ultimately be explained by the same fundamental laws of behavior. But “reductive” thinking can also refer not to the explanation or substitution of one thing by something else, but to a process of simplification, a stripping-away of the supposedly extraneous features of our view or idea of a thing in order to distill it to its essence. At some level, however, this kind of “reduction” is part and parcel of all theoretical work, including Arendt’s: what else are her (or anyone’s) concepts but simplifications, instruments for directing attention toward some aspects of the world and away from others? Moreover, reduction in this sense can be deployed precisely as an antidote to reductionism: to draw out whatever is fundamental or “irreducible” in a phenomenon is also to guard against its confusion with, or its explanation in terms of, anything else. It’s tempting to think that *The Human Condition* follows exactly this pattern. In distinguishing among three basic human activities of “labor,” “work,” and “action,” and boiling each one down to its essence, doesn’t Arendt employ this second kind of “reduction” as an antidote against reductionism—that is, against the conflation of these activities, or the pernicious substitution of one for another?

There’s an element of truth to this, but it’s also too simple, particularly in light of Arendt’s central concern with the ideology of rule, for what Arendt found problematic about the picture of human relations expressed in that ideology is not easily captured by the idea of reductionism—that is, of the definition or explanation of one thing in terms of something else. The ideology of rule was not just a definition or an explanation: it was an expression of human aspirations and aversions; and its force was not so much to flatten or subsume as to *polarize*
human relations, organizing them around a stark opposition between those who are supposedly able to enjoy the aspiration to freedom and those who are subordinated to necessity. And while Arendt’s differentiation among various human activities was indeed part of her effort to counteract this kind of polarizing reduction, she was also acutely aware of the ways in which reduction in the second sense, the simplifying distillation of things to their essences, could actually contribute to and intensify the very polarizations that she sought to resist: for instance, by casting one human activity as the exclusive site of the realization of freedom, and another as nothing but the locus of the experience of necessity. On my reading, Arendt’s work on *The Human Condition* represents her attempt to negotiate this problem, to find a way of using theoretical simplifications while also, as it were, turning them back against themselves, arranging them so that they would eventually complicate and enrich, rather than polarize and harden, her readers’ view of the world.

But if this is right, then it is crucial to suspend the assumption that, when it comes to each of the three central activities in *The Human Condition*, the force of the book is always and only definitional, a matter of distilling labor, work, and action to their essences—submission to life’s necessary cycles; utilitarian fabrication; and the public doing of deeds and speaking of words. Elsewhere, for example, I’ve tried to show how Arendt’s chapter on “work” proceeds not simply by defining the activity but by showing that it involves *more* than she initially suggests—that is, that even technically produced and instrumentally useful objects turn out to have an aesthetic and public dimension. Arendt’s chapter on “action” follows this same pattern: what at first seems to be merely a matter of the speaking of words and performance of deeds by an actor, disclosing his or her “unique distinctness” and starting something new before an audience of others, turns out also to implicate something that cannot be so easily localized in one person or at one
moment, namely, the strength or weakness of that bond that holds people in an ongoing relation
of presence and attention to each other and to their world, which Arendt will call “power.”

What the phrase “anonymous glory” helps us see, I think, is just how far toward the
breaking point Arendt stretches this movement from the individual deed toward the relational
field of activity. While The Human Condition’s chapter on action begins by discussing the
disclosure of the identity of the unique and singular agent in the deed, near its end it
characterizes “action” in terms of an unending process: “the strength of the action process is
never exhausted in a single deed but, on the contrary, can grow while its consequences multiply;
what endures in the realm of human affairs are these processes, and their endurance is as
unlimited, as independent of the perishability of material and the mortality of men as the
endurance of humanity itself.” One crucial term in this passage is “endurance,” which, we
should remember, is a Faulknerian leitmotif. Even before Faulkner’s famous invocation of it in
his Nobel Prize speech, Robert Penn Warren had referred to the “glorification of human effort
and human endurance” as the “constant ethical center” of Faulkner’s writing; and Arendt, too,
seems to have been struck by this element of Faulkner’s work. In a suggestive notebook entry
from 1955—embedded within a longer series of entries about the importance of the category of
“process” in the modern natural and historical sciences—she contrasted “courage,” the virtue of
the “man of action” like Achilles, with “endurance,” the “virtue of passion,” represented by
Odysseus (“the much enduring one”) and also by Faulkner, for whom “pride,” she wrote, is not
transgressive hubris but the legitimate “the pride of endurance.” Yet if courage and endurance,
action and passion, are “exact opposite[s],” they are nevertheless not alternative modes of
existence or shapes of character between which people need choose, or even could: the point of
Arendt’s idiosyncratic and anti-reductive conception of action is precisely to hold these
contradictory elements together—to insist, as she says in *The Human Condition*, that “to do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin.” Endurance in the sense of the durability or permanence people seek through glorious action is inextricably joined to endurance in the sense of suffering, of the vulnerability of the actor to unanticipated responses and consequences by means of which action acquires its processual extension through time: “man’s enduring chronicle” is also the chronicle of man’s enduring. That is one reason that the “chances” it offers may be characterized as “anonymous.”

Along with “endurance,” the second crucial term in that passage from *The Human Condition* is “process,” and it is important to underscore how surprising and how consequential it is to find Arendt associating action with processuality, given her seeming hostility to the idea of process in other contexts—to the “social viewpoint” which “takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind” and the unending and cyclical process of labor that serves it; or to conceptions of history as process that she thinks are characteristic of modernity, and become particularly vivid in Hegel and Marx. Yet even as Arendt distinguishes action, through which people identify themselves as the bearers of “unique personal identities,” from the processes of life and labor in which, it seems, we accomplish nothing sufficiently lasting or distinctive to make names for ourselves, she also undercuts this distinction between the laboring body and the acting person. It turns out to matter how the burden of social reproduction is distributed—that is, whether “one group of men tries to rid itself of the shackles binding all of us to pain and necessity” by shackling others instead—which is to say that there is a relevant difference between doing one’s own labor and doing another’s, or having yours done by another, and thus that labor, fully understood, is never quite reducible to the fungible abstraction of “labor-power,” to use Marxian language. (Thus Arendt will say, near the end of *The Human Condition*, that
“laboring is too lofty, too ambitious a word for what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have come to live in”; properly understood, it seems, labor still requires that the “pain and trouble of living” be “individually sensed.” And it also turns out that the activity of laboring may not be as distant from the world, understood as a site of durable works and memorable deeds, as we ordinarily think. In *The Human Condition*’s chapter on labor, Arendt remarks at one point that the “recurring cycles” of embodied labor do not only fulfill the immediate needs of the human being for sustenance, but also help protect the “human artifice” against the “processes of growth and decay” through the “monotonous performance of daily repeated chores;” she adds that “in old tales and mythological stories it has often assumed the grandeur of heroic fights against overwhelming odds, as in the account of Hercules, whose cleaning of the Augean stables is among the twelve heroic ‘labors.’” To be sure, Arendt is quick to reassert a distinction here: “the daily fight in which the human body is engaged to keep the world clean and prevent its decay bears little resemblance to heroic deeds; the endurance it needs to repair every day the waste of yesterday is not courage, and what makes the effort painful is not danger but its relentless repetition.” But given that, as we have seen, endurance is as much a constituent of action as courage—given that the figure of Odysseus, who shared with Heracles a heroic readiness to “go through life enduring toil and suffering,” is as crucial to a full understanding of action as is the figure of Achilles—it is no longer clear that this distinction can be read simply as a repudiation.

If the processes of life and labor do not quite sink into an anonymity completely detached from the worldly disclosure of the individual in action, neither is action the heroic opposite of trans-individual historical processes, such as apparently endless process of accumulating wealth characteristic of capitalist modernity, or the potentially planet-destroying natural processes
unleashed by modern science and technology. It and they are made of the same cloth; indeed, Arendt goes so far as to say that the “actual human experience underlying” the concept of process “is action”—though the theoretical apparatuses of modern history and political economy may obscure this fact, treating “process” itself reductively. And this is a double-edged conclusion. On the one hand, it means that “the capacity for action...is still with us,” which sounds reassuring. (When Gavin Stevens gave Chick Mallison that piece of good advice—“just dont stop”—Chick had an equally valuable response for his uncle: “‘No,’ he said. ‘We dont need to worry about stopping now. It seems to me what we have to worry about now is where we’re going and how.’”) But, on the other hand, as in Faulkner’s case, Arendt’s willingness to think the individual deed and its rippling responses and consequences together, and across hugely disparate scales, is also a way of resisting a tempting but problematic form of theoretical and political solace: in the same move by which she reassures us that we have not lost the capacity for action, she also underscores the fact that there is nothing necessarily admirable or redemptive about that capacity, which has been at the center of some of modernity’s most threatening developments. This seems to me to be the only way to make sense of such otherwise befuddling passages as the one in which Arendt warns her readers of how “dangerous” it would be “to ignore that for the first time in our history the capacity for action has begun to dominate all others,” a claim that runs directly counter both to the usual gloss of her as a theorist of action’s loss or disappearance, and the idea of action’s recovery as a source of political and theoretical redemption. Indeed, a conception of action adequate to the scale of modern social power, Arendt seems to suggest, must somehow be indelibly tied to individual deeds and fully immersed in a processual field that is not only impure and unreliable—no guarantee of salutary effects—but also indifferent to us as individuals, to the needs for meaning or purpose or
satisfaction that we bring to what we do. What Arendt had admired in Brecht’s impersonality, after all, was precisely that he saw how “deadly ridiculous it would be to measure the flood of events with the yardstick of individual aspirations—to meet, for instance, the international catastrophe of unemployment with a desire to make a career.”87 If there is a contradiction in the fact that this characterization of Brecht is part of an essay of remembrance and praise for a named individual, it is—like the phrase “anonymous glory” itself—a contradiction not in terms, but in the world.

NOTES

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2. Bertolt Brecht, “The Ballad of the Waterwheel,” in Selected Poems, 89. When this (1947) collection was reprinted in 1959 by Grove Press, the title of the poem was changed from “Ballad” to “Song,” which reflected Brecht’s own change of the German title to from “Ballade” to “Lied” in the 1951 collection Hundert Gedichte. The poem itself, written no later than 1934 for Die Rundköpfe und Die Spitzköpfe, or The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads, exists in multiple versions.


5. Arendt, HC, 141.


8. Arendt, HC, 181 n. 5.


10. If the jump from Brecht to Faulkner seems at all incongruous, it is worth recalling that American modernists—including those who were also thought of as “regional” writers like Faulkner—were published, reviewed, and discussed alongside European and emigré writers, both in New York magazines like Partisan Review and in journals published in the South or edited by Southerners, such as The Sewanee Review or John Crowe Ransom’s Kenyon Review. (Arendt’s earliest piece on Brecht, for example, appeared in Kenyon in 1948; in the following issue, Brecht’s friend and interpreter Eric Bentley, who had become involved with Kenyon on an editorial fellowship in 1944, and who had helped arrange Arendt’s essay, would publish a review of Robert Penn Warren’s novels; later the same year, the Partisan Review would review Faulkner.) On the remarkable density of institutional and personal interconnections in this period between the New York intellectuals and the Southern New Critics, see Lawrence H. Schwartz, Creating Faulkner’s Reputation: The Politics of Modern Literary Criticism (Knoxville: University Of Tennessee Press, 1988).

11. Although Arendt was apparently quite a fan of Faulkner’s (her personal library, held at Bard College, contains thirteen volumes of his fiction, and it’s clear that she read at least one novel beyond those that have survived in her collection) she never wrote about his work at any length; and so far I’ve been unable to determine the timing of her readings of Faulkner—who, before the end of the second World War, was much more widely read in France than in America. (On this see Schwartz, Creating Faulkner’s Reputation.) She might first have encountered his work during her years in Paris, and indeed three of her copies of Faulkner are editions from the early thirties that were out of print by the time she arrived in America, though they could have been purchased secondhand; in any event, by 1948, just two years after the publication of Malcolm Cowley’s Portable Faulkner, she was confident enough to complain to her friend Alfred Kazin that his massive survey of American literature, On Native Grounds, had done an injustice to Faulkner, “who in my opinion is a greater writer than you think, as a matter of fact quite possibly the greatest living writer” (Hannah Arendt to Alfred Kazin, August 4, 1948, in “The correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Alfred Kazin,” Samtiden no. 1: 121). Arendt’s most general comment about Faulkner’s fiction comes in a note to On Revolution, appended to her discussion of the ephemerality of the “living word and the living deed,” and the need for “incessant talk” about human affairs to give rise to “certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference” (Hannah Arendt, On Revolution, revised ed. [New York: Viking, 1965], 220). The note reads: “How such guideposts for future reference and remembrance arise out of this incessant talk, not, to be sure, in the form of concepts but as single brief sentences and
condensed aphorisms, may best be seen in the novels of William Faulkner. Faulkner’s literary procedure, rather than the content of his work, is highly ‘political’, and, in spite of many imitations, he has remained, as far as I can see, the only author to use it” (320). For some reflections on Faulkner’s writing in light of this note see David Minter, *Faulkner’s Questioning Narratives: Fiction of his Major Phase, 1929–42* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 74ff.

12. In the United States, for example, this ubiquitous problem came to the fore in the summer of 2013 in the wake of the trial of George Zimmerman, as people struggled to make the necessary remembrance of one highly publicized individual case, of the life and death and name of Trayvon Martin, illuminate rather than obscure not just the many analogous cases that go unreported in the national press, but the massiveness and monotonous ordinariness of the apparatuses of white supremacy—from racial profiling, to the securitization of public and private space, to mass incarceration—to which that case was related. On this tension see especially Mark Reinhardt, “Stuff White People Know (or: What We Talk About When We Talk About Trayvon),” *Theory & Event* 15, no. 3 (2012), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3.reinhardt.html (accessed July 25, 2013).


16. I take this to be part of the meaning of Arendt’s gloss on her own book as an attempt to “think what we are doing” (Arendt, *HC*, 5).


18. This roughness of “anonymous glory” is anticipated (though not exactly duplicated) in a complexity that Gregory Nagy has long found in the Homeric word *kleos*, usually rendered
“fame” or “glory,” but which, he argues, also refers to the poetry or song itself in which the singer recalled a hero’s action, and which serves as the medium through which fame is achieved (Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964], 250; see also Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013], hours 1–2). Something similar is also visible in a comment Arendt made in her notebooks in 1953 about the idea of doxa, usually translated “opinion” but also, importantly, the New Testament Greek word that would be rendered by the Latin gloria. Doxa, she said was “not simply opinion [Meinung]” but “both my share of the world and the way the whole world appears from my position [Stand]” (Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, vol. 1 [Munich: Piper, 2002], XVII.4 [July 1953], 399 [my translation]). Still, notwithstanding the analogous strangeness of thinking of “glory” not only as fame desired and perhaps enjoyed by a subject but also as the artifact that bears it, or of “opinion” not only as someone’s view but also as the world that appears in it, the idea of “anonymity” pushes further, articulating glory not only onto objectivity but onto impersonality.


20. Arendt, *HC*, 181. In the German edition of *The Human Condition*, this note reads: “William Faulknerns *Legende* zeichnet sich nicht nur durch die Qualität vor der Nachkriegsliteratur des Ersten Weltkrieges aus, sondern auch dadurch, daß sie der erste Roman ist, dessen Verfasser offenbar verstanden hat, warum dieser Krieg so furchtbar war, und daher den Unbekannten Soldaten zum Helden des Geschehens machte.” [William Faulkner’s *A Fable* stands out among the post-war literature of the First World War not only for its quality but also as the first novel whose author evidently understood why this war was so terrible, and therefore made the Unknown Soldier into the hero of the story.] Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (Munich: Piper, 1981 [1960]), 353. Arendt also mentions *A Fable* in “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” in *Men in Dark Times*, where she praises it as the “first work of art...which so transparently displayed the inner truth of the event that it became possible to say: Yes, this is how it was” (20).

21. Faulkner, *A Fable*, 434. This subplot is not entirely fanciful: particularly in the late years of and immediate aftermath of the war, the French military burial services struggled to cope with what Daniel J. Sherman calls the “chaos of bodies that remained one of the most poignant legacies of the war” (*The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001], 74). The chaos has still not quite abated: while writing this note, I learned that only yesterday—December 5, 2013—the remains of 24 French infantrymen killed at Verdun in 1916 and discovered in May were buried at the Verdun necropolis, some still unidentified. See Sébastien Georges, “Auprès de leurs camarades” (December 6, 2013) http://www.verdun-douaumont.com/aupres-de-leurs-camarades/ (accessed December 6, 2013).

As Keen Butterworth notes, when Faulkner was asked about his use of Christianity in *A Fable* in the late fifties, he replied that a writer “must write out of what he knows and the Christian legend is part of any Christian’s background,” adding: “it’s just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it’s just there.” (Butterworth, *A Critical and Textual Study of Faulkner’s A Fable* [Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983], 14–15, quoting *Faulkner in the University*, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959], 86). This, as I have suggested elsewhere, is analogous to Arendt’s procedure with respect to the inherited vocabulary of the “tradition of Western political thought.”


Faulkner, *A Fable*, 434. For an historical account that emphasizes this nationalist function of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the commemorative practices of interwar France, see Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): “Buried beneath the Arc de Triomphe, however, the unknown affirmed the continuing legitimacy of the nation-state in whose name he had died, and validated all narratives of the war that took the national polity as their basis, whatever their political perspective.... The consecration of anonymity as the center of commemoration stood for the unity of the French nation over and above struggles to interpret its history and define its identity” (102–103); for a broader survey of memorial practice, which similarly reads the anonymity of the unknown soldier as the condition of its universality, see Thomas W. Laqueur, “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 157–58.

Faulkner, *A Fable*, 35.

On this last scene see particularly Noel Polk, “Scar,” in *Faulkner and War*, 158.


Brecht was drafted in 1918 and served as a medical orderly; Faulkner enlisted as a cadet in the Royal Air Force in Canada the same year, but “he never got to Europe and it is virtually

32. Arendt, *OT*, 630–31. In the original printing of the first edition, this passage appears at 438; Arendt omitted the “Concluding Remarks” from subsequent editions, but they were restored as an appendix to the 2004 edition.


34. Arendt, *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, vol. 1 (Munich: Piper, 2002), III.9 (March 1951), 61 (the entry is in German, though Faulkner is quoted in English). This entry postdates the citation in *OT*, which had been published in February of 1951.

35. See e.g. Arendt, *HC*, 173.


Faulkner subsequently claimed to have been misrepresented, and repudiated the statement as something that “no sober man would make nor any sane man believe” (“A Letter to the Leaders of the Negro Race,” in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, 107); for further discussion of Faulkner’s condition at the time of the interview see Peavy, Go Slow Now, 72–75.


42. Arendt twice mentions Faulkner in “Reflections on Little Rock,” referring once (and approvingly) to his claim that “enforced integration is no better than enforced segregation” and once to his declaration that (in her problematically sanitized gloss) “in a conflict between the South and Washington he would ultimately have to act as a citizen of Mississippi,” which she presents as an example of the relatively strong sense of distinct nationhood that characterizes the American South (“Reflections on Little Rock,” in Responsibility and Judgment, ed. Jerome Kohn [New York: Schocken, 2003], 202, 199). Faulkner drew parallels between enforced integration and enforced segregation on multiple occasions, including in the Howe interview (see Peavy, Go Slow Now, 69) as well as the “Letter to the North” (“Letter to a Northern Editor,” 86).


44. Faulkner, Intruder, 181.

45. Faulkner, Intruder, 184.


47. Faulkner, Intruder, 182, 193.

48. Faulkner, Intruder, 182. I am simplifying here in one respect: the crowd as “Face” does reappear one more time in the interval between this “flick!” and the crowd’s retreat from the Square, as it surges across the square and smashes the window in the undertaker’s office; but then it is gone for good, and “this time he didn’t even need the flick” (183).

49. Faulkner, Intruder, 185.

50. Faulkner, Intruder, 193.

51. Matthew 6:1; for extensive discussion of the association of goodness with anonymity and invisibility in the Christian tradition see Arendt, HC, 74–78.

52. Faulkner, Intruder, 193.

53. I take this to be the force of the portion of the monologue in which Chick characterizes the result of his action: “not a life saved from death [the prospect of Lucas’s murder still hangs over
the story at this point, because the man who had framed him remains unapprehended] nor even a
death saved from shame and indignity nor even the suspension of a sentence but even the
grudging pretermission of a date” (193–194); the last phrase in particular seems to point back to
Chick’s impulse to shout to the assembling crowd: “you fools, dont you see you are too late, that
you’ll have to to start all over again now to find a new reason?” (181). In short, he realizes that
the whole scenario is likely to repeat itself.

54. On this see Polk, “Man in the Middle.”


56. Faulkner, *Intruder*, 138: “it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought
into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white
foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it....”


59. This is one central purpose of my book in progress, *Hannah Arendt and the Architecture of
The Human Condition*.

60. For an excellent critique of action-centric readings of *HC* (focusing instead on “world”) which
has encouraged me to be more skeptical of the category than I had been, see Lena

61. On Arendt’s critique of rule see my “Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy,”

(emphasis in original).


64. Patchen Markell, “Arendt’s Work: On the Architecture of *The Human Condition*,” *College
Literature* 38, 1 (Winter 2011): 15–44.


66. On this see Patchen Markell, “The Moment Has Passed: Power After Arendt,” in *Radical
Shulman (University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming 2014).

68. Faulkner’s 1950 speech famously asserts that “man will not merely endure: he will prevail,” a redemptive optimism that seems to me quite absent from Arendt’s thought (William Faulkner, “Address Upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature,” in Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters, 120); Robert Penn Warren, “William Faulkner,” in New and Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1989), 204; this essay was originally published in two parts in The New Republic in 1946 as a review of Malcolm Cowley’s The Portable Faulkner.


70. Arendt, Denktagebuch XXI, 31 (525). As an example of Faulkner’s “pride of endurance” Arendt goes on to quote Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!: “If happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can”; the quotation is not identified by Arendt or her editors but can be found in William Faulkner, Absalom Absalom!, in Novels, 1936–1940, ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk (New York: Library of America, 1990), 100, where it is part of Mr. Compson’s speculative characterization of Judith’s attitude in the wake of her father’s prohibition of her marriage to Charles Bon.

71. Arendt, Denktagebuch XXI, 31 (525); HC, 190. In insisting on the contradictory belonging-together of action and suffering, “courage” and “endurance,” Arendt distances herself from a strategy Faulkner himself sometimes seems to pursue, whether in the didactic voice of Gavin Stevens or in his own voice as a commentator on current events—namely, to divorce these, in particular by presenting “endurance” as the special virtue of black Americans, as if to urge a greater degree of passivity or at least “patience” upon them. (See, e.g., Intruder, 199; “A Letter to the Leaders of the Negro Race,” 111.) Although Arendt’s “Reflections on Little Rock” tends to erase the political agency of black Americans in a different way—by framing the controversy over school desegregation from the beginning as a question of what the Federal government ought to do on their behalf—she does not do this through what Craig Werner has called the idealization of the “enduring saint,” whose stasis creates the conditions of the possibility for racial redemption through white agency (“Tell Old Pharaoh: The Afro-American Response to Faulkner,” The Southern Review 19, no. 4 [October 1983]: 714.

72. Arendt, HC, 89.

73. On the centrality of process to modern conceptions of history see Arendt, “The Concept of History,” passim.

74. Arendt, HC, 179.

75. Here I am following the lead of Linda Zerilli, who has made a similar argument in “The Arendtian Body” (in Bonnie Honig, ed., Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt [University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995], e.g. 179.

77. Arendt, *HC*, 322.

78. Arendt, *HC*, 100.


82. Arendt, *HC*, 231–32.


84. Arendt, *HC*, 323.

