

“Justice as he sees it”: Faulkner’s emerging lawyer of the post-war U.S. South.

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This paper argues that William Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and specifically through its representation of the lawyer Gavin Stevens, is amongst the first post-war novels to anticipate and formulate the legal transformations of the Civil Rights struggle. While the lawyers of pre-war Southern fiction reliably upheld paternalistic legal philosophies and white consensus attitudes towards race and region, I will argue that, after the Second World War, they begin to embody the contradictory and incommensurate strains of a nascent socio-legal transformation, featuring as narrative figures straining under the contested definitions of ‘law’ and ‘justice’ in a region poised on, but still awaiting, the changes wrought by the 1950s and 60s.

Through a sustained focus on how the spaces of law and justice in Faulkner’s novel cast the attorney as an ‘emerging figure,’ I contend that Stevens’s position as ‘lawyer-citizen’ ensures he is caught amid change at a local and federal level, leading to profound misunderstandings of his character – both critically and historically. Focus too is placed on Gavin’s much-maligned speeches in the second half of the novel. While Elizabeth Hardwick labels them “absurd, strident lectures,” this paper instead considers the lawyer’s rhetoric flourishes as a means to begin properly assessing the complicated legacies brought about by a regional history fraught with racial violence and legal animosity.

What is more, Faulkner’s ‘emerging figure’ of the post-war U.S. South enables significant dialogue with later iterations of the region’s literary lawyers, who I distinctively argue become – individually and as something of a ‘fictional group’ – the earliest example of a growing and developing scepticism towards the dominant claim that American law progressed beyond the racial prejudices and injustices of its history in the post-war era.