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**“DIRT FARMER” VS. “SOIL SCIENTIST”:
REPRESENTATIVE TENSIONS IN THE
CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES OF FARMER-
WRITERS WALTER THOMAS JACK AND EDWARD H. FAULKNER**

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ABSTRACT

This extended case study of Edward Hubert Faulkner, one-time extension agent turned overnight agricultural sensation, and Walter Thomas Jack, a former Quaker schoolteacher and self-professed Iowa “dirt-farmer,” and their respective, point/counterpoint soil conservation classics, *Plowman’s Folly* (1943) and *The Furrow and Us* (1946), illuminates key tensions within the fields of rural sociology and agricultural history: namely subject versus object, inside versus outside, and “peasant” versus “professional” practice as they were played out in the American popular and agricultural press from 1943 to 1948. While it is true that *Plowman’s Folly*, as its title implies, goads the American farmer for his close-minded traditionalism, and the *Furrow and Us* largely defends the “peasant” class, the reality is more complicated, as the self- and media-constructed identities of Faulkner and Jack forever altered their respective historical legacies: Faulkner was not a pure academic, as Walter Jack made him out to be, and Jack was not, as he presented himself, a simple Iowa dirt-farmer “putting experience against titles.” Such rurally-inscribed tensions, examined in light of the Faulkner-Jack no-till debate that *Time* magazine called in 1944 the “hottest farming argument since the tractor first challenged the horse,” occupied the nation during wartime and exposed many dichotomies, false and real, between “professor” and “plowman,” between agricultural “faddists” and agricultural “scientists.” Though their differences were exaggerated, Faulkner and Jack both offer what Oregon State University’s B.P. Warkentin labels “subjective” portrayals of the soil and soil-derived sociology. Such subjective yet scientifically-informed accounts, often drawing their legitimacy from rural cultures subscribing to implicit notions of agrarian superiority and the artificiality of urban life, frequently problematize “outside” (academic and popular press) examination, as the case of Faulkner and Jack makes clear.

Subject Versus Object

The documentary work of the rural sociologist, rural historian, rural writer, and rural educator negotiates a tension best described as “subjective voice versus object of the establishment,” a dichotomy that, in the study of rural communities in the sixty years since the heyday of farmer-writers Walter Jack and Edward Faulkner, has manifested itself variously and problematically. In rural communities founded on a set of shared values, familial histories, and socioeconomic exigencies, the question of difference pervades as well as preoccupies. Given the strength and rigidity of traditional rural membership paradigms, to be *in* often requires being native to a place—so thoroughly inside that it is not only possible to be *from* a place, but also, and more emphatically, *of* a place, and *for* a place. The prepositions—*from*, *of*, *for*—wed advocacy with geography. To speak from “inside” of a rural community

is to *see* subjectively, to self-report, self-refer and self-diagnose; in rural communities such self-reliance—some would call it close-mindedness—is often a point of pride. Thus to be inside a rural community, to be native to it, has, in the relatively short history of American rural sociology, all but reserved for rural residents roles as *subjects* rather than *scientists*, *stories* rather than *authors*, *pupils* rather than *teachers*.

By contrast, the professional, whether social scientist or otherwise, asserts his or her position by attaining a level of objectivity enabled by methodological, geographical, or philosophical difference relative to his or her subjects. The pioneering narratives of rural sociology, deploying a basic toolkit of observation, interview, and oral history, aspired to a new omniscience fashioned from old subjectivities. The first generation of university-trained rural sociologists wished for perspective and critical distance, birds-eye views thought unavailable to those on the “inside” of rural cultures. The methodology of the nascent rural sociology and Country Life movements and their many farm-reared or farm-vested practitioners, men such as Kenyon L. Butterfield, Charles Josiah Galpin, and T. Lynn Smith, reflexively and repeatedly engaged seemingly antithetical themes such as nearness and distance, allegiance and analysis, culture and “supra-culture.”

A case in point is the suggestively titled chapter “Local Degeneracy” in the Wilbert Lee Anderson (1906) monograph *The Country Town: A Study of Rural Evolution*. Anderson’s almost tortured ambivalence concerning the small rural towns of his home region, New England, recalls James Agee’s (1941) dilemma in documenting declining social and economic conditions in his native Mountain South in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Anderson’s (1906:4) agonizing attempts to reconcile his personal feelings with the objective methodologies of rural social science illustrates the subject versus object tension perfectly:

Even scientific diagnosis avails nothing unless remedies are applied, and certainly to refute the pessimist when the hour demands the rescue of a civilization would be no better than fiddling while Rome burned. If this book had the gift of prophecy and knew all mysteries and all knowledge, if it had all faith so as to remove mountains, and did not prompt the deeds of love, it would be nothing.

In my estimation, the study of rural sociology, especially in the Midwest and the South, has, in our century, primarily been the study of communities sustained by the soil—studies conducted by men and women practically relieved of the necessity of wresting their living from the earth. So while, on one hand, a sense of

“soillessness”—spotlessness if you will—distinguishes the scientist in a lab-coat, literal sense as well as, perhaps, a quasi-religious sense—the “dirtiness” of the American farmer has, historically, lent him a certain legitimacy and also a celebrated level of authorship, agency, and autonomy. Before the Industrial Revolution at least, the yeoman generally understood his work in the fields as both art and a science—a bit of magic, a pinch of lore, a dash of scientific “fieldwork” to leaven the mix. His methods were both inductive and deductive.

Thus the multiple intelligence of the farmer, particularly the farmer of the Golden Age of American agriculture that led to rural sociology as an academic discipline, challenged, by his very existence, the equation *inside = scientific subject* rather than *scientific practitioner*. Consequently, this agrarian exceptionalism problematized the scientifically-derived methodologies of then emerging disciplines—rural sociology and agricultural studies to name two—as they were instituted in the universities. These tensions remain with us today, especially in the ongoing debates over agribusiness-co-opted university research and the politics of agricultural education in the land-grant universities, a perspective that current rural advocates say mistakenly directs the young agrarian away from soulful stewardship and sustainable practice and into mindless farm consumerism and environmental folly (e.g., Berry 1972, 1977; Jackson, Berry, and Colman 1984; Logsdon 1994).

A Cathected Historical Interest

The tensions encapsulated by subject versus object, farm versus university, and dirt-farmer versus soil scientist are, for me, as a rural writer, historian, and great-grandson of the farmer-writer Walter Thomas Jack, perennially meaningful ones. The tensions between experience and education, in the sense in which John Dewey (1938) understood them, registered for me, as in so many first-generation rural college students, in simple but omnipresent directives from my father, himself a farmer, as I grew up. My first off-the-farm job, for instance, was on the grounds crew, rather than in the pro shop, of a local golf course. If I was to pursue my love of golf—a pastoral game of agrarian origins of which my dad heartily approved—it would be by way of good, honest, and often backbreaking work. When I applied for and eventually selected a college, it would be in-state, at one of the preeminent American land-grant colleges, Iowa State University. When, after graduation, my love for literature pointed me in the direction of graduate school, it would be as a student of the fine arts, a member of a writer’s *workshop* (the term itself implying a rolling up of sleeves) rather than a student of literary theory. I understood

intuitively that, as a fourth generation Iowa farmer’s son, no matter where I hung my professional hat, I was called to produce rather than to parse. My love of imaginative writing had no sooner instilled itself than it was tempered by the practice of more objective nonfiction: first cub reporting and, ultimately, editing of an Iowa community newspaper. Journalism was a practical calling, my dad pointed out, that had fed Midwesterners Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Anderson while instructing them in the fundamentals of their craft. The problems of writing, as with the problems of the soil, must be explored by practical experience *and* thoughtful experiment; that much was clear to me.

By my late twenties I had been the victim of some eight years of postsecondary schooling and shouldered a good deal of agrarian guilt because of it. Then, I rediscovered *The Furrow and Us*, the first and only book published by my great-grandfather Walter Jack (1946) and the impetus for my first book of essays: *Black Earth and Ivory Tower: New American Essays from Farm and Classroom* (Jack 2005). While teaching at Tusculum College, a four-year school dedicated, not coincidentally, to experiential, service-based learning, I read *The Furrow and Us* cover to cover for the first time since I had been a teenager; homesick, I regarded it as both a technical manual on soils and a breadcrumb trail pointing the way back home. The book returned my attentions to the (dis)connections between farm and university, an awareness heightened not only by my newfound professorship at Tusculum, but also by my renting of a small tobacco farm. My commute each day took me down serpentine, red clay lanes marked by decrepit, perfectly functional barns, undersized tobacco allotments, and, by Iowa standards, minuscule herds of dairy and beef cattle. Here was a brand of farming smaller, more resourceful, and, in many ways, more flagrantly old-fashioned than anything I had witnessed growing up on a 500-acre corn and soybean farm. It was during these Tennessee salad days, my fifth and sixth consecutive years in Dixie, that I began to look more deeply into the Black Earth and Ivory Tower polemic, the inside and outside not only of the so-called “dirt-farmer” and “soil scientist,” but of Northerner and Southerner, ruralist and city dweller.

As it turned out, the Southern-born, heretofore offstage character that had provoked my grandfather’s book-length counterpoint back in 1946 was himself the product of a Kentucky hill farm. This foil—the man my grandfather considered a hopelessly deluded academic when in fact he was an experimental farmer cut from similar cloth, was Kentuckian Edward H. Faulkner. The story of Jack versus Faulkner illuminated for me then as now the tension between peasant, so-called, and scientist, between provincial and cosmopolitan, between field and laboratory,

between inside and outside—legitimacy and illegitimacy. That Edward Faulkner's fame and infamy eclipsed, many times over, my great-grandfather's, is partially explained, I think, by Southern rural stereotypes, at once fortuitous and damning, that made Faulkner a straw man for my Midwestern great-grandfather, a devil for conventional agricultural and agribusiness, a darling for the East Coast media, and a hero to the historically hard-pressed Southern farmer.

Representative Tensions: A Postwar Case Study

In the midst of the production frenzy of 1940s wartime rural America, Edward Hubert Faulkner, a former extension agent, and Walter Thomas Jack, a former Quaker schoolteacher and self-professed "dirt-farmer," competed for the right to articulate the lay-farmer's honorable expertise and his resistance to the dictums issued by so-called agricultural experts. As too often happens, the two men's underlying similarities caused each to vilify the other in a game of agrarian one-upmanship that would encapsulate not only the till versus no-till debate—what *Time* magazine then called the "hottest farming argument since the tractor first challenged the horse" ("Plow Row" 1944:¶1)—but also the enduring false dichotomy between the peasant and the professional scientist, the professor and the plowman.

Considering this heightened "either-or" between soil farmer and soil scientist, the titles of Jack's (1946) *The Furrow and Us* and Faulkner's (1943) *Plowman's Folly* deceive. While it is true that *Plowman's Folly*, as its title implies, goads the American farmer for his close-minded traditionalism, and the *Furrow and Us* defends the "peasant" class, the reality is more complicated. Faulkner was not a pure academic, as Jack made him out to be, and Jack was not, as he presented himself, a simple Iowa dirt-farmer "putting experience against [academic] titles" (Dorrance & Company Order Form 1946).

The best agricultural historians have seen through staged polemics and made bedfellows, albeit strange ones, of Walter Jack and Edward Faulkner—two lightning rods in the till versus no-till debate. Hindsight reveals the books and the men shared a genre and an essential outlook. Oregon State University's B.P. Warkentin labels treatises like Jack's and Faulkner's "subjective" portrayals of the soil and cites Von Humboldt's quotation by way of context: "In order to comprehend nature in all its sublimity, it would be necessary to present it under a twofold aspect, first objectively as an actual phenomenon, and next subjectively as it is reflected in the feelings of mankind" (Warkentin 1994:17). Warkentin notes that books like Faulkner's and Jack's, reflecting ideas "so common to our heritage,

of the unnaturalness of urban life, and the purity of the rural life” (1994:17) enjoy widespread appeal, pointing out the enduring concept of the “independent yeoman farmer and the efforts to preserve the farm” (1994:17) and, more generally, the increased currency of literature of the environment and of place.

Jack’s (1946) *Furrow and Us* is perhaps the best representative of what would, in the year’s following the publication of Faulkner’s (1943) *Plowman’s Folly*, become an industry all its own—something we might call Faulkner-ism. Jack’s book, as it serves to calibrate the strength and venom of sentiments Faulkner’s *Plowman’s Folly* unleashed, is a particularly useful lens, inasmuch as overreaction, historically speaking, often reveals an era more truly than the actual triggering event. Thus we might, for example, think of McCarthyism as a greater revelation of the Zeitgeist of the American Right than a barometer of the true strength of the day’s domestic communism. Similarly, the better-safe-than-sorry ideology of our current “War on Terror” perhaps better characterizes the paranoia and preoccupation of the world’s only superpower than an actual threat level. Granted, our subject *du jour* is American agriculture not American culture. Still, Jack and Faulkner believed the two inseparable.

Constructed Identities: Edward Faulkner, Backyard Gardener or Soil Scientist?

Plowman’s Folly made Edward Faulkner (1943) an overnight sensation. Broadcast and print media found Faulkner irresistible. Here was an ex-Kentucky extension agent relieved of his duties a decade or so before and, at the time of the book’s release, working as an insurance salesman and a “crop investigator in private employment” (from the dust jacket). The term *crop investigator* itself, doubtless selected by Faulkner for its dramatic ring, hints at the larger than life, X-files-esque pursuit of the perfect crop and growing conditions. The media soon glommed on to this perfectly American story of a professional outcast toiling away in the American hinterlands, Elyria, Ohio, conducting madly successful experiments on leased lands and turning his backyard in town into a second working laboratory. Here was a man whose tomatoes, in dry and wet years alike, grew preternaturally large to the absolute amazement of neighbors and crop agents. Here was a fiercely blue-eyed, Appalachian-born contrarian sticking it to the U.S. Department of Agriculture that had once paid, directly or indirectly, his salary as a Smith-Hughes teacher of agriculture and a county extension agent in Kentucky and Ohio.

No one did more to further the messianic image of Edward Faulkner than Louis Bromfield, the millionaire, Pulitzer prizewinning author and prodigal son who had

returned from Europe before the War to run his own cooperative farm experiment in his native Ohio: Malabar Farm. When Louis Bromfield, an admitted skeptic, threw his weight behind Faulkner in the *Reader's Digest*, most of middle class America read Bromfield's testimony as a ringing endorsement. In his very first sentence, Bromfield (1943:35) prepackages the David and Goliath story for his reader. "This is a success story of a man who found a sound idea and stuck to it until fame came to him, accompanied by a modest fortune." Bromfield continues in high hyperbolic vein, speculating that in fifty years there would be monuments in Faulkner's honor the same way that Pasteur's lifesaving work had been memorialized in stone and bronze.

Yet history would not remember Faulkner as a hero; it would barely remember him at all. Even within his own world of agriculture, it seems, research devoted to Faulkner is seldom published except by a very few historians of sustainable agriculture such as Randall Beeman (1993)—this despite *Plowman's Folly* occupying eleventh position all-time, a mere four spots behind Charles Darwin in the list of "Top Twenty Historical Monographs by Citation Counts" in soil science literature (Simonson and McDonald 1994:407). In their exceptional study *Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*, Beeman and coauthor James A. Pritchard (2001:70) detail how Faulkner's book "rocked the agricultural community and gained national attention even amid the monumental events of World War II." Perhaps fearing overstatement of their case, Beeman and Pritchard quote Russell Lord, the drama of whose retelling easily outpaces their own. Lord, in fact, claimed that Faulkner's plowless revolution had "resounded around the world with the vigor and intensity worthy of such a subject as the atomic bomb" (cited in Beeman and Pritchard 2001:71). Yet for all of this alleged earthshaking and atom-splitting, Faulkner's is a name curiously forgotten. After detailing the unlikely popularity of a book that went through eight printings in little more than a year with the University of Oklahoma Press and an unheard of 250,000 with Grosset and Dunlop, conservation writer Charles Little (1987:xvii) nevertheless declares that Faulkner's "star waned almost as quickly as it had risen." Calling *Plowman's Folly* "the theoretical cornerstone of what is now called 'conservation tillage,'" Little (xiii) noted in his introduction to the reissue of Faulkner's work that "the book, and its author are all but forgotten by a new generation of government and agricultural experts, many of them the hidebound sort that Faulkner would probably be doing battle with were he alive today."

That neither Walter Jack nor Edward Faulkner would have monuments built in their honor goes straight to the heart of our question: how does history

remember the self-professed agrarian “peasant” relative to the certifiable agrarian scientist, and how, in particular, do Faulkner’s and Jack’s legacies reflect history’s privileging of one label over the other? If our case study is any judge, if one wants a historical legacy, is it better to be a credentialed scientist or a plainspoken man of the earth? For example, Faulkner’s anti-government, I told-you-so rhetoric meant that his ideas about no-till and disking, while ultimately widely adopted and assimilated, would never be properly credited. Faulkner held, it seems, no executable patents for the new machinery that would carry out his surface tillage regimen, nor did he carry any official, legacy-ensuring titles into his old age beyond his early position as a Smith-Hughes teacher of agriculture.

When Edward Faulkner descended upon Louis Bromfield, his was a voice from the wilderness. When Bromfield learned of Faulkner’s plan to have farmers mothball the moldboard plow and instead sow their seeds directly in the previous year’s “surface trash,” as in nature, it was as if, Bromfield (1943:36) writes, “he had proposed that the industrial world do away with the locomotive or the blast furnace.” Faulkner’s very image seems, in Bromfield’s rendering, more supernatural than scientific. The encounter, told here through Bromfield’s (1943:36) eyes, is worth quoting in full:

He was gray-haired, wiry, and a great talker. There was in his clear blue eyes that dedicated look I know well because so many people come to me with plans to save the world. . . . He spoke about his backyard in Elyria, Ohio, and about a couple of acres of cheap, poor land which he had leased as an experimental plot. He had been a county agent and had resigned because some of his ideas were too revolutionary for his superiors to swallow.

Bromfield’s retelling puts the reader in a mythic, if not religious space, as the gray-haired soil shaman speaks of marvels in far off lands too wonderful to comprehend and meets with skepticism and even ridicule from those in high places. Bromfield, who had farmed with the moldboard plow himself on Malabar Farm and had remembered it as revolutionizing agriculture, “opening vast surfaces of the earth to quick colonization” and as one of the “greatest of civilizing influences” (Bromfield 1943:36), could hardly believe the blasphemy Faulkner uttered. He reports to his readers that he dismissed his visitor as a “crank” and sent him on his way. Paul B. Sears (1935), professor of botany at nearby Oberlin College and author of the conservation classic, *Deserts on the March*, reported a similar encounter. In his foreword to the Island Press reissue of *Plowman’s Folly*, Sears (1987:ix) recalls a

“personable gentleman” who appeared on his doorstep seeking approval for a manuscript that had been “rejected by a succession of publishers.” In both “celebrity” narratives, Faulkner appears on the scene unbidden, conservation farming’s version of Marley’s ghost.

Faulkner’s story, like Walter Jack’s, would be built on redemption as much as persistence, and Louis Bromfield goes on to describe his eventual wearing down at the hands of Faulkner and the soil prophet’s subsequent visits preaching his no-plow gospel. On a visit several years after their initial encounter, Faulkner presumed to offer Louis Bromfield, the great man, a book manuscript. Here especially, the peasant-playing-scientist seemed conspicuously big for his britches. Bromfield (1943:36) implies that he read the book as a courtesy, reporting that he found it “a little too rambling” and that he “made some suggestions,” none of which deterred Faulkner’s belief in its publishability.

Cut to a climactic scene, in which Louis Bromfield receives, a year later, Faulkner’s finished manuscript, this time bearing the imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press. Bromfield (1943:36) picks up the narrative here:

That night I took it to bed with me. It was three in the morning when I finished it. I went to sleep a convert. . . . In the weeks that followed other persons sat up all night reading *Plowman’s Folly*. Reviews, articles, and editorials appeared everywhere on Faulkner’s book. I heard of it over the air. Wherever I went, people were discussing it. Probably no book on an agricultural subject has ever prompted so much discussion in this country.

Overnight, or so it was written, Faulkner, the ex-country agent, the Elyria insurance salesman, became a famous citizen. Most tellingly, the hard work, persistence, and self discipline required to research, write, and promote a book as groundbreaking as *Plowman’s Folly* were subsumed by the made-for-Hollywood myth of the manuscript’s “accidental discovery,” a story perpetuated a half century later. In his foreword, Sears (1987:ix) paints a near-cinematic tableau of a sleepy “late afternoon in the early 1940s,” in Norman, Oklahoma, where Oklahoma University Press director Lavoie Smith is closing shop for the day when he chances upon a manuscript in the mail room “left to be packaged and returned to its author with the usual regrets.” Director Smith pauses over it, reads a few pages, and the rest, as they say, is agricultural history.

Faulkner and the Eastern Media

Faulkner had become a famous citizen and a controversial one at that. The titles of the articles about him that followed—titles such as “Swatting the Plow” (Holman 1944) and “The Abolition of the Plow” (Bennett 1943) conjure Southern pluck as well as cultural repudiation. Significantly, these titles also intimate Faulkner’s combative, provincially-contrarian tone. Other articles entitled “Down with the Plow” (1943) and “Two Revolutions in Plowing” (Lord 1943) seem to connote the pitchfork-wielding anarchist and the village mob come to the castle door—in this case, the fortress of traditional American agriculture. In the few short months following the publication of *Plowman’s Folly*, Faulkner (1943) would be pigeonholed as both prophet and radical, an apostle of the heretical smashing idols in the hallowed halls of conventional agriculture. In his *New York Times* book review, F.F. Rockwell (1943:18) describes Faulkner as Don Quixote “tilting at the landscape full of windmills” and charging across a field of “present-day horticultural practice, leaving in his wake, one after another, the shattered remains of just about every tenet that has been held by professional agronomists.” Interestingly, the analogies here suggest journalists found it more expedient to represent Faulkner as an upstart radical than the trained agrarian he was.

Besides giving humdrum reviewers a chance to apply their best literary and biblical allusions to an upstart Southerner, Faulkner’s book succeeded in capturing the public’s interest, in part because the public, and the press, thought the U.S. Department of Agriculture in need of shaking up. The terror and powerlessness of the Dustbowl years, widely perceived as a failure of government scientists and agronomists, still loomed large in the public psyche and, by 1943, victory gardens had become a fact of American life. In short, everyone had, by necessity, become a backyard agriculturalist, where hard times demanded individual innovation rather than blind subscription to a company line. Faulkner, also a backyard agronomist and weekend farmer, would capitalize on the self-reliance craze though, in so doing, his revolutionary book seemed destined to go the way of all mass market, one-hit wonders and overnight sensations—to the dustbin. In this, it seemed Faulkner made a Faustian bargain—opting for short-lived popular acclaim over the cool perpetuity of established science.

While many in established agricultural circles rejected Faulkner’s thesis out of hand, the press seemed unusually enamored of his work, perhaps because it served their interests. Russell Lord, a Faulkner supporter, agricultural journalist, USDA consultant, and, later, editor of *The Land*, reveled in the long-coming slugfest Faulkner initiated. “No book . . . in the last thirty years of agriculture,” Lord

(1943:413) writes in his review in *The Nation*, "has aroused such a furor; and this rejoices me." Likewise, *Time* magazine ("Down with the Plow" 1943) reported that U.S. Soil Conservation Director Hugh Bennett "saluted" Faulkner and his no-till prescriptions. Like the schoolyard runt that, emboldened by his classmates, takes on the bully only to be pummeled, the delight of Russell Lord and others was tempered by an acknowledgment of eventual retribution. In his review, Lord (1943:413) intimates that those who follow Faulkner will "have quite a fight ahead," and while Lord supports Faulkner's no-till thesis, he is clearly less than willing to enter the fray on his friend's behalf for fear of being accomplice. Likewise, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, a reviewer celebrates Faulkner's skepticism: "Agriculture has not had enough heresy. It will be good for agronomists to have to prove their plowing" (L.M.L. 1943:12). Elsewhere, Faulkner is called a "maverick" by Russell Lord (1943:413), an "iconoclast" by Cornell Professor of Soil Technology Richard Bradfield (1944:30), a "Diogenes" (Skillin 1943:447), and compared to Calvin Coolidge preaching on sin (L.M.L. 1943:12).

Apropos to our discussion here concerning peasant versus professional practice, Faulkner was rarely called a "genius" in print nor was he typically praised for his intellect, as one might expect of an inventor, scientist, or savior. While called an "ex-county agent" by Bromfield, Emil Troug, Ross Holman and many others, Faulkner's real training at Cumberland College (then Williamsburg Baptist Institute) and the University of Kentucky is mentioned only in the biographical note on his book's dust jacket. To emphasize Faulkner's academic pedigree in the popular media would have been to threaten the legitimacy of the David and Goliath narrative the press had drummed up. Likewise, to remind readers of Faulkner's experience as a Smith-Hughes teacher of agriculture or to inform audiences of his collegial relationships with the likes of Sears (1935), head of the botany department at Oberlin College and author of the seminal work *Deserts on the March*, would again undermine the-made-for-radio drama. Preferred were descriptions of what *Time* magazine ("Down with the Plow" 1943:45) described as Faulkner's agricultural "monkeyshines," freak harvests characterized by "sweet potatoes in two months instead of the normal four; . . . five pickings of beans instead of the usual one or two."

Before we leave *Plowman's Folly* (Faulkner 1943) for a time, note that while Faulkner would, in the ensuing years, continue to lecture and consult, he would come out with a book several years later entitled *A Second Look . . .* (Faulkner 1947) in which he would amend his all-or-nothing, no-till thesis to something more

palatable to Big Agriculture. Though he would go on to publish several books as sequels to his first Big Bang, each would produce a smaller and smaller ripple.

Agricultural Science Responds

Not surprisingly the strongest criticism for Faulkner and his plowlessness came from established agrarians and researchers who were deployed, one after the other, to restore order in the world of agriculture. *Harper's Magazine* brought in Emil Truog, head of the soils department of the Wisconsin College of Agriculture and originator of the widely used Truog soil tests. Before throwing Faulkner to the wolfish Truog, the editors of *Harper's* first set the stage, describing how *Plowman's Folly* had already sold fifty thousand copies (it would ultimately sell more than 350,000) and how “orders [were] coming in faster than the publishers can fill them” (Editors' Introduction 1944:173). By this time, Grosset and Dunlap of New York had reprinted *Plowman's Folly* by special arrangement with the University of Oklahoma Press, who had run out of paper trying to keep up with the demand. The East Coast editors of *Harper's*, in referencing the fierce debate the book had caused in farm circles, referred distantly to the “Western communities” where the till versus no-till debate had become, in their words, “a staple subject.” Professor Truog, they wrote, would “rise to the defense of the plow,” and so he did.

Truog, an academic given an almost unprecedented five pages in a general interest magazine to cut Faulkner down to size, opened by taking the high road, providing token praise for Faulkner's “well-written” book and acknowledging that “we are doing too much plowing in some sections of this country” (Truog 1944:173). While Faulkner (1943:3) had played the role of plucky peasant in *Plowman's Folly*—beginning the book with the expected thumb-in-the-eye diatribe against the “left-handed manner of scientists themselves,”—Truog, the academic, would maintain the decorum expected of someone with his academic pedigree. Having conceded excessive plowing in “some sections,” Truog (1944:176) asserts that “it is nonsense to maintain as Edward H. Faulkner does . . . that the moldboard plow has sapped the soil of its fertility, raided the nation's food basket, fostered crop pests, and even paved the way for the current vitamin pill fad.” In a sentence, Truog argues, “Mr. Faulkner's thesis is not sound.”

After the opening volley, Truog's rebuttal offers the expected fare, rehashing the standard charges made against Faulkner by the established scientific and agricultural communities. Sounding a wartime, jingoistic note, Truog cites the United States' status as the world's leading food producer as anecdotal evidence of Faulkner's folly. “Surely,” Truog (1944:173) sniffs, “we're not ready to discard it

[the moldboard plow] because a former county agent and insurance salesman has cultivated a bountiful tomato patch near Elyria, Ohio." Truog's dismissive rhetoric, peppered with the shaming, even emasculating connotations suggested by "former county agent" and "tomato patch," orphaned Faulkner from scientific as well as large scale agricultural approval. This shunning left E.H. Faulkner with just two audiences remaining: backyard gardeners and so-called "dirt farmers" like Walter Thomas Jack. As we will soon see, Jack and his fellow yeoman farmers did not, for the most part, count themselves in Faulkner's camp.

Truog next hits Faulkner repeatedly where Faulkner is weakest: data. The head of the soils department chides Faulkner for overlooking elementary science, citing the lack of an experimental control. Using the word "research" only in quotes to refer to Faulkner's impressionistic dabbling, Truog, relying on the fifty-year history of the soils lab at the University of Wisconsin, takes issue with Faulkner's arguments about the rooting habits of common crops. In his lab, Truog declares, he possesses samples of oats, corn, clover, and other plants that show beyond any doubt that such plants root two to three feet deep—debunking Faulkner's focus on the surface as the primary source for plant health. Truog (1944:176) concludes his refutation with a commonsensical question: "If nature's soil could, by itself, nurture a nation of 130,000,000, all soil and crop specialists would be without jobs, for all the farmers would have to do would be to reap and to sow." Though Truog's post facto argument would strike many as support for Faulkner's agenda, which argued that farmers could, with proper training, be far less interventionist, here it seems to take from Faulkner his last remaining calling card: common sense.

Other rebuttals, including F.F. Rockwell's and Dr. Charles E. Kellogg's, would follow a similar line of reasoning, focusing on Faulkner's lack of numbers and overall scientific amateurism. Rockwell (1943:18) acknowledges Faulkner's high-spiritedness, while decrying an abject lack of data that could not "by any stretch of the imagination be considered scientific." Likewise, Dr. Charles Kellogg, head of the Division of Soil Survey for the USDA, dresses down Faulkner's "plowless farming" in the pages of *Scientific Monthly* (cited in "Sense About Soil" 1948:¶5), where Kellogg dismisses no-tillage as little more than a fad. In Rockwell's (1943:18) last paragraph, he again conjures Faulkner's neophyte status by comparing him to an "inexperienced barrister who in summing up strives too hard to present to the jury the absolute perfect case." Again, Faulkner is dealt with high-handedly by his detractors, who, while praising his courage, ultimately dismiss his "little book" as the flawed product of a well-intentioned but hopelessly deluded pseudo scientist.

Constructed Identities: Walter Jack, Salt of the Earth or Salt in the Wound?

Walter Thomas Jack stands out among Faulkner’s detractors in several key ways. First, Jack was the only large scale working farmer to publish a lengthy counterpoint to Faulkner’s arguments. Second, Jack’s (1946) *The Furrow and Us* may be the only book-length rebuttal undertaken, as its entire *raison d’être*, to disprove Faulkner’s thesis. Third, and most important, Jack was one of a very few *Plowman’s Folly* critics to point out, rightly, Faulkner’s one-time close professional ties to the very strain of academic agriculture Faulkner decried. In fact, Jack’s book, uniquely, takes seriously Faulkner and his academic pedigree while also using that pedigree to spotlight Faulkner’s alleged hypocrisy.

Jack’s *The Furrow and Us*, released in the waning days of 1946, benefitted from three years’ accumulation of anti-Faulkner literature. Faulkner, by 1946, had won both established supporters and enemies; battle lines were clearly drawn. Thus Jack’s book was assured an audience of, at least, his Midwestern farming peers so long as it made sure to counter Faulkner. In fact, Dorrance, the small Philadelphia press which published Jack’s first and only agrarian work of nonfiction, capitalized fully on Faulkner’s agricultural infamy. The editors declared confidently in press promotional materials that “*The Furrow and Us* is the answer to *Plowman’s Folly*” (Dorrance & Company Order Form 1946). Artfully using the passive voice and implicating Faulkner explicitly without naming him, the Dorrance marketing blurb purposefully riles the proud, yeoman farmer likely to take offense at *Plowman’s Folly*: “The propriety of the plow has been questioned and even ridiculed in *Plowman’s Folly* that implies that no scientific reason exists for plowing the ground.” By contrast, Walter Jack, the Dorrance marketers trumpeted, balanced a “dirt-farmer’s” (read: *peasant’s*) hands-on experience with soil science, calling Jack’s book “a recital of the practical and scientific reason for making a quick return to the earth of all its residues” (Dorrance & Company Order Form 1946).

Here and elsewhere, Jack, like Faulkner, attempts to resolve the dirt farmer versus soil science tension by advocating a unique brand of subjective soil science, paradox granted. Though not as frequently reviewed as Faulkner, Jack met with similar criticism. Writing for the *Cedar Rapids Register*, Rex Conn (1947:8) remarked, “Soil scientists are likely to take exception to some of the conclusions he [Jack] has drawn from the field tests on his farm” while Jack’s fellow farmers, Conn continues, “may not follow his reasoning on soil fertility too well.” In the press especially the tension between peasant and professional reasserted itself: as a

scientist, Conn implies, Jack would not make muster; as a "dirt farmer" his scientific writing would exceed his brethren's ability to comprehend.

In almost every way, Jack's book capitalized on Faulkner's notoriety while unintentionally reproducing many of its unresolved tensions. Indeed, *The Furrow and Us* reflects the language and organization of *Plowman's Folly* so closely as to suggest imitation if not parody. The tension between professional and "peasant" practice, which history suggests favors the professional over the plowman, holds particularly true when comparing two admitted outsiders, Jack and Faulkner, and the historical reputations of their respective volumes. Jack, lacking Faulkner's academic degrees, collegial connections, and agricultural extension background, manages a "second rank" rating among the top monographs of social science, placing *The Furrow and Us* in the same category as Faulkner's 1947 *Plowman's Folly* sequel, *A Second Look*. . . . Jack's work, while revolutionary in its disavowal of nitrogenous fertilizers and its advocacy of ecologically-minded farming practices such as cover cropping, counter plowing, and green manuring, was nevertheless conservative by comparison with *Plowman's Folly*. Jack, a working farmer single-handedly managing several hundred acres, could not afford the complete philosophical alienation from his neighbors an aggressive anti-plow stand would bring; nor could he completely give up the brand of practical field science he championed—a perfect union of soil sentiment and soil study—to convert to Faulkner's attention-getting but unsubstantiated claims.

While Jack lacked any academic credentials as a soil scientist, his treatment of the soil, by comparison with Faulkner's, was *more* rather than less scientific. Cautioning that "the result of any worthwhile experiment . . . should not be judged by a single year's experiments" (Jack 1946:43), this working farmer undertook, in 1944, a study substantially more scientific than anything Faulkner attempted in *Plowman's Folly*. Jack planted four separate corn plots at 15,000, 20,000, 25,000 and 30,000 stalks per acre and a fifth, control plot at a normal stand of 10,000 stalks per acre; specifically, he hoped to determine "just how much leaf exposure was necessary to perform the vital function . . . of manufacturing the protein, carbohydrates and fats that go to make up our food" (Jack 1946:64). Comparative study of the resulting yields proved to Jack's (1946:67) satisfaction that "synthesis is one of the major limiting factors in crop yields." With a modesty typical of his Quaker heritage and expected of him by his yeoman neighbors, Jack (1946:67) dismissed his remarkable, field-scale experiment in sustainable agriculture, saying that it "did not break any world records." Unlike Faulkner, Jack's bona fide experiments risked social as well as scientific capital. As a member of a tightly-knit and risk-adverse farming

community, Jack worked from the inside, while simultaneously intimating his difference in an embrace of the scientific method in his own fields in full view of skeptical neighbors. It was Jack, not Faulkner, who conducted his comparative study of soil carrying capacity in a large field, declaring “for definite opinions on methods of soil management it is much more comprehensive to observe results in a large field embodying different types of soil types and elevation” (Jack 1946:76). This observation was clearly made for Faulkner, whose suburban backyard, Jack knew, could not possibly yield data about large-scale producers.

Yet despite his superior “science,” Walter Jack was as uncomfortable with an exclusively scientific agriculture as Faulkner. After devoting four consecutive chapters to a review of soil science literature and laboratory study—chapters in which Jack (1946:35) proclaims, “We are all scientists—we live by it—accomplish important work by a certain knowledge of it,” he follows, revealingly, with a chapter entitled “Soil and Sentiment.” In these pages, Jack (1946:68) celebrates the “mystery” of soils, observing, “Few realize that the processes of plowing, planting, sprouting, growing, and harvesting are magnificent ones, and fewer still realize they are working in cooperation with God.” In passages such as this, all three representative tensions endemic to science-minded agrarianism—subject versus object, inside versus outside, and “peasant” versus “professional” practice—come to the fore. Moreover, Jack’s then-radical advocacy of organic farming is tempered by a larger conservatism typical of rural communities, resulting in his reticence toward self-promotion and careerism of the kind evidenced in the celebrated, yet still scientifically-marginal work, of Edward Faulkner.

A closer comparison of the rhetorical and organizational strategies of Jack’s and Faulkner’s respective monographs shows underlying ideological and philosophical similarities that mark both men as, to the detriment of their historical reputations, outsiders to conventional agriculture. Further comparison demonstrates the many ways in which Jack’s work is derivative of *Plowman’s Folly* and dependent on it as a rhetorical whetstone. Jack’s and Faulkner’s respective first sentences both sound a combative, cautionary note, siding with Mother Nature over the agricultural pundit. Walter Jack’s opening paragraphs serve as a shot across the bow of every production-mongering scientist, commodities broker, and farmer pursuing volume at any cost. In the book’s second paragraph, Jack (1946:15) asserts, “To gear our nature to our modern civilization is but courting madness.” Faulkner (1943:12), though firmly against the moldboard plow, sounds a similar note: “No crime is involved in plagiarizing nature’s ways.” Uncannily, the opening paragraphs of both books seek expressly to illuminate an apparent “paradox.” Faulkner (1943:3) cites

the paradox of the moldboard plow's enduring popularity even as he condemns it as "the least satisfactory implement for the preparation of land for the production of crops." Walter Jack opens his "Author's Preface" with a simple declarative sentence doubtless offered as an antidote to Faulkner's more philosophical entrée: "This work," he writes, "is not intended as a paradox" and yet goes on to cite a notion that many if not most of his fellow farmers would consider paradoxical—namely that permanent agriculture, with all its scientific manipulations, could be fundamentally "inspired by the natural behavior of soils and plants" (Jack 1946:7).

Both men begin their arguments on a personal rather than a scientific note, summoning their own past failures and faux pas as further evidence of a Lost Cause gospel. Remembering the dark days of the Depression, when grain surpluses plagued Washington and the only way out for a capital-starved farmer was to grow more grain on existing acres, Jack (1946:27) admits that he had been "too busy worrying about bad luck and low prices to take stock of [himself]." Further detailing his ignorance in hindsight, he writes, "I had done the job of plowing, planting, and harvesting in the usual manner, unmindful of the retribution that follows when there is not the proper relationship between the tiller and the tilled." Likewise, Faulkner (1943:15) indulges in the agrarian version of the born-again narrative, admitting that it took him seven years to "break away from conventional ways of thinking about the soil." Faulkner continues, "Like all others trained in agriculture, I had vainly tried to piece the puzzle together, in order to make of agriculture a consistent science."

Eager to contrast his own brand of practical field science with what he considered Faulkner's city-boy dabbling, Walter Thomas Jack stood for the lay farmer, who, he believed, was a true scientist. Reminding his reader that the greatest scientists did not always regard themselves as such, he describes their discoveries as creative, serendipitous, even spontaneous acts. "[Q]uite by accident, [they] formulated laws . . . destined to become basic scientific facts," Jack (1946:35) writes, citing Marie Curie and James Watts. In the end, Jack (1946:36) illustrates his point with an appropriately agrarian metaphor, declaring "a laboratory can be an idea, dream, plot of ground, or, in fact, the layman's work." This natural laboratory of the practical imaginer and farm-grounded experimenter Jack (1946:36) set in stark contrast to the university's "pretentious grills" and "spotless rooms where technicians manipulate mysterious devices."

Research, argues Jack (1946:36), ought not be confined to the classroom or laboratory but should instead be viewed as the "practice by all classes of workers."

Here, again, Jack makes a straw man of the Smith-Hughes teacher of agriculture. Not only was Faulkner's theory erroneous, but so was Faulkner, Jack suggests, because he was not a man of the soil. Faulkner, tone-deaf to the soil's rhythms as Jack heard them, would suffer nature's revenge for that estrangement. “She [Nature] will call these perpetrators to account with the imposing of the usual penalty, declining yields,” Jack (1946:40) charges.

Truth be told, Faulkner, who had either already left the world of agricultural extension for private practice, was similarly suspicious of the scientist and the academic and did not attempt to market his work under the scientific umbrella. In fact, Faulkner's position vis-à-vis the agricultural sciences was complex if not conflicted, as was Jack's. On the one hand, Faulkner had cut his teeth in professional agriculture and knew, or thought he knew, of an existing body of evidence—predating *Plowman's Folly*—arguing against the use of the plow. In his chapter “The Margin of Error,” Faulkner (1943:8) writes, “The discussion here is concerned wholly with reducing to practical terms, employable in anybody's backyard or on any farm, the scientific information possessed for decades but hitherto not put to any extensive use.” Louis Bromfield (1943:37), the novelist turned Faulkner-convert, owns up to as much, admitting, “Much of what Faulkner wrote was already known to many agricultural experts.” Similarly Hugh Bennett (1943) cites the use of “stubble mulch” farming by pioneering fruit and sugar cane farmers long before Faulkner. Elsewhere in North America, Faulkner contemporaries made as much or more headway, especially Dr. Evan Hardy at the University of Saskatchewan, whose stunning shallow-plowing experimental gains *Time* magazine reported (“The Professor” 1946). Interestingly, none of these factors—the not-so-new nature of Faulkner's no-till regimen, the not-so-rustic story of Faulkner's academic credentials, and the not-so-superficial depths of Faulkner's collegial support—prevented the U.S. media from choosing Faulkner as its darling.

Beyond his emphasis on the “no-brainer” aspects of no-till, Faulkner did everything in his power to argue for the novelty of his homegrown “research” and to diminish laboratory science's relevance to everyday problems in farmers' fields. His results were so thoroughly commonsensical, he argued, that their implementation was “a good deal like suggesting to the mother of a new-born baby to investigate the possibility of feeding her child naturally rather than by the bottle as conventionally is done” (Faulkner 1943:14). In either case, formal scientific methodology was, he claimed, not necessary where natural inclination and common wisdom such as his entered the picture.

Faulkner makes his most unequivocal philosophical statement in Chapter Five, entitled "Research: Unsponsored. . . Unconventional." The chapter sketches his early biography as the son of a poor but successful hill farmer with an uncanny green thumb, and recounts his first cautionary backyard experiments in Kentucky. Referring to his haphazard approach in those early years, Faulkner (1943:57-58, emphasis added) offers the following qualification: "It is clear, therefore, that to call this *research* without proper explanation . . . would be to debase the high meaning of real research work. Such work is always preceded by carefully organized plans and pursued by acceptable methods." Later, he would put his methods to the test on larger field-scale plots. Still, even in that context Faulkner (1943:55) admitted that he was "not a research worker in the conventional sense." Recalling the criticism leveled at him by conventional soils experts such as Emil Truog, Faulkner clearly never intended his results to be considered agricultural science per se, and that criticism implying otherwise was either rhetorical or reactionary.

Jack's most serious dig against Faulkner—that he was pawn, as he saw it, of academic agriculture—comes midway through *The Furrow and Us*, where reference is made to the after effects of reading *Plowman's Folly* and its ilk, volumes that made Jack, a dirt farmer, feel more predator than producer. In his own defense, Jack (1946:50) writes:

So convincing was this tale of woe that I began to look upon myself as the progeny of a mountain goat or a glorified ape. Then, quite suddenly I became aware that these animals would not, or could not, farm for thirty years, raise a decent family, and contribute something, even though a mere trifle, to civilization and culture. No, in this case, if there is a goat involved, the scent emanates from the direction of the writer of such stuff.

Elsewhere, Jack, making hay of the rapidly changing international, political, and cultural scene since the publication of *Plowman's Folly* in 1943, becomes even more indignant, more patriotic, taking offense in his Author's Preface to Faulkner, that "most ardent critic of the furrow" (Jack 1946:10), claiming that Faulkner "ridiculed" the American farmer for not producing yields comparable to the Egyptians who still used primitive agricultural tools. In fact, Faulkner had, whether by Kamikaze contrarianism or unusual bravery, said as much and more, burning bridges with lay-farmers in the process. Faulkner's (1943:5) words here are best quoted in full:

It [the American farmer’s poor environmental record] gains nothing in attractiveness, moreover, when we consider that our Chinese friends and the often despised peasantry of the so-called backward countries of the world can produce more per acre without machinery than the American farmer can with all his fine equipment.

Positioning himself as David in a peasant versus soil scientist debate, Jack bristles at Faulkner’s anti-democratic insinuations, as did many farmers of that era, who saw in Jack a true representative of their yeoman concerns. Jack (1946:10) engages in some Populist pulpit-beating in an attempt to answer his fellow farmers’ wounded pride, responding with a patriotism, if not jingoism, characteristic of the day: “No, the American farmer does not envy the crooked stick farmers of any country for they know the furrow is mightier than the Nile. . . .” Jack further defends the self-made American farmer, saying, “They [the Egyptians] need have no fear of the law of diminishing returns since their rich uncle, Mr. Nile, makes no charge for his services.”

The battle for the naturalness and the sanctity of the American Plains’ precious topsoil was a battle, in Jack’s estimation, for civilization and the maintenance of a leisure class, a class to which neither Walter Jack nor Edward Faulkner belonged but which they nonetheless fought to protect. “To make our homes and civilization permanent is to guard our topsoil, keeping it fertile and productive,” Jack (1946:11) concludes. In the closing paragraphs of his “Author’s Preface,” Jack takes one last shot at undoing Faulkner’s belittling comparison of American farmers to peasants from other nations. In defense of his country’s plowmen, Jack (1946:11) writes “We are not Pagans of the soil, but tillers of it, and as such, we must take care of it and it in turn will take care of us.”

Challenging the Corporate-University Agricultural Establishment

Jack’s position vis-à-vis Faulkner was unequivocal: the author of *Plowman’s Folly* had been co-opted by business agriculture and government-funded, land-grant universities. Faulkner, a one-time Smith-Hughes teacher funded by the Feds to reform and urbanize country life through cultural re-education of the nation’s rural residents, spent his first twenty-five working years steeped in the scientific paradigm then endemic to all levels of government. Then as now, it seemed to take an outsider to both cultures, Academe and Corporate Farming, to critique both and to advocate for the average Midwestern tiller who operated by conscience and common sense rather than by the latest county extension bulletin or academic

paper. "Now and then," Jack (1946:15) writes in the opening chapter of *The Furrow and Us*, "here and there comes an aggressor to the vital natural laws, a portent to the natural order, proving his point with smooth language and, before a sobering thought has time to germinate, many accept the new idea against their common sense." Not unlike the agrarians who collaboratively published *I'll Take My Stand* (Twelve Southerners 1930), Jack aims here to unmask the treachery of institutional men such as Faulkner who had, Jack believed, betrayed the independent producer at the expense of commercial interests. This cause, along with its missionary flavor, would be taken up in the decades after Jack's death in 1965 by farmer-writers such as Wendell Berry (1977) and Gene Logsdon (1994), who, in their respective volumes, *The Unsettling of America* and *At Nature's Pace*, would decry the land-grant university's science-based betrayal of the small-time peasant producer. Jack's (1946:60-61) words are worth quoting here in full:

It seems obvious at the present that our Agricultural Schools are putting more stress on economic problems than intimate problems of the soil. This might be expected and even encouraged because the average farmer finds these problems outside the sphere of his every-day experience.

Small wonder, then, that titled educators take a special interest in this branch of farm business, for farm economics is the brain-child of our national planners and their prognostications can be dispensed from the round table with dignity.

Not so with the problems of the soil. To master its meaning is to live on it, live by it, ever watchful for any deviation in response due to variations in tillage practices, getting the feel of it in the spring and working and observing it throughout the changing seasons.

There are too many articulate people whose inspirations are prompted by the glamorous thoughts of Nature being the mother of us all. They speak and write pretty things to fire our imaginations and leave us with a literary hangover.

The present day farmer wants facts, not fancy, something workable that will help analyze natural processes that build our soil. To these processes we must look for our future existence.

Like our modern day political figures—George Bush, Al Gore, and Sandra Day O'Connor, to name a few—it has become politically expedient to equate a farming or ranching background with visionary, independent leadership. By comparison,

Jack and Faulkner were authentic agrarians, though their self-consciousness about their own credentials bespeaks an important anxiety. Less than a month after Faulkner published *Plowman's Folly*, G.E. Fussell (1943:42) of Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in London published an article in the pages of the journal *Agricultural History* documenting the agrarian wannabe-ism implicit in “real farmer” narratives of the eighteenth century. These often apocryphal farming treatises demonstrate, according to Fussell, a tendency by so-called “rustick authors” to proclaim loudly, often contrary to the evidence, that their writings resulted from practical experience on the land. In short, these willful “rusticks,” while more educated than authentic yeoman, proved unduly anxious to claim membership in both worlds: practical peasant and expert soil scientist. In this way, they hoped to transcend the tensions born of their own ruralism and intellectualism by foregrounding a complex inheritance.

Jack, doubtless the real thing and the very type Jefferson had in mind as the soul of the Republic, echoes in his writings Jefferson's foundational belief that farmers are the most virtuous citizens. Jack (1946:55) updates and makes more ambitious the notion of agrarian superiority, writing, “[I]t is certain that soil fertility and health are conjunct factors in the scheme of life and the farmers of the future will be even more important to national health than medical men.” Against this backdrop, it behooved both Jack and Faulkner to align themselves with everyday farmers and to write “real farmer” narratives. For Faulkner, forced to lease a few acres for his experimental plots to compensate for an inadequately sized backyard, the claims of “real farmer” status were a stretch, and Jack knew it. In fact, Jack's *The Furrow and Us* is clearly as much of an ad hominem attack on Faulkner and his veracity as a man of the earth as it is a rejection of Faulkner's brand of “soil science.” Here again, the question at the core of the Jack/Faulkner, till versus no-till debate represents, in particular, an enduring, historically-important tension between so-called “peasant practices”—often hands-on, hard-won, and passed down—and credentialed expertise achieved via formal schooling. In any case, we have seen that Jack and Faulkner, both raised poor by small farmers, came from the yeoman's tradition, especially by comparison with the journal editors who reviewed their work, such as Russell Lord, and academic experts such as Wisconsin's Emil Truog and Cornell's Richard Bradfield.

The Farmer-Naturalist Legacy of Faulkner and Jack

In the end, while Jack and Faulkner unfortunately wrote as rivals rather than in solidarity against big-time, bought agriculture, the Jack/Faulkner rivalry is, in

another sense, natural. In a centralized wartime farm economy, dissenting voices, especially those with real credentials on the land, could not be viewed as anything other than a threat, and to turn the dissenters against one another was then, as it is now, the most effective way to preempt organized resistance. I do not mean to posit, in these closing sentences, a conspiracy theory, but to remind, apropos to the peasant versus soil scientist dichotomy and the inside versus outside tension, that Jack and Faulkner did share an identity as "subjective" soil men. Further, I argue that Jack and Faulkner are overlooked as precedents for farmer-naturalists able to transcend the pigeonholing of shopworn professional versus peasant.

Though their personal and authorial identities were shaped in response to conventional rural norms, the substance of their debate, rather than the rhetoric of it, exposed many culturally-inscribed rural myths with which they wrestled. By putting pen to paper, by speaking out on matters of soil as well as sentiment, they challenged the endemic, reductive labeling that often makes rural residents reluctant if reliable subjects for sociological surveys, methodologies that often negatively heighten their already evolved sense of "subject versus investigator." In championing as well as embodying formal and informal research, Jack and Faulkner prefigure the agenda-shaping popularity of farmer-naturalists such as Wendell Berry (1972), Gene Logsdon (1994), and Victor Davis Hanson (2000), the inheritors of the Jack/Faulkner tradition in an environmental age made more open to both subjective and objective agrarian inquiries. Although Jack and Faulkner perceived themselves as rivals, their unwitting common bond, opposition to the increasingly corporate-dominated agricultural establishment, would be their ultimate legacy.

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