

Machines in Faulkner's Mississippi Garden



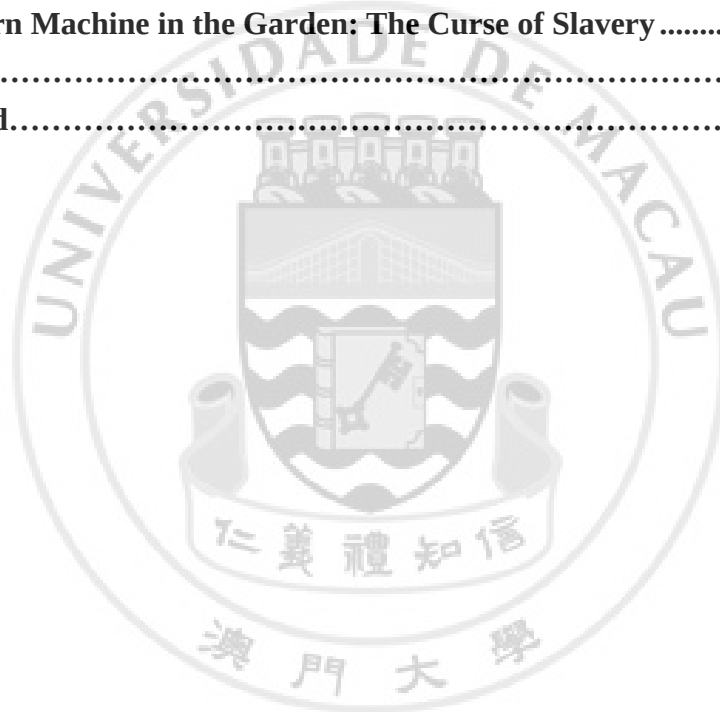
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Abstract of the Thesis

Leo Marx wrote *The Machine in the Garden* to portray the changes America's natural environment has been undergoing during the period after the entry of industrialization, drawing evidence from the pastoral writings by American writers from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. William Faulkner, being a prominent American pastoral writer of the twentieth century, is glaringly omitted from Marx's discussion. Faulkner's ambivalence towards the social changes, especially in the South, as well as his relatively complex outlook of America as an unspoiled Garden of Eden may be the two chief reasons thwarting the consideration of Faulkner's works by the materialist critic Marx.

Both Marx and Faulkner view nature as a pristine and peaceful environment that is uninterrupted by human beings, having even mythopoeic power. The arrival of the mechanical age, or the age of industrialization, as observed by both the writer and the critic, causes gradual, but severe, alterations in the country, defiling not only the landscape but also the mentality of its people. Differing from Marx, Faulkner is ambivalent. He feels the pull of the old Southern traditions, including communal unity, patriarchy and chivalry, which are mostly represented by some of his characters, who are helplessly yearning for the antebellum values. Yet, ironically, they die because of these yearnings. Those who embrace modernization are those who survive. While Marx demonstrates that writers like Irving and Jefferson imagined the country a pure region from the start, Faulkner notices the existence of

a Southern machine in his Mississippi garden, namely chattel slavery and land-seizing. Yet Faulkner appears too ambivalent to present this Southern machine explicitly; various factors such as Western hemispheric slavery, paternalism and mythologization of the slave-holding South obfuscate the representation of this Southern machine.

