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THE WORLD VIEW OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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THE WORLD VIEW OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the changing world view in the fiction of William Faulkner. In considering all of his fiction it is apparent that he moves chronologically from extreme pessimism to a limited optimism. It is, of course, impossible to take his seventeen novels and fit each one neatly into a well-ordered development. However, because the novels evince a movement (from pessimism to optimism) between these two extreme world views, they will be presented chronologically. Furthermore, the change from pessimism to optimism does not develop according to any particular pattern. For instance, the setting of many of the novels is Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, while others are located in different regions. Some novels concentrate on the racial problem, some on man's relationship to the land, and others on man's relationship to man, and to God.

It is impossible to consider Faulkner's world view without considering his humor because the two are so inextricably linked together. It was the original intent of this study to consider the humor as a structural principle in Faulkner's fiction. However, in the development of this topic it was learned that humor could not be considered apart from the world view. In a sense, then, this study has directed the writer.

In his early period the humor is bitterly ironic. As he moves toward a more optimistic world view, the humor takes on softer hues; it becomes more humane. From the grotesque and bitterly ironic, there is a gradual shift to a regional folk humor. The satiric tone becomes gentler and is colored by compassion.

Before one can fully appreciate Faulkner's writings and before he can grasp the implications inherent in his changing world view, he must become acquainted with the Faulknerian myth, as presented in his fiction. It is with the introduction of the myth (in The Sound and the Fury) that provincialism takes on added dimensions of universality. The reader is soon aware that Faulkner is not merely treating a county in Mississippi, but that he is using this particular setting as a symbol of the whole South--with, indeed, universal implications.

The South of the post Civil War is laboring under the curse of slavery and the greedy ownership of the land. The curse is operative primarily in the case of the planter-aristocratic class--the Sartorises and the Compsons. They, of course, were the owners of the land and the slaves. But the poor whites and the Negroes are also affected, not only because they too live in the blighted land, but because they are the victims of the planter-aristocrats. An atmosphere of doom and damnation hovers around the descendants of the pre-war, slave-owning classes. In Sartoris, the author even

states that there is a sound of doom in the very name Sartoris.

A clue to the nature of this curse lies in Faulkner's treatment of time. The present can never be realized except in terms of the past. The curse laid on post-Civil War generations is inextricably linked to the sins of their ancestors. Thus the curse functions both on a racial and an individual level. When Joseph Warren Beach speaks of the social significance in Faulkner's work he has in mind the fatal link between past and present. "What I refer to is the sense one has that individual souls in the South today are shadowed by evils inherited from a pre-war social system and ideology."[1] The role of the Negro, in terms of the curse, becomes understandable once the reader is aware of the fusion of the past and present. The Negro serves as a constant reminder to the Southern white of the guilt of the old South.

Humor also functions as a structural principle in Faulkner's notion of fatality. Henri Bergson states as a central concept in his book on humor:

> Life presents itself to us as evolution in time and complexity in space. Regarded as time, it is the continuous evolution of a being ever growing older; it never goes backwards, and never repeats anything. Considered in space, it exhibits certain coexisting elements so closely interdependent, so exclusively made for one another, that not one of them could,

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[1]Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction: 1920-1940 (New York, 1941), p. 135.

> at the same time, belong to two different organisms; each living being is a closed system of phenomena, incapable of interfering with other systems. A continual change of aspect, the irreversibility of the order of phenomena, the perfectly self-contained series: such then, are the outward characteristics--whether real or apparent is of little moment--which distinguish the living from the purely mechanical.[1]

In other words, any deviation from the life flow--that which is mechanical but should be alive--produces humor. Many of Faulkner's early characters act in this manner. They act, as Faulkner has stated in various ways in much of his fiction, as pawns moved about by the Player. This is enacted on a small scale in The Hamlet in the scene where Ratliff makes the sardonic comment to the townspeople that nothing in the world can keep them from buying Flem's wild ponies. And in much of Faulkner's work there is an awareness on the part of the actors that their course is predetermined. Only in his later fiction do a few of his characters become free agents and assume the responsibility that goes with freedom of the will.

If one considers Faulkner's fiction in its totality, the macrocosm inherent in the microcosm, not always evident in the individual novel, is readily apparent. Considered thus in the framework of the myth Yoknapatawpha county is a symbol of the South. The cosmic manipulation of man in Yoknapatawpha county has universal implications. One need

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[1]Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London, 1911), p. 88.

only compare the novels outside the Yoknapatawpha series to those in the series to see the parallel world views.

Because of spacial limitations it has not been possible to treat the short stories, many of which are excellent and shed light on the subject, except incidentally. Also the study of the novels has been limited to those points which contribute to the formation of Faulkner's world view.

CHAPTER I

Soldiers' Pay

With the publication of his first novel Faulkner enters the ranks of the lost generation writers. Soldiers' Pay (1926) is bitterly ironic. The irony is suggested by the title: the pay the soldiers receive for offering their life for their country is to return to a country where there is no place for them, where society frowns on them because they have lost touch with "reality."

There is a double irony apparent in the story, which gives a final bitter twist to the theme of futility. The returned veterans realize the shallow character of the society to which they have returned; they view it through cynical, disillusioned eyes. This is a society with which they can establish no identity. Yet, at least sub-consciously, they would like to find their niche, take their place in the society which they heartily condemn.

Joe Gilligan and Cadet Lowe are returning from the war. On the train they encounter a wounded lieutenant, Donald Mahon, who is also returning home. They take it upon themselves to see that he reaches his destination without mishap. They are joined by a young woman, Margaret Powers,

whose sympathies are aroused at the sight of the bewildered and dazed lieutenant (he has received a severe head wound).

Margaret and Joe deliver Donald to his father, who has been led to believe his son was dead. The reverend has to bear his son's death twice, because he soon learns from a specialist that his son will shortly lose his sight, and then his life. The old man believes that if Donald marry his fiance, Cecily Saunders, he may be restored to health. Cecily, a shallow young thing, is horrified at the thought of marrying a walking corpse. Margaret Powers, therefore, marries him, much to the bitter disappointment of Joe Gilligan, who is in love with her.

But Januarius Jones, a cynical, satyrish young man, is pleased with the turn of events because he is out to seduce Cecily. However, failing in this quarter, he turns his attentions to the reverend's serving-girl, Emily, Donald's boyhood sweetheart, with more success.

At the end of the novel Donald dies, Cecily runs away and marries, Margaret leaves, and Joe stays on at the parsonage to console the disheartened and disillusioned reverend.

What becomes a dominant theme in all of Faulkner's work is first evidenced in Soldiers' Pay: man is not a free agent; he is a victim of fate, chance, or an indifferent God. But whereas in his later works Faulkner's characters must assume responsibility for their sorry plight, there is none of this in Soldiers' Pay. But here, as always, one must seek

rapport with his fellow victims. Gilligan, the returned veteran, and Lowe, the cadet who never got overseas, sit in mute comradeship before the specter of death, in the person of Donald Mahon. "The two of them sat in silent comradeship, the conradeship of those whose lives had become pointless through the sheer equivocation of events, of the sorry jade, Circumstance."[1]

In Soldiers' Pay and Mosquitoes Faulkner usually ascribes the evil in the world to luck. There is no meaning in life; one does not act according to a code of ethics or moral values, personal or social. As Gilligan explains Donald's tragedy to Margaret Powers: "Rotten luck. That's exactly what it was, what everything is. Even sorrow is a fake, now."[2] In his later fiction Faulkner's villain is variously called fate, or a vindictive God. Even in Soldiers' Pay fate holds its own with luck. (Fate implies predestination; luck implies chaos.) Margaret Powers "thought of her husband youngly dead in France in a recurrence of fretful exasperation with having been tricked by a wanton Fate: a joke amusing to no one."[3]

The motion of fatality is an extremely important aspect of Faulkner's irony. Thus his irony operates on two

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[1]William Faulkner, Soldiers' Pay (New York, 1934), p. 30. (Second reference to books by Faulkner will be given by their titles, or a shortened version of their titles, only.)

[2]Ibid., p. 42. [3]Ibid., p. 36.

levels: on the first level there is man's ironic view of himself and his fellow man; on the second level the cosmic joker (or fate) so arranges the affairs of man as to extract the last bit of irony out of his futile scratchings. This cosmic arrangement often adds an air of grotesquerie to man's plight.

A further irony is to be found in the note Cadet Lowe injects into the story. Most of the principal characters are lost in the post-war world to which they return. They have been touched by the war, and their illusions have been destroyed. But the tragedy in Cadet Lowe's life is that he never got in the war. ". . .they had stopped the war on him."[1] He reflects as he gazes on Donald's scarred face: "Just to be him. Let him take this sound body of mine! Let him take it. To have got wings on my breast, to have wings; and to have got his scar, too, I would take death to-morrow."[2]

Harry Hartwick contends that there is nothing symbolic in Faulkner's cruelty.

> Like Hemingway he views every species of human behavior with anesthetized tolerance and reclines upon a glacial note of pessimism. 'No battle is ever won,' he says in The Sound and The Fury. 'They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair.' In Soldiers' Pay he insists that we learn scarcely anything as we go through this world, and that we learn nothing whatever which can ever help us or be of any particular benefit to us, even.'. . .
>
> He has been compared, in his zest for the cruel and morbid, to Robinson Jeffers. . .But Jeffers' deeds

[1] Ibid., p. 7. [2] Ibid., p. 45.

> of crime, perversion, and sadism are symbols that lift us above the deed, while Faulkner's never transcend the level of bare perception. There is nothing, we feel, behind his atrocities, no cosmic echo; each gamy detail exists for itself alone, and seems to be designed more to thrill the reader than to awaken his conceptual faculties.[1]

This view pretty well states the opinion of many of Faulkner's early critics. Only in later years (the beginning of the change is usually attributed to O'Donnell, and to Cowley's The Portable Faulkner) have the critics realized that there is a definite symbolic structure in Faulkner's writings. Although this becomes more readily apparent in his Yoknapatawpha novels, even in Soldiers' Pay the perceptive reader realizes that the cruelty arises from the fact that the people have no illusions or beliefs to live by.

In the opening scene in the book, on the train, the reader begins to have an awareness of the futility felt by the returning veterans. Their trivial conversations and their outrageous antics seem to say, "We are only marking time. We do not know how to cope with the world to which we are returning. Is there a place for us? If only we could believe there were!" Their witticisms and humorous actions strengthen the above impressions by bringing into sharp relief the essential futility of all human endeavor.

> Well, he was a sergeant, the biggest one I ever seen. Say, he was like that fellow in Arkansaw that had some trouble with a nigger and a friend said to him,

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[1]Harry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction (New York, 1934), pp. 214-215.

"Well, I hear you killed a nigger yesterday." And he said, "yes, weighed two hundred pounds." Like a bear.[1]

"There now, wasn't so bad, was it? Remember, this hurts me to see my good licker going more than it does you. But she do kind of smack of gasoline, don't she?"

Cadet Lowe's outraged stomach heaved at its muscular moorings like a captive balloon. He gaped and his vitals coiled coldly in a passionate ecstacy. His friend again thrust the bottle in his mouth.

"Drink, quick! You got to protect your investment, you know."[2]

All the soldiers decide to jump off the train because the conductor has remonstrated with them about their drunken condition. But the luggage must go out first.

"Hey, what you doing?" But the man ignored him, tugging the window up and dragging a cheap paper suitcase across his companion's knees. Before either Lowe or the conductor could raise a hand he had pushed the suitcase out the window. "All out, men."

His sodden companion heaved clawing from the floor. "Hey! That was mine you throwed out!"[3]

The soldiers have thrown a protective cordon around the wounded lieutenant. They resent civilian interference.

"Was he wounded?"

Gilligan waked from his dream. "Look at his face," he said fretfully; "he fell off of a chair on to an old woman he was talking to and done that."

"What insolence," said the woman, glaring at Gilligan. "But can't something be done for him? He looks sick to me."

"Yes, ma'am. Something can be done for him. What we are doing now--letting him alone."[4]

One of Faulkner's most effective techniques is the way he juxtaposes various scenes and ideas so that their

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[1]Soldiers' Pay, p. 8. [2]Ibid., p. 11.

[3]Ibid., p. 13. [4]Ibid., p. 31.

essential polarity is shown in sharp relief. In Soldiers' Pay the scene shifts from the train to the garden of the rector, Reverend Mahon, where Januarius Jones makes his first appearance. Jones is one of Faulkner's most curious creations. We never encounter anything like him in any of his other works. The reason that critics couple this book with Mosquitoes, in their claim that they are written in the Huxley manner, is because of the presence, I imagine, of Januarius Jones in the novel. Jones is a Sybarite. But in addition to his fleshly appetites he enjoys discoursing, in a learned fashion, on the sorry state of man. It is significant that Jones, who is a thoroughly contemptible character, gets his girl, whereas Gilligan, a most sympathetic character, loses his. Paralleling the Gilligan-Jones duality is that of Margaret and Cecily. Cecily, a shallow, empty-headed fool, gets her man; Margaret, Gilligan's counter-part, loses hers. But Jones by no means resides on the Olympian heights, reviewing the world with cold, ironic detachment. He too is a victim--a victim of his own ennui. The veterans attempt to escape reality through trivial, drunken horseplay. Jones makes the same attempt through cynical, detached contemplation. But they are all victims of the reality they abjure.

The reader first sees Jones in the home of the rector, who is the antithesis of Jones--and who is also defeated.

> A man could very well spend all his time eating and sleeping and procreating, Jones believed. He rather wished the rector (or anyone who could imagine

> a world consisting solely of food and sleep and women) had had the creating of things and that he, Jones, could be forever thirty-one years of age.[1]

The rather benign verbosity of the rector sends Jones into the depths of despair. He enjoys listening only to himself.

> "In this bush is imprisoned a part of my youth, as wine imprisoned in a wine jar. But with this difference: my wine jar always renews itself."
> "Oh," remarked Jones, despairing, " there is a story here, then."
> "Yes, dear boy. Rather a long story. But you are not comfortable lying there."
> "Who ever is completely comfortable," Jones rushed into the breach, "unless he be asleep?"[2]

Once Jones has gained the floor the rector finds it difficult to get it back--

> "That is true. Man cannot remain in one position long enough to really think. But about the rose bush--"
> "Regard the buzzard," interrupted Jones with enthusiasm, fighting for time, "supported by air alone: what dignity, what singleness of purpose! What cares he whether or not Smith is governor? What cares he that the sovereign people annually commission comparative strangers about whom nothing is known save that they have no inclination toward perspiration, to meddle with impunity in the affairs of the sovereign people?"[3]

This, of course, is very reminiscent of Aldous Huxley--a somewhat watered-down version of Huxley, true; but it doesn't call for too severe a stretch of the imagination to project the passage into Point, Counterpoint. The counterpoint continues into the lunch hour. Jones despairs at the rector's suggestion that bread is for the soul, not the palate. After

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[1] Ibid., p. 59. [2] Ibid., p. 62. [3] Ibid., p. 63.

the disquisition on comfort Jones has an accident and drenches his trousers. He is forced to don a pair of the rector's which are much too large for him. "'Now,' cried his host, 'make yourself comfortable (even Jones found irony in this) while I find something that will quench thirst.'"

Reverend Mahon at the beginning of Soldiers' Pay is characterized as a pleasant, ineffectual small-town rector, whose life is bounded by the four walls of his parish house. It comes as a shock when the other side of the rector is brought into focus; when he emerges as a figure of gloom and pessimism. "There is always death in the faces of the young in spirit, the eternally young. Death for themselves or for others, and dishonor. But death surely. And why not? Who gathers the withered rose?"[1] The reverend, who could have been a benign country parson, in a world where one's actions were determined by a set of ethical values, becomes a tragic figure; he is unable to cope with the post-World War I world.

Cecily's revulsion at the sight of Donald's battered face symbolizes the shallowness of the young generation. All they know of life is its surface glitter. If the facade is not attractive that which is under the surface is of no interest to them. It is perhaps structurally sound then that much of the humor in Soldiers' Pay is often of a shallow nature, a mere decor. Faulkner uses trick situations and mistaken

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[1] Ibid., p. 67.

identity as humorous devices. For instance, there is the scene between Cecily and Jones, when she thinks she is embracing Donald.

> "Donald, Donald! I will try to get used to it, I will try! Oh, Donald, Donald! Your poor face! But I will, I will," she repeated hysterically. Her fumbling hand touched his sleeve and slipping down his arm she drew his hand under her cheek, clasping it. "I didn't mean to, yesterday. I wouldn't hurt you for anything, Donald. I couldn't help it, but I love you, Donald, my precious, my own." She burrowed deeper into his lap.
>
> "Put your arms around me, Donald," she said, "until I get used to you again."
>
> He complied, drawing her upward. Suddenly, struck with something familiar about the coat, she raised her head. It was Januarius Jones.[1]

The later Faulkner seldom uses humor as decoration, just to get a laugh.

Gilligan is helpless before the flow of Jones' rhetoric. "'Bless my soul,' he [Jones] said at last. 'Has the army disbanded already? What will Pershing do now, without any soldiers to salute him? We had scarcely enough men to fight a war with, but with a long peace ahead of us--man, we are helpless.'"[2] Only Margaret Powers can conquer Jones in the contest of wit. Gilligan, however, can defeat him in physical combat, and proceeds to do so at every opportunity. It is appropriate that Jones should reign in the field of wit; one often thinks of a wit as an effete decadent, incapable of action. Gilligan, on the other hand, is a man of action; one who goes straight to the core of things. His is not the way

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[1] Ibid., p. 137. [2] Ibid., p. 135.

of the wit. Margaret, also, only indulges in the contest when forced to do so by Jones.

Even in this first novel of Faulkner a theme is established which is to assume great importance in his later treatment of the Southern myth: the desire to return to the past, to a time when, and place where, life had meaning. Donald, although he is home, continually asks to be taken home. He, of course, is searching for a world he knew before the war. The people who find solace in the present are deluding themselves. Mrs. Burney feels compensated for the death of her son by the fact that the important people in town, who never noticed her before the war, now speak to her, in her bereavement. But the reader, and many of the characters, know that her son died the death of a miserable coward.

During the war years the boys who were too young to go to war were displaced in the eyes of their girls whenever a uniform appeared on the scene. Their position is described in a passage once again reminiscent of Huxley. "Of course, girls had used him during the scarcity of men, but always in such a detached impersonal manner. Like commiting fornication with a beautiful woman who chews gum steadily all the while."[1] But the boys come into their own when the girls realize how insufferably dull the returned veterans are.

> "What," said a beautiful, painted girl, not listening, to James Dough . . ."is the difference

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[1] Ibid., p. 188.

> between an American Ace and a French or British Aviator?"
>
> "About six reels," answered James Dough glumly (such a dull man! Where did Mrs. Wardle get him?) who had shot down thirteen enemy craft and had himself been crashed twice, giving him eleven points without allowing for evaporation.
>
> "How nice. Is that so, really? You had movies in France, too, then?"
>
> "Yes. Gave us something to do in our spare time."
>
> "Yes," she agreed, offering him her oblivious profile. "You must have had an awfully good time while we poor women were slaving here rolling bandages and knitting things."[1]

And so the veteran receives his reward. As the title suggests, "the rewards of patriotism are slim in a world of unheroic selfishness and bitchery."[2]

The veterans are completely out of place at the social function arranged for them by the town mothers. They are unable to establish contact with the civilian world. Their only refuge is in each other's company. "'Look at them, Joe,' Mrs. Powers said, 'sitting there like lost souls waiting to get into hell.'"[3]

As Beach points out, Margaret Powers is the strongest character in the book. She approaches life with great lucidity. Yet, why does she not settle down with Gilligan? "Her soul. . . is a freaked and pallid orchid taking its nourishment from an atmosphere of disillusion and decay."[4] Beach attributes it to mere perversity on the part of the author.

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[1] Ibid., p. 189. [2] Beach, op. cit., p. 126.

[3] Soldiers' Pay, p. 196. [4] Beach, op. cit., p. 126.

Such is not the case. A normal relationship cannot flourish in a fallen world.

Faulkner is often able in the very nature of his sentence patterns to capture the meaning of the passage. "Locked together they poised and slid and poised, feeling the beat of the music, toying with it, eluding it, seeking it again, drifting like a broken dream."[1] He devotes considerable space to the dance floor scene. It seems to symbolize the movement of life. Or as Havelock Ellis called it, The Dance of Life. Gilligan feels more than ever out of the swim as he views the dancers.

> Cecily's body poised again, turning, and she said to Gilligan:
> "You aren't dancing to-night?"
> "Not like that," he replied, "no, ma'am. Where I come from you'd have to have a license to dance that way."
> . . . . . .
>
> "Say," Gilligan murmered, watching their retreat, "you can see right through her."
> "Dat's de war," explained the negro driver, sleeping again immediately."[2]

Gilligan is on the outside looking in. His humorous, wry observations but serve to emphasize his isolation. Yet they keep him from becoming a pathetic figure. He may be doomed, but he can at least face his doom courageously. And this is the best that man can hope for. But even the characters who participate in the dance of life are isolated. Jones' one-sided conversations with Mrs. Saunders, Cecily's

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[1] Soldiers' Pay, p. 195. [2] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

mother, is a humorous device pointing up the lack of communication among inhabitants of the wasteland. In the following scene he is posing as a war hero:

> "I suppose you never happened to run across Donald Mahon in France, did you?"
> "No. I had very little time in which to meet people, you see," replied Jones with gravity, who had never seen the Statue of Liberty--even from behind.[1]

Jones, "who had no mother that he could name and who might have claimed any number of possible fathers,"[2] tells Mrs. Saunders how horrified he was one day, at the age of eleven, when he realized that he had lost his Sunday school card.

> "How dreadful. And did you find it again?"
> "Oh, yes. I found it in time for the picnic. My father had used it to enter a one dollar bet on a race horse. When I went to my father's place of business to prevail on him to return home, as was my custom, just as I passed through the swinging doors, one of his business associates there was saying, 'Whose card is this?' I recognized my forty-one stars immediately, and claimed it, collecting twenty-two dollars, by the way. Since then I have been a firm believer in Christianity."
> "How interesting," Mrs. Saunders commented, without having heard him. "I wish Robert liked Sunday school as much as that."
> "Perhaps he would, at twenty-two to one."[3]

The clever, sophisticated observations on the state of man are carried on by both Jones and the omniscient author. A comparison of passages by each, show a remarkable similarity. If this is a fault, it is a fault Faulkner never overcomes. At any rate, the reader can usually determine what characters are speaking for the author.

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[1] Ibid., p. 219. [2] Ibid., p. 230. [3] Ibid., p. 231.

> Sex and death, the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us! In youth they lift us out of the flesh, in old age they reduce us again to the flesh; one to fatten us, the other to flay us, for the worm. When are sexual compulsions more readily answered than in war or famine or flood or fire?[1]

This is the author speaking, while Jones is enjoying the fruits of his conquest of Emily, and Donald Mahon is being buried. Faulkner achieves a nice contrapuntal effect by interspersing throughout the seduction scene, snatches of the burial service.

> (I am the Ressurection and the Life, saith the Lord. . .)
> Jones' yellow stare enveloped her like amber, remarking her sun-burned hair and her foreshortened thigh, wrung by her turning body into high relief.[2]

To Faulkner, life is a paradox; more than that, a cruel joke. Man is a frustrated creature chasing dreams and illusions. If the dream is attained, satiety or sorrow is the inevitable aftermath. The Reverend Mahon realizes his dream--his son is returned to him. Tragic sorrow is the result. Jones finally seduces Emily. He "sighed. It was a sigh of pure ennui."[3]

The reverend's final comments on the nature of God contain a bitter irony.

> "Circumstance moves in marvelous ways, Joe."
> "I though you'd a said God, reverend."
> "God is circumstance, Joe. God is in this life. We know nothing about the next. That will take care of itself in good time. 'The Kingdom of God is in man's own heart,' the Book says."

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[1] Ibid., p. 295. [2] Ibid., p. 297. [3] Ibid., p. 315.

> "Ain't that a kind of funny doctrine for a parson to get off?"
>
> "Remember, I am an old man, Joe. Too old for bickering or bitterness. We make our own heaven or hell in this world. Who knows; perhaps when we die we may not be required to go anywhere nor do anything at all. That would be heaven."[1]

To believe in this philosophy, while witnessing the hell that is modern civilization, is particularly bitter fruit for the reverend to swallow. If indeed heaven and hell are to be found on earth, in Faulkner's world hell has effaced heaven. For life is a living death. And according to John Arthos, "The war had loosed its forces, and the lieutenant, who had once given himself to a cause, is now an inarticulate actor in a story signifying nothing."[2]

> Donald Mahon lay quietly conscious of unseen forgotten spring, of greenness neither recalled nor forgot. After a time the nothingness in which he lived took him wholly again, but restlessly. It was like a sea into which he could neither completely pass nor completely go away from. Day became afternoon, became dusk and imminent evening: evening like a ship, with twilight-colored sails, dreamed down the world toward darkness. And suddenly he found that he was passing from the dark world in which he had lived for a time he could not remember, again into a day that long passed, that had already been spent by those who lived and wept and died, and so remembering it, this day was his alone: the one trophy he had reft from Time and Space. Per Ardua ad astra.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 317.

[2] John Arthos, "Ritual and Humor in the Writing of William Faulkner," Accent, IX (1948-1949), 20.

[3] Soldiers' Pay, pp. 292-293.

It is interesting to note, however, that if the Reverend Mahon is speaking for Faulkner in the above scene--and there is every reason to believe that he is--then even in his first novel there is the suggestion that man is capable of making for himself a heaven on earth. This early conception is pretty well lost in his first few novels; displaced by the Cosmic Joker. But in his last few works it is to reappear as the dominant world view.

Alfred Kazin writes that Soldiers' Pay is "cheerfully slapdash in its structure and rather poignantly overwritten."[1] Donald's death scene, of which the above passage is a small section, is certainly "poignantly overwritten." This is one method by which Faulkner achieves his union of form and content. By submerging the content in an incredible flow of rhetoric, the reader tends to lose sight of the material, to lose himself in the language itself. A sort of delayed reaction sets in. When the reader realizes what the author is actually saying the impact is often much more forceful. (Hemingway achieves the same result by under-writing a scene.) Delayed reaction is also often experienced in many of Faulkner's humorous scenes. The humor frequently anesthetizes the reader, momentarily taking his mind off the horror which the humor may be cloaking.

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[1]Alfred Kazin, "Faulkner: The Rhetoric and the Agony," VQR, XVIII (July, 1942), 389.

In the final paragraph there is a melding of beauty and damnation; a dialectic of spiritual hope, and death and damnation. The rhetoric catches the rhythm of the mellow church hymns. And as they fade into the distance the reader finds himself back on the blasted earth.

> Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. The voices rose full and soft. There was no organ; no organ was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds. They stood together in the dust, the rector in his shapeless black, and Gilligan in his new hard serge, listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad. Then the singing died, fading away along the mooned land inevitable with to-morrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation; and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust in their shoes.[1]

Faulkner has undoubtedly been influenced by Fitzgerald's stories of the modern wasteland. Both authors present a world in which values are non-existent; a world in which man wanders aimlessly, and sometimes frantically, in pursuit of the sensual. In reading Soldiers' Pay I was constantly reminded of the huge advertisement of Dr. Eckleberg in The Great Gatsby, with the gigantic eye (an indifferent God) looking out over the miles of cinder and garbage (the modern wasteland).

The influence of Eliot's wasteland is to be seen in a later novel, Pylon.

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[1] Soldiers' Pay, p. 319.

CHAPTER II

MOSQUITOES

Although it is generally conceded that Faulkner intended Mosquitoes (1927) to be a satire on the artistic, bohemian crowd he encountered during his sojourn in New Orleans, the novel is also a study in futility. And though it is true that most of the characters are artists, the extension of the satire to include all of mankind in the modern world is apparent. This is a satirical, witty book, written in the Huxley-Waugh mode. The wit not only functions to emphasize the inanity of the life situation, it satirizes the people who are incapable of finding a purpose in life. The satire stresses the pointlessness of the characters' lives. As a writer of wit, Faulkner is pretty much of a failure.

Not until he creates the myth of the South does the great depth of Faulkner's humor manifest itself. After Mosquitoes he seldom employs wit as a mode of humor.

> For Mosquitoes makes it very plain that if Mr. Faulkner is of the lost generation, it is only of the lost generation of the Sartorises. But it shows, too, that Mr. Faulkner is not an Aldous Huxley and should not try to be one. He is primarily a myth-maker; and there can be no such thing as a satiric myth.[1]

[1]George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner Mythology," Kenyon Review, 1 (Summer, 1939), 296.

Mrs. Maurier, a wealthy patron of the arts, gathers together a group of artists, through the auspices of her go-between, Mr. Talliaferro, for a cruise on her yacht. She tries for a well-rounded representation of the arts. She secures a writer, a poet, and a sculptor. Each guest accepts her invitation with the cynical knowledge that he will have a few days in comparative luxury. Nothing goes right on the trip. Mrs. Maurier is continually being thwarted in her attempts to organize convivial fun. The men stay drunk all the time, tell dirty stories, and make fun of the grapefruit she brought along as a health precaution. Her dances and bridge sessions are unattended or are broken up by drunken ribaldry. Her niece brings a couple along who are not only of the lower classes, but have nothing to do with the arts. The boat becomes stranded on a sandbar, a guest is believed drowned, and her niece runs away with the steward. Mrs. Maurier's relief at the end of the trip knows no bounds.

Each character in the story expresses in some way the futility and meaninglessness of the modern world.. Mrs. Maurier is in constant search for the beauty expressed by the artistic symbol. Not understanding art she looks for beauty in the artists themselves, but finds none. Talliaferro is consumed with a desire for sexual liaisons. He is forever frustrated by his inadequacy in such matters. Likewise, Miss Jameson, a potential nymphomaniac, is continually frustrated in her sexual advances. Gordon, who lives a lonely, gloomy

life, nurses a bitter contempt for the world and its inhabitants. And always there is talk: brilliant, serious, witty, and idiotic--talk which never ascends to the level of action. "Talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words. It seemed endless, as though it might go on forever. Ideas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead."[1]

Campbell and Foster make the pertinent observation that the "futile lives of these trivial characters are symbolic of a similar dreadful futility in the whole universe." They quote one of the passages which bears out their contention:

> When David and Mrs. Maurier's niece leave the ship for a walk on the land, they move among "huge and silent trees," which
>
> "might have been the first of living things, too recently born to know either fear or astonishment, dragging their sluggish umbilical cords from out the old miasmic womb of a nothingness latent and dreadful."[2]

In Soldiers' Pay Faulkner makes much use of sex as a determinant of the unfulfilled desires of the inhabitants of the modern wastland. The union of man and woman through sex and love never comes off. Margaret and Gilligan never communicate on the sexual level. Margaret's marriage to Donald is

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[1]William Faulkner, Mosquitoes ("A Dell Book"; New York, 1927), p. 153.

[2]Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman, 1951), p. 120.

sexless. Cecily and George are victims of the sex urge. Only Jones achieves his final goal, in a cold-blooded, loveless seduction of the defeated Emmy. And throughout much of Faulkner's fiction, unrealized sexual unions symbolize the futility of man's existence. But in none of his works does sex play as important a role as it does in Mosquitoes. Each character must define himself in terms of his sexual nature. "'Sex,' said the Semitic man, 'to an Italian is something like a firecracker at a children's party; to a Frenchman, a business the relaxation from which is making money; to an Englishman, it is a nuisance; to an American, a horserace. Now, which are you?'"[1]

The sex motif, of course, because of its identification with the scatological, lends itself readily to a humorous treatment. In Mosquitoes this is perhaps best exemplified in the person of Mr. Talliaferro. Here Faulkner makes effective use of a tried and true comic device. Talliaferro lays the most elaborate plans for each conquest. He drives Fairchild to distraction with his incessant visits and phone calls, seeking Fairchild's advice and approbation. But something always goes wrong. He can never make the conquest. The humor inherent in this situation is fully exploited. It becomes more than a mere comic device when the reader realizes the symbolical implications of Talliaferro's failures. Then, too, the humor keeps Talliaferro from becoming a tragic

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[1] Mosquitoes, p. 198.

figure--he is merely comical. These are not tragic characters. Tragedy can occur only in a world which has values, in a life which has meaning. Not until his next novel, The Sound and the Fury, does Faulkner take on the stature of a tragic pessimist.

In the opening paragraph Mr. Talliaferro is discoursing on sex. Thus from the first, the reader has a fairly comprehensive grasp of the character of Mr. Talliaferro.

> "The sex instinct," repeated Mr. Talliaferro in his careful cockney, with that smug complacence with which you privately consider a virtue, "is quite strong in me. Frankness, without which there can be no friendship, without which two people cannot really ever 'get' each other, as you artists say; frankness, as I was saying, I believe--
>
> . . . . . .
>
> ". . .frankness compels me to admit that the sex instinct is perhaps my most dominating compulsion." Mr. Talliaferro believed that Conversation--not talk: Conversation--with an intellectual equal consisted of admitting as many so-called unpublishable facts as possible about oneself.[1]

One of the weaknesses in satire is that that particular element of humor usually allows for little or no character development. A character is a type in a satirical piece. This defect is overlooked if the wit is brilliant, as it is in the writings of Waugh and Huxley. Faulkner, although he has his moments, seldom reaches the heights. Actually, all one needs to know about Talliaferro is inherent in the above

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[1] Ibid., p. 9.

passage. He takes on no added dimensions as the story proceeds.

Mr. Talliaferro's counterpart is Mrs. Maurier. Just as Talliaferro achieves sexual gratification only through talk, so Mrs. Maurier can only talk about art--she is incapable of appreciating it. Each fulfills his function as the other's alter ego. Talliaferro treats Mrs. Maurier as a bountiful and perceptive patron of the arts, and Mrs. Maurier views Talliaferro as a perfectly wicked man with the women.

The characters in Mosquitoes fall roughly into two categories: those who are unaware of the aimlessness of their existence, such as Talliaferro and Mrs. Maurier, and those who have an awareness of the pointlessness of their lives, such as Fairchild and the Semitic man. If Talliaferro were cognizant of his sexual inadequacies, as is Miss Jameson, he would be more of a tragic figure; his incredible unperceptiveness makes him a comic figure.

> He took pleasure in his snug bachelor quarters in the proper neighborhood, in his solitary routine of days: of walking home in the dusk for the sake of his figure, examining the soft bodies of girls on the street, knowing that if he cared to take one of them, that there was none save the girls themselves to say him nay.
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> . . . . . .
>
> But long since celibacy had begun to oppress him.[1]

Celibacy is always an important symbol in Faulkner's fiction.

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[1] Ibid., p. 284.

In the wasteland of Mosquitoes the inhabitants are victims of sterility. It is an unproductive world.

The irony in this novel operates on two levels: there are the victims who delude themselves regarding their victimization (when Mrs. Maurier occasionally views herself in accurate perspective, the sight is so terrifying she returns immediately to her protective shell); then there are the victims who realize that they are lost but are unable to do anything about it. Thus pessimism operates on both the human plane and the cosmic plane. Fairchild, who cynically accepts Mrs. Maurier's hospitality, although caught up in his own ennui, is most lucid in his insight into the decadent society in which they live. The author obviously speaks most frequently through this particular point-of-view character. The contrast between Fairchild's world-weary cynicism and Talliaferro's illusory world is a marked one. No matter how heavy the sarcasm, Talliaferro never realizes the contempt with which Fairchild receives his confidential plans for his conquest of the female. After one such plan: "'Sure, sure,' Fairchild repeated solemnly. 'She can't resist you. No chance at all. To tell the truth, I kind of hate to think of women and young girls going around exposed to a man like you.'"[1]

Talliaferro pauses momentarily on his road to triumph

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[1] Ibid., p. 83.

to see if he has the necessary accoutrements for victory. Just as he is about to make a pass at the voluptuous Jenny "he stood before the mirror, examining his face, seeking wildness, recklessness there. But it bore its customary expression of polite alarm. . ."[1] He is ready for the conquest:

> "Wake sleeping princess Kiss," Mr. Talliaferro jabbered in a dry falsetto. Jenny squealed, moving her head a little. Then she came fully awake and got her hand under Mr. Talliaferro's chin. "Wake princess with kiss," Mr. Talliaferro repeated, laughing a thin hysterical laugh, obsessed with an utter and dreadful need to complete the scene.
>
> Jenny heaved herself up, thrusting Mr. Talliaferro back on his heels. "Whatcher doing, you old--" Jenny glared at him. . .
>
> Jenny watched Mr. Talliaferro's dapper dispersion with soft blond indignation. . .Once more she expelled her breath with righteous indignation, and soon thereafter she drowsed again and slept.[2]

Not only is Talliaferro a failure, he is an ignoble failure. In their successes even, the Talliaferros are failures. In a later scene with Jenny, who is by no means averse to a little friendly petting if she is in the right mood, he is on the brink of a conquest:

> Mr. Talliaferro saw her as through a blond mist. A lightness was moving down his members, a lightness so exquisite as to be almost unbearable, while above it all he listened to the dry interminable incoherence of his own voice. That unbearable lightness moved down his arms to his hands, and down his legs, reaching his feet at last, and Mr. Talliaferro fled.
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> Jenny looked after him. She sighed.[3]

It is symbolically functional that Jenny's response

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[1] Ibid., p. 105. [2] Ibid., p. 106. [3] Ibid., p. 156.

to his advances is a rather bored indifference. In the first scene, when he nettled her, she fell asleep directly after his departure. In this last scene, although she would have enjoyed a bit of love play, she sighs apathetically when he runs off. Nothing is important--nothing happens. The life force has degenerated into a mere trickle. Character interaction never penetrates beneath the surface.

In their discussion of Talliaferro's inability to reach his goal, the Semitic man argues with Fairchild on the latter's stand that Talliaferro fails because he substitutes words for action. In his disagreement the Semitic man uses a stock comic device, the evocation of laughter by presenting as true the opposite of what is commonly accepted as true.

> Well, why not with words? One thing gets along with women as well as another. And you are a funny sort to disparage words; you, a member of that species all of whose actions are controlled by words. It's the word that overturns thrones and political parties and instigates vice crusades, not things: the Thing is merely the symbol for the Word.[1]

And it is true, life to these people is found in the realm of words. They do not act, they talk. Thus this witty observation functions to jolt the reader into an awareness of the warped and negativistic philosophy by which these characters live.

Mosquitoes begins with Talliaferro's observations on sex. Throughout the novel his belief in his sexual powers

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[1]Ibid., p. 107.

and his attractiveness remains unshaken, despite repeated failures. It is only appropriate that the novel should conclude after Talliaferro's final fiasco. The cycle is complete. In the beginning was the Word. No longer is the word a symbol of the deed. In the wasteland man never moves beyond the Word. The word is "boldness." Talliaferro captures Fairchild and explains his latest plan to him. He believes that he has been too hesitant in his advances. Women like men of action, who will sweep them off their feet.

This is the world of the word. In Talliaferro's case the irony occurs in the discrepancy between what he says and what he does. Nothing went as he had planned it. When he tried to kiss his date (who turns out to be Jenny) "she put her elbow under my chin and choked me until I had to move back to my side of the seat, and she said, 'I never dance in private or without music, mister man.'"[1]

When he tells Jenny that she is thinking about him she looks at him as if he were crazy. He pays a cabby ten dollars to leave them stranded in a lonely section of the country. But unfortunately Jenny stays at the dance with another man and the cab driver disappears with the money. Fairchild

> looked at Mr. Talliaferro with utter admiration. "O Thou above the thunder and above the excursions and alarms, regard your masterpiece! Balzac, chew thy bitter thumbs! And here I am, wasting my damn

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[1] Ibid., pp. 282-283.

> life trying to invent people by means of the written word!" His face became suddenly suffused: he rose towering. "Get to hell out of here," he roared. "You make me sick!"[1]

In juxtaposition to Talliaferro's celibate state is that of Miss Jameson. The reader laughs at Talliaferro. Both his insignificance and the humor in which his actions are enclosed prevent him from becoming a tragic figure. He is not a victim of circumstance, but of his own foolishness. Miss Jameson experiences the same difficulties and she meets them in the same manner: she is on a continual prowl for men. However, there is no lack of boldness on her part. Her failure is simply that she is not attractive to men. The irony operating in her case is a bitter irony, whereas with Talliaferro it is more on the slap-stick side. Miss Jameson at first tries to win her objective through words:

> "So many people waste their time over things like architecture and such. It's much better to be a part of life, don't you think? Much better to be in it yourself and make your own mistakes than to make your life barren through dedicating it to an improbable and ungrateful posterity. Don't you think so?"
> "I hadn't thought about it," Pete said cautiously. He lit a cigarette. "Breakfast is late today."[2]

Pete is a perfectly healthy animal. He is continually falling in and out of clinches with Jenny. He takes rebuffs from the niece in stride. But Pete is an animal. He is completely insensitive to the more subtle forms of human activity; whereas Miss Jameson wilts a bit more each time her advances

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[1] Ibid., p. 285. [2] Ibid., p. 88.

are parried. Each new thrust calls for a courage born of desperation. She finally throws off all pride in an attempt to get Mark Frost, the poet, to make love to her. On the night that Frost is to visit her she spends considerable time and care on herself and her apartment. The soft lights, low music, and chilled drinks make the setting perfect. But Frost doesn't respond. He lies on the couch discoursing in a bored manner on various subjects, flicking ashes vaguely in the direction of the ash tray. The situation calls for drastic action. Miss Jameson goes into the bedroom, puts on her flimsiest negligee, and climbs into bed, leaving her door ajar. Quiet settles over the apartment; only Miss Jameson's breathing can be heard. Suddenly Mark Frost erupts from the couch and dashes outside--and catches the last trolly just as it is pulling away.

Jenny is the counterpart of Pete. She lives solely on the physical level. She thinks only of her looks and of men. She drifts aimlessly from one petting match to another. She is indiscriminate, one man serving as well as another. When the niece accuses her of liking to pet all the time, she answers, "'Well, I don't mind. . .I've kind of got used to it,'. . .The niece expelled her breath in a thin snorting sound and Jenny repeated, 'You've got to do something, havn't you?'"[1] Making love means nothing more to her than a way to

[1] Ibid., p. 116.

pass the time. Symbolically, then, when the union between man and woman comes off, it is devoid of meaning; it is not even sinful. The dialectic of good and evil has become synthesized in an all-pervading ennui. This particular world-view adumbrates Mr. Compson's speech in The Sound and the Fury, when he states that there is no good and no evil, all is sound and fury signifying nothing. Only in his later writings does Faulkner depart from his belief in a nihilistic futility.

Jenny is the forerunner of the Eulas and Lenas. The humor in all three of them inheres in their bovine qualities. They are Faulkner's earth goddess figures. Eula, in The Hamlet, doesn't learn to walk until she is six because she instinctively knows there is no place to go. Lena, the victim of an illicit love, travels across the country ostensibly looking for her lover, but actually to see the country. Jenny makes love with a placidity that is a travesty on the very meaning of the word.

The humor in Faulkner's novels tends to cloak for a time the horror. When the evil finally emerges from its wraps the accumulative effect is much more forceful than if it had been evident from the beginning. Jenny, for instance, appears to be a very simple animal and comes across to the reader as a figure of fun. Mrs. Wiseman, sister of the Semitic man, seems to be the most level-headed member of the yatchting group. She keeps Mrs. Maurier from becoming too hysterical, and the men from becoming too obstreperous. She

takes from the beginning a proprietary interest in Jenny. She tries to mother her and protect her from the men. She strokes Jenny to sleep when she is upset. Under her soothing touch Jenny cries, for no apparent reason. By the end of the novel it becomes quite obvious Mrs. Wiseman has seduced Jenny. Thus Jenny's casual attitude toward sex has landed her in a cesspool.

The most powerful section in the book, and the one from which the title is taken, centers around the niece's elopement with David, the steward. David is the only really good character in the story. His love for the niece borders on worship. They escape from the ship with money and food, and head for the nearest town. The road is a deserted pavement through a marshy district. They soon run out of water and are practically eaten alive by mosquitoes. Finally, in desperation, they return to the ship. In Faulkner's cosmic pessimism, nature takes an active part in subduing a normal and healthy action.

Gordon, the sculptor, is a Christ figure. He creates a virgin which he will not part with: "This is my feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me."[1] He regards the niece with a brooding, aesthetic love. He forces Mrs. Maurier to look into her soul, causing her to shrivel up in terror. He stands aloof from,

[1] Ibid., p. 23.

and contemptuous of, his fellow man. Because of the pitiable nature of man Gordon is a god, turned misanthrope. He sums up love in the wasteland thusly:

> "stars in my hair in my hair and beard i am crowned with stars christ by his own hand an autogethsemane carved darkly out of pure space but not rigid no no an unmuscled wallowing fecund and foul the placid tragic body of a woman who conceives without pleasure bears without pain. . ."[1]

The meaningless antics of the wastelanders is perhaps best symbolized in the scene in which the guests decide to pull the boat off the sandbar on which it is stranded, rather than wait for the tug. All of them pile into the tender, with Mrs. Maurier screaming encouragement to them from the boat. Chaos reigns supreme. The farcical action rises through a series of mishaps culminating in the "drowning" of Gordon, when suddenly the rope breaks--as it always does--all their efforts being expended in vain.

The "drowning" of Gordon caps a neat climax on the Christ parody. He is not missed for a long time after his disappearance. No one saw him fall out of the tender. His death produces various reactions: Mrs. Maurier wonders how she can be so unlucky; the men get drunk. There is speculation that he drowned himself because the niece ran off with David. "'Drowned himself for love?' Mark Frost said. 'Not in this day and time. People suicide because of money and disease: not for love?'"[2] This calls for a general

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[1] Ibid., p. 40. [2] Ibid., p. 187.

philosophical discussion in which the disappearance of Gordon is forgotten.

Gordon's "resurrection" is treated as casually as was his "death." What was his motive in "dying?" He was bored.

The humor in Mosquitoes is very superficial. Although the characters also are superficial it is carrying functionalism too far if a superficial presentation of humor and wit are used to emphasize the shallowness of contemporary society. Faulkner never again tries for a facile, brittle wit. Most of the humor in the rest of his novels is deep and rich, and contributes structurally to the creation of the myth.

CHAPTER III

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

In The Sound and the Fury (1929) Faulkner deals with material with which he has a feeling of identity. The theme of pessimistic futility, with overtones of doom and damnation, was already established; but it was worked out on "foreign" soil. He had no thorough grip or understanding of his material. All of his best novels and short stories are laid in Yoknapatawpha county or its immediate environs. Whenever he departs from this region (Pylon, The Wild Palms, A fable) his power as a writer declines. In this sense Faulkner is as much controlled by his material as he is in control of it.

The Sound and the Fury is a story of the breakup of a once proud and prosperous Southern family, the Compsons. The father, Jason, spends his time in a semi-alcoholic haze uttering gloomy and pessimistic statements on the state of mankind. His wife is a self-pitying hypochondriac. All of the children reflect, in one way or another, the dissolution of the Compson household. Benjy is an idiot; Quentin commits suicide; Caddy is a victim of an uncontrollable sex urge; Jason, the only one who survives the destruction, is cruel

and selfish. Caddy's illegitimate daughter, Quentin, follows in her mother's footsteps, on a more sordid level. In contrast to the disintegrating aristocracy is the endurance of their Negro servant, Dilsey. Only in the character of Dilsey is found any hope for an eventual rejuvenation of the South.

The South is suffering under the sins of its past. "The theme of the surrogate, the substitute victim, is as pervasive throughout Faulkner's fable as the theme of time."[1] Actually the two themes, substitute victim and disintegration of the South, are integrated. Modern man must expiate the sins of his forefathers because he can't divorce himself from the past. W. M. Frohock points out that Faulkner is not really using a flashback technique because the past works in conjunction with the present.[2] The theme of despair is a functional adjunct to the theme of time. "It is this fear of the meaninglessness rather than a flight from despair that motivates Quentin's suicide. For he realizes that even his horror at Caddy's promiscuity is mortal and can only be secured for eternity by the destruction of time itself."[3]

A very bitter irony runs through the book. Much of it is furnished by the point of view of Mr. Compson. Faulkner

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[1]Robert M. Adams, "Poetry in the Novel: or, Faulkner Esemplastic," VQR, XXIX (1953), 427.

[2]W. M. Frohock, "William Faulkner: The Private versus the Public Vision," Southwest Review, XXXIV (1949), 288.

[3]Peter Swiggart, "Moral and Temporal Order in The Sound and the Fury," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 231.

has never created a more bitter and pessimistic character. His position is ironical: he makes ironic observations on the state of the world, and yet he is one of the victims. Self-realization, without consequent action, does not prevent him from being an ironic figure. The irony takes on a tragic note because he cannot do anything--he is the victim of a cosmic joke. Just before Quentin commits suicide he looks at the watch his father gave him and remembers his father's words:

> I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his [Quentin's grandfather] or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.[1]

These words aptly foreshadow Quentin's suicide. He is in a paradoxical position: he can neither escape time no matter how hard he tries, nor does he really wish to. Without an awareness of time life would be meaningless--better death. In or out of time, life is meaningless to Mr. Compson. The fact that nothing can remain dreadful is, paradoxically, what finally drives Quentin to suicide. "If we could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad

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[1]William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, ("The Modern Library", New York, 1946), p. 99.

too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today."[1] If one could do something dreadful he would at least make himself felt, he would not be a mere bug crawling around aimlessly. "Not only does the universe contain no order with which we may conform; it contains no prohibition for us to violate. This is the ultimate disorder."[2]

Quentin's attempt to escape from time is an attempt to return to a world of innocence. "Before man's fall, in the golden age, the notion of innocence was linked with that of eternity. The divine was outside time, but after the fall man found himself inexorably in time."[3] Rabi believes that this is the reason Quentin is obsessed with the idea of incest: "Incest is associated with the joys of childhood, the innocence of the first days, the flight beyond the boundaries of time, and the escape from the world of suffering."[4] Benjy

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[1] Ibid., p. 99.

[2] Adams, op. cit., p. 431.

[3] Rabi, "William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing, 1951), p. 130. (In second references to a book in which I use more than one critical article on Faulkner, only the author, the title of the article, and the title of the book will be given.)

[4] Ibid., p. 131.

succeeds where Quentin fails, because he is able to escape time through an identification with the past. Present and past time are the same to him. "The process of time as we conceive it, from past to future through present, is a mere appearance, a delusion. Real time has nothing to do with those categories: it is a simultaneous though unconscious present."[1] Quentin is horrified by the word "temporary." It sums up for him the ephemeral status of man. "Quentin is destroyed by the 'time' he tries to conquer, but Benjy has never made it an enemy."[2]

When Quentin tells his father that he has committed incest he is informed that even such an act would be meaningless in a world without values. Quentin would gladly accept hell if it would give some significance to an incestuous relationship with Caddy. "If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame."[3] "'The horror' and the 'clean flame' would be preferable to the meaninglessness of the 'loud world.'"[4]

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[1]Pierre Emmanuel, "Faulkner and the Sense of Sin," Harvard Advocate, CXXXV (Nov., 1951), 20.

[2]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 233.

[3]The Sound and the Fury, p. 135.

[4]Robert Penn Warren, "Cowley's Faulkner," NR, CXV (July-Sept., 1946), 180.

On Quentin's last day he becomes involved in an incident which is an ironic inversion of his would-be incestuous relationship with Caddy. He is followed by a young Italian girl with whom he acts the role of kindly older brother. In attempting to find out where she lives he is accosted by her brother who accuses him of "unclean" designs on his sister. The irony of the accusation causes Quentin to break into uncontrollable, hysterical laughter. The world is upside down; chaos is the ruling force. Only through death can Quentin escape time:

> you will not even be dead and i temporary and he you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this now . . .it will be a gamble and the strange thing is that man who is conceived by accident and whose every breath is a fresh cast with dice already loaded against him will not face the final main which he knows before hand he has assuredly to face without essaying expedients ranging all the way from violence to petty chicanery that would not deceive a child until someday in very disgust he risks everything on a single blind turn of a card no man ever does that under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realized that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman. . .youd better go on up to cambridge right away you might go up into maine for a month you can afford it if you are careful it might be a good thing watching pennies has healed more scars than Jesus.[1]

Always in Quentin's consciousness is the dark philosophy of his father--a pessimistic skepticism which finally causes him to seek refuge in death. "Man is what he _was_, not what he _is_;

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[1] _The Sound and the Fury_, p. 196.

and the logical conclusion, if the past becomes intolerable, is that life itself cannot be endured."[1]

The only thing Mr. Compson has left is a sardonic belief in his own superiority--based upon class. Self-centered individualism has been substituted for family cohesiveness. Mrs. Compson defends her worthless brother, Maury, against the biting slurs of her husband because she senses in these attacks a slight against her background. She ceaselessly insists that her family is as good as his. It is in this breakup of the clans, Irving Howe asserts, "that Faulkner charts the decay of the traditional South."[2] In his next book, Sartoris, the McCaslins are introduced. Among the McCaslins clan loyalty is more important than class consciousness. And in a much later story, "The Bear," Isaac McCaslin emerges as a constructive force. Uncle Maury is a symbol to Mrs. Compson. As Quentin says:

> Uncle Maury . . .kept his Father's belief in the celestial derivation of his own species at such a fine heat then Mother would cry and say that Father believed his people were better than hers that he was ridiculing Uncle Maury to teach us the same thing she couldn't see that Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not.[3]

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[1]Swiggart, op. cit., pp. 222-223.

[2]Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, (New York, 1951), p. 7.

[3]The Sound and the Fury, p. 194.

The cynicism of Mr. Compson is a sickness through which he views all human activity as part of a cosmic disease. The allusions to Christianity in the above passage are part of the general pattern. Mr. Compson's cynicism is a background which covers the foreground activity with a lurid light. The Christian symbology, for instance, which in later works functions as a counterpoint to the present chaos, in The Sound and the Fury is simply part of the cosmic ruin.

Mrs. Compson, too, serves as a constant reminder of the ridiculousness of human endeavor. Whereas in later works the theme of the substitute victim is a meaningful expiation through suffering, when stated by Mrs. Compson it becomes part of the general mockery: "'I know you don't intend to make it more difficult for me. But it's my place to suffer for my children,' she says. 'I can bear it.'"[1] Even the view of cosmic pessimism becomes absurd in her mouth: "What reason did Quentin have [for committing suicide]? Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady."[2]

In contrast to the emptiness of Christianity for the Compsons is the strength which the Negroes find in Christianity.

> "Mammy ain't feelin well dis mawnin."
> "Dat's too bad. But Rev'un Shegog'll cure dat. He'll give her de comfort en de unburdenin."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 238. [2] Ibid., p. 315. [3] Ibid., p. 307.

The Reverend Shegog's sermon is one of the most powerful passages in the book. When he appears in the pulpit a groan of dismay is heard from the pews--he is a wizened little monkey. When he starts preaching he sounds like a big city Easterner. But as he becomes emotionally involved in the Word of the Lord his voice and accent revert to his primitive ancestry, to a time when the Negro was held in bondage: "Dey passed away in Egypt, de swingin chariots; de generations passed away. Wus a rich man: what he now, o bredren? Was a po man: what he now, O sistun? Oh I tells you, ef you aint got de milk in de dew of de old salvation when de long, cold years rolls away!"[1]

Through Dilsey's eyes the reader sees the Compson family in their proper time-sequence perspective. "I've seed de first en de last."[2] According to Perrin Lowrey, "It is with Dilsey's section that the keystone to the arch of the whole book is dropped into place."[3]

> Ben's wailing which "might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets," is set against Dilsey's thoughts as she sits stroking Ben's head and says, "Dis long Time, O Jesus, dis long time." And while Dilsey is thinking of how Christ's birth and the present and eternity are all related in time, Jason, through his compulsion of haste, has come to the end of his rope in Mottson, and has become "a man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life ravelled out about him like a wornout sock."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 311. [2] Ibid., p. 313.

[3] Perris Lowrey, "Concepts of Time," English Institute Essays, ed. Alan S. Downer (New York, 1952), pp. 81-82.

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

Jason's character is clearly and consistently drawn from early childhood. Carvel Collins, in his discussion of symbology in The Sound and the Fury, sees Jason as the super-ego.[1] He appoints himself as the moral conscience of the Compson household. He, for instance, has Benjy, who is pure id, castrated. He is the only one who is strong enough to survive the crack-up. Actually Jason is the least sympathetic character in the book. He is a cruel and selfish person. Dilsey calls him a mean man. It is ironic that Jason should act as the moral conscience of the South; a person with no conscience whatsoever. Always Jason brings a matter-of-fact, cynical insight into the motives of his fellow men. He is a hard, practical pragmatist with no ideals or spiritual aspirations. He is seen thus in early childhood. After the children have been up to some devilment they are afraid that Jason will tell.

> "Jason wont tell." Quentin said. "You remember that bow and arrow I made you Jason."
> "It's broke now." Jason said.[2]

The Jason section is one of the most humorous sections in Faulkner's writings. His complete skepticism as to the worthiness of men's motives makes of man not a spiritual being but an animal. Jason is an example of the black bile in humor. The humor serves, symbolically, to strip man of any

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[1]Carvel Collins, "The Interior Monologues of The Sound and the Fury," English Institute Essays, p. 49.

[2]The Sound and the Fury, p. 39.

dignity. Not only does he go down, but he goes down ignominiously. In Faulkner's later novels man still goes down, but he is allowed some dignity in his descent.

Jason's meanness is well established in his childhood:

> "He cut up all Benjy's dolls." Caddy said. "I'll slit his gizzle."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "He cut up all the dolls Maw--Benjy and I made." Caddy said. "He did it just for meanness."[1]

It is ironical that Mrs. Compson should find in Jason her only comfort and joy. She wished to protect him from the curse. "I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were."[2] Actually Jason does not need her protection, he is outside the curse. He may be affected by its materialistic backwash but it can't reach his soul because he has no soul.

Jason's satirical jibes at his fellow townspeople always boomerang because in the reader's eyes, and, indeed, in the eyes of the townspeople themselves, Jason exposes his own shallow character--he lays bare the poverty of his soul. His running commentary against Negroes but emphasizes the fact that only in the long-suffering, primitive endurance of

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[1] Ibid., p. 84. [2] Ibid., p. 123.

the Negroes is there any hope for the South. The opening sentence of his section projects the reader immediately into the cynical consciousness of Jason!

> ONCE A BITCH ALWAYS A BITCH, WHAT I SAY, I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her.[1]

Jason hates Caddy because her husband was going to put him in his bank until he found out that Caddy was pregnant with another man's child and divorced her. He makes life miserable for her child, Quentin. The supreme irony occurs when Quentin steals his money and runs away. Jason can't prosecute because his hoard consisted of four thousand dollars (in addition to the three thousand he had saved laboriously for years) that he had swindled from Caddy, who had sent monthly checks for Quentin. Dilsey is able to keep him somewhat in check because she suspects what has been going on. Jason's wrath towards Quentin is based partially on the fact that she is ruining the good name of Compson with her promiscuous love affairs. He chases Quentin and a showman one day:

> I hadn't hardly got out of sight of his barn hardly when I saw the ford. They had tried to hide it. Done about as well at it as she did at everything else she did. Like I say it's not that [her promiscuity]

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[1] Ibid., p. 198.

> I object to so much; maybe she cant help that, it's because she hasn't even got enough consideration for her own family to have any discretion. I'm afraid all the time I'll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square, like a couple of dogs.[1]

Dilsey protects her as best she can.

> "I aint gwine let him," Dilsey says, "Dont you worry, honey." She held to my arm. Then the belt come out and I jerked loose and flung her away. She stumbled into the table. She was so old she couldn't do any more than move hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant tote off. She come hobbling between us, trying to hold me again. "Hit me, den," she says, "if nothing else but hittin somebody wont do you. Hit me," she says.[2]

Dilsey's loyalty to the family is the one beautiful note in the story. She certainly receives no reward for her love and devotion. For instance, after saving Quentin from a whipping she tries to comfort her!

> "Now, now," Dilsey says, "I aint gwine let him tech you." She put her hand on Quentin. She knocked it down.
> "You damn old nigger," she says. She ran toward the door.[3]

The only gratitude she receives from Mrs. Compson is a constant whining and nagging. It is a great pain for Dilsey to walk up and down stairs. Yet she has to many times a day to fetch Mrs. Compson hot water bottles and to administer to her every request. Mrs. Compson is not in the least concerned over the hardships she puts her to. She lets Dilsey toil up the stairs to dress Benjy when she knows that Benjy is asleep:

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[1] Ibid., p. 257. [2] Ibid., p. 203. [3] Ibid., p. 203.

> "Are you going to wake him up just to dress him?" she said.
>
> Dilsey stopped. With her foot lifted to the next step she stood there, her hand against the wall and the grey splash of the window behind her, motionless and shapeless she loomed.
>
> "He aint awake den?" she said.
>
> "He wasn't when I looked in," Mrs. Compson said. "But it's past his time. He never does sleep after half past seven. You know he doesn't."
>
> Dilsey said nothing. She made no further move, but though she could not see her save as a blobby shape without depth, Mrs. Compson knew that she had lowered her face a little and that she stood now like a cow in the rain, as she held the empty water bottle by its neck.
>
> "You're not the one who has to bear it," Mrs. Compson said. "It's not your responsibility. You can go away. You don't have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out."[1]

Of course, if Dilsey did leave, the remnants of the Compson family would collapse. Also she is protecting Benjy. Only her hold over Jason keeps him from putting Benjy in an institution. When Quentin steals the money, that is just what Jason does.

His conflict with the Negroes is further pointed up by his relationship to old Job, an elderly Negro who works in the same store with Jason. The owner of the store, Earl, says:

> "Those cultivators have come. You'd better help Uncle Job put them up."
>
> I went on to the back, where old Job was uncrating them, at the rate of about three bolts to the hour.
>
> "You ought to be working for me," I says. "Every other no-count nigger in town eats in my kitchen."
>
> . . ."Aint nobody works much in dis country cep de boll-weevil, noways," he says.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 287-288.

> "You'd better be glad you're not a boll-weevil waiting on those cultivators," I says. "You'd work yourself to death before they'd be ready to prevent you."[1]

The concept of time, which plays such an important part in the myth, is integral in the conflict between Jason and the Negroes, as exemplified in the above passage. One of the reasons that the Negroes will endure is that they don't fight time. They are in no hurry to experience the future; whereas Jason is a time-compulsive. He thinks of time in terms of money. And he is always being defeated by time. For example, his running battle with Western Union symbolizes his fight with time. He is always getting the market reports too late to act on them:

> "What time did that report come in?" I says.
> "About an hour ago," he says.
> "An hour ago?" I says. "What are we paying you for?" I says, "Weekly reports? How do you expect a man to do anything? The whole damn top could blow off and we'd not know it."
> "I don't expect you to do anything," he says. "They changed that law making folks play the cotton market."
> "They have," I says. "I hadn't heard. They must have sent the news out over the Western Union."
> . . .Only be damned if it doesn't look like a company as big and rich as the Western Union could get a market report out on time. Half as quick as they'll get a wire to you saying Your account closed out.[2]

Jason bitterly resents having to feed a bunch of "worthless niggers." They represent to him everything that is wrong with the South: its nostalgic clinging to the past and its refusal to keep up with the times. He believes it

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[1] Ibid., p. 207. [2] Ibid., p. 244.

basic to the Negro temperament to stand placidly by while the world falls apart around them. "Old man Job came up with the wagon. After a while he got through wrapping the lines around the whip socket."[1] Jason calls him a fool for spending his money on a traveling carnival which won't spend a cent of it in their town. Job retorts:

> "You too smart fer me. Yes, suh," he says, looking busy as hell, putting five or six little packages into the wagon, "You's too smart fer me. Ain't a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself," he says, getting in the wagon and unwrapping the reins.
>
> "Who's that?" I says.
>
> "Dat's Mr. Jason Compson," he says. "Git up dar, Dan!"
>
> One of the wheels was just about to come off. I watched to see if he'd get out of the alley before it did. Just turn any vehicle over to a nigger, though. . . Like I say the only place for them is in the field, where they'd have to work from sunup to sundown. They cant stand prosperity or an easy job. Let one stay around white people for a while and he's not worth killing. They get so they can outguess you about work before your very eyes, like Roskus [one of the Compson's servants] the only mistake he ever made was he got careless one day and died.[2]

"In 1865. . .Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers."[3]

Jason is a much worse offender in the destruction of the clan unit than his father was. Mr. Compson, at least in a limited fashion, made an effort to preserve the family--whereas Jason continually talks family preservation only

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[1] Ibid., p. 266.

[2] Ibid., pp. 267-268. [3] Ibid., p. 18.

because Dilsey has a hold on him, and because he is able to swindle Caddy through the innocent auspices of his mother. He has no family feeling, and he functions as a destructive principle. He believes that Benjy symbolizes the breakup of the Compsons:

> It's bad enough on Sundays, with that damn field full of people that haven't got a side show and six niggers to feed knocking a damn oversize mothball around. [Part of the Compson estate was sold to make a golf course.] He's going to keep on running up and down that fence and bellowing every time they come in sight until first thing I know they're going to begin charging me golf dues, then Mother and Dilsey'll have to get a couple of china door knobs and a walking stick and work it out, unless I play at night with a lantern. Then they'd send us all to Jackson, maybe. God knows, they'd hold Old Home week when that happened.[1]

Jason's attitude toward Benjy is in direct contrast to that of the rest of the family. Benjy is the focal point around which they revolve. Only Quentin, Caddy's child, shares Jason's antipathy. Caddy's love for Benjy makes her ashamed of her illicit affairs. Mrs. Compson, who sees everything as a cross for her to bear, believes that Benjy was given to them by God as a reminder of their sins. Dilsey regards Benjy as a symbol of innocence, untouched and unspoiled by the encroachment of time. Benjy does not arouse a family feeling in Quentin because she has no roots, nor in Jason because he is trying to abjure his roots. "I could hear the Great American Gelding snoring away like a planing mill."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 205. [2] Ibid., p. 280.

Jason, who holds his job only because his mother invested money in the business, bitterly resents having to support the family.

> Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that's right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it's not that I have any objection to having it here; if it's any satisfaction to you I'll quit work and nurse it myself and let you and Dilsey keep the flour barrel full, or Ben. Rent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him, then she cried some more and kept saying my poor afflicted baby and I says yes he'll be quite a help to you when he gets his growth not being more than one and a half times as high as me now and she says she'd be dead soon and then we'd all be better off and so I says all right, have it your way. It's your grandchild, which is more than any other grandparents it's got can say for certain.[1]

In all of his tirades against his family, and mankind in general, Jason symbolizes the new modernism which Faulkner hates so much. Jason believes in progress, and it can not be achieved if one holds on to customs and values just because they have been around for generations. The fact that he is held in bondage by his family keeps him from progressing, from staying up with the advancing times. Each member of the family represents in one way or another an adherence to the past, a past much better forgotten. The feeling of family loyalty is particularly reprehensible to him. If one is to be held down by a sense of loyalty to one's family, no matter what the status of the members of the family, he is deliberately shackling himself with a ball and chain. Jason has no

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[1] Ibid., p. 214.

such misplaced family fidelity. Caddy makes a desperate plea to Jason to take care of Quentin:

> "You'll have to promise to take care of her, to--she's kin to you; your own flesh and blood. Promise, Jason. You have Father's name: do you think I'd have to ask him twice? once, even?"
> "That's so," I says, "He did leave me something."[1]

Caddy's plea, of course, does not move Jason. Certainly her reference to their father was not a fortunate one. Jason has nothing but contempt for the memory of his father. He muses over his plight during one of his interminable chases after Quentin and some man:

> I went on to the street, but they were out of sight. And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what's the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I'm not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family's crazy. Selling land to send him [Quentin] to Harvard and paying taxes to support a state University all the time that I never saw except twice at a baseball game and not letting her daughter's name be spoken on the place until after a while Father wouldn't even come down town anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter I could see the bottom of his night shirt and his bare legs and hear the decanter clinking until finally T. P. had to pour it for him and she says you have no respect for your Father's memory and I says I dont know why not it sure is preserved well enough to last.[2]

There is probably no more irreverent character in all of literature. Not once, in all of his interior monologue, does Jason show a spark of humanity. Mrs. Compson's ridiculous,

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[1] Ibid., p. 227. [2] Ibid., p. 251.

ego-centric pride in her family name of Bascomb is constantly ridiculed by Jason. Her brother Maury is the only remaining Bascomb, and a weaker, more degenerate rascal never lived. Mrs. Compson is perfectly well aware of his true character but purposely deludes herself, out of her family loyalty. Jason, of course, has no such false sense of loyalty, and derides Maury mercilessly. Maury tries to comfort his sister at Mr. Compson's funeral: "So he kept on patting her hand and saying 'Poor little sister,' patting her hand with one of the black gloves that we got the bill for four days later."[1] Mrs. Compson has only Jason and Maury left: "Thank God you are not a Compson, because all I have left now is you and Maury and I says, Well I could spare Uncle Maury myself."[2] Maury comforts her:

> "Now, now. Don't you worry at all. You have me to depend on always."
> "And we have. Always."[3]

Maury is always getting money from her over Jason's opposition:

> "He's my own brother," Mother says. "He's the last Bascomb. When we are gone there wont be any more of them."
> "That'll be hard on somebody, I guess." I says.[4]

Jason certainly has an accurate understanding of Maury's true nature. But Maury is kind to Mrs. Compson, whereas Jason is cruel. In every exchange with his mother

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[1] Ibid., p. 215. [2] Ibid., p. 218.
[3] Ibid., p. 219. [4] Ibid., p. 242.

Jason is unkind. She gives the Negroes a day off on Easter Sunday:

> "I know you blame me," Mrs. Compson said, "for letting them off to go to church today."
> "Go where?" Jason said, "Hasn't that damn show left yet?"
> "To church," Mrs. Compson said. "The darkies are having a special Easter service. I promised Dilsey two weeks ago that they could get off."
> "Which means we'll eat cold dinner," Jason said, "or none at all."
> "I know it's my fault," Mrs. Compson said. "I know you blame me."
> "For what?" Jason said. "You never resurrected Christ, did you?"[1]

Only through Jason could the Compson line continue. So far no other Compson has appeared in the Faulkner chronology. Certainly Jason has no desire to raise a family or, indeed, to get married. "I says no thank you I have all the women I can take care of now if I married a wife she'd probably turn out to be a hophead or something. That's all we lack in this family, I says."[2] The nearest Jason will come to marriage is to keep a mistress whom he sees on weekends after his mother's death. It is significant that his tie-in should be with a Memphis whore. His experience with the upper classes has been an unfortunate one. Also, it is a further example of his crass materialism--to traffic only in that which he can buy and sell.

> I went on back to the store. Earl was busy up front. I went on back to the desk and read Lorraine's letter. "Dear daddy wish you were here. No good parties when daddys out of town I miss my sweet daddy." I reckon

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[1] Ibid., p. 295. [2] Ibid., p. 264.

> she does. Last time I gave her forty dollars. Gave it to her. I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I'm going to give her. That's the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you cant think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw.[1]

The fact that Jason has no wife and children emphasizes his essential sterility.

Jason never deviates from his tone of complete pessimism. Obviously he would never take a chance on establishing a family. He would never give God a chance to play him one more dirty trick. After the death of his mother Jason sells the Compson homestead, which is torn down and a row of shabby apartments put up in its stead. Modernism reigns triumphant.

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[1] Ibid., p. 211.

CHAPTER IV

SARTORIS

In Sartoris (1929) several healthy characters are introduced from the planter-aristocratic class, notably Jenny and old Bayard. Both of them represent throw-backs to an earlier day when the South prospered under more favorable winds. They have not lost touch with the past, still feeling an identification with the land and the tradition. At the opposite pole is young Bayard, recently returned from World War I, who can feel no such identity: a lost and doomed soul. He tries to escape his lonely fate by living recklessly and dangerously. But even in his case there is a time, after a particularly close shave with death, during which he too has a feeling of identification with the land. "He had been so neatly tricked by earth, that ancient Delilah, that he was not aware that his locks were shorn, was not aware that Miss Jenny and old Bayard were wondering how long it would be before they grew out again."[1] Old Simon, the Negro servant, is the counterpart of old Bayard. He too is steeped with the tradition of the old South. He views

[1]William Faulkner, Sartoris ("A Signet Book"; New York, 1953), p. 182.

with Bayard's apprehension the catastrophic headlong plummeting of the young generation.

Regional humor appears strongly in Sartoris and remains a dominant influence in most of his later writings. Only in an atmosphere of kindliness and security can such humor flourish. There was none of this atmosphere in The Sound and the Fury, except in connection with the Negroes. And the feeling of disintegration which cloaked the Compson family was so pervasive that even the Negroes were sucked up into its vortex. There is very little native humor (which is reserved for the characters who feel an identification with the land) in the scenes in which young Bayard participates; he is a figure of tragedy. The humor which surrounds him is bitterly ironic. He destroys what he comes into contact with. After he inadvertantly causes the death of his father, the kindly strains of regional humor give way to the discordant notes struck by the Cosmic Player.

> The music went on in the dusk softly; the dusk was peopled with ghosts of glamorous and old disastrous things. And if they were just glamorous enough, there was sure to be a Sartoris in them, and then they were sure to be disastrous. Pawns. But the Player, and the game He plays. . .He must have a name for His pawns, though. But perhaps Sartoris is the game itself--a game outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late to an old dead pattern, and of which the Player Himself is a little wearied. For there is death in the sound of it, and a glamorous fatality, like silver pennons downrushing at sunset, or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux.[1]

[1] Ibid., p. 317.

Simon functions in many ways in the Sartoris household as Dilsey did in the Compson household. Both of them act as a stabilizing influence on the disintegrating families. But whereas Dilsey moved in an atmosphere of doom and damnation, Simon idles in an atmosphere where humanitarian principles are operable. It would not be far amiss to assert that only in humanitarian surroundings can regional humor exist. Indeed, regional humor is one device of creating humanitarianism. Perhaps it was because of his pleasant environment that Simon lacked the insight of Dilsey. Both realized the roles they were enacting, but only Dilsey realized the significance of her role. In almost all of Faulkner's works the Negro emerges as a positive force, whereas the white people function as a negative force. However, beginning with Light in August, and to a certain extent in As I Lay Dying, a few of the poor whites assume the same function as the Negroes.

I have already mentioned the important role sex plays in Faulkner's writings. Simon is a victim of his sexual passions. But his final death comes as a great shock to the reader because Simon had treated sex with the same equanimity with which he had approached life in general. He visits the kitchen of a neighboring home where Jenny is being entertained:

> "Yes ma'm," he repeated, "I been eatin' ice cream too long ter quit at my age."
> "Dey won't no vittles hurt you ez long ez you kin stomach 'um," the cook agreed, raising her saucer to her lips again. The girl returned and with her head

> still averted she set the bowl of viscid liquid before Simon, who, under cover of this movement, dropped his hand on her thigh. The girl smacked him sharply on the back of his grey head with her flat palm.
>
> "Miss Rachel, can't you make him keep his hands to hisself?" she said.
>
> "Ain't you 'shamed," Rachel demanded, but without rancor, "a ole grayhead man like you, wid a fam'ly of grown chillen and one foot in de graveyard?"
>
> "Hus yo' mouf, woman," Simon said placidly, spooning spinach into his melted ice cream.[1]

Simon is in continual financial arrears because of his constant chase of the female. He has interminable wrangles with old Bayard over the necessity of securing a loan. One such argument resulted over Simon's need to replace funds he had appropriated from his church, of which he was the treasurer. Unlike Dilsey, who finds her strength and endurance in religion, Simon takes his religion with as light an air as he takes everything else.

> "Well, Cunnel," he began, "looks like me en you's got to make some financial 'rangements."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Much obliged, Simon," old Bayard answered, "but I don't need any money right now. Much obliged, though."
>
> Simon laughed heartily, "I declare, Cunnel, you sho' is comical."[2]

Simon explains that he has been holding the money for a new church building.

> "Hit's kind of all 'round cu'i's. . .Now dey wants de money back."
>
> "That's strange," old Bayard said.
>
> "Yessuh," Simon agreed readily. "Hit struck me jes' 'zackly dat way."

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[1] Ibid., p. 48. [2] Ibid., p. 203.

> "Well, if they insist, I recken you'd better give it back to 'em."
>
> "Now, you's gittin' to it." Simon turned his head again; his manner was confidential, and he exploded his bomb in a hushed melodramatic tone: "De money's gone."
>
> "Dammit, I know that," old Bayard answered, his levity suddenly gone. "Where is it?"
>
> "I went and put it out," Simon told him, and his tone was still confidential, with a little pained astonishment at the world's obtuseness. "And now dem niggers 'cusin' me of stealin' it."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Old Bayard snorted violently. "You get that money back and give it to those niggers, or you'll be in jail, you hear?"
>
> "You talks jes' like dem uppity town niggers," Simon told him in a pained tone. "Dat money done been put out, now," he reminded his patron.
>
> "Get it back. Haven't you got collateral for it?"
>
> "Is I got which?"
>
> "Something worth the money, to keep until the money is paid back."
>
> "Yessuh, I got dat." Simon chuckled again, unctuously, a satyrish chuckle rich with complacent innuendo. "Yessuh, I got dat, all right. Only I never heard hit called collateral befo'. Naw, suh, not dat."[1]

When Bayard says that he'll be damned if he'll pay a cent, that he'd rather see Simon in jail, he replies: "Now, Cunnel, . . .you ain't gwine let dem town niggers 'cuse a member of of yo' family of stealin', is you?"[2]

A few days later the church delegation calls at the Sartoris home. The same rich humor found in the above passage is continued in the follow-up scene. Once again Simon declares innocence in the matter of putting the money out,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 203-204. [2] Ibid., p. 206.

while old Bayard rants and raves, causing even Jenny to clap her hands over her ears. Bayard pays them the sixty-seven dollars as both the reader and Simon knew he would. "'Thank de Lawd, we got dat offen our mind,' Simon said, and he came and lowered himself to the top step, groaning pleasurably."[1] But too soon, for the delegation returns. It seems that the correct sum is sixty-seven dollars and "fawty" cents. Bayard explodes, demanding that Simon pay the forty cents. Simon claims the privilege of poverty. But Jenny, the traitor, reminds him that she gave him fifty cents that very morning.

Simon looked at her with pained astonishment.

. . . . . .

"I might need dis money, Cunnel."[2]

But the colonel at least carries the day on this point and Simon pays up.

Faulkner's humor becomes very full and rich in scenes which show the depth of feeling which members of old families have toward each other if they have not lost touch with humane values. A contrasting scene to the one above is enacted in The Sound and the Fury between Jason and Dilsey's boy, Luster. Luster wants very much to go to the traveling carnival but has lost his entrance fee. Jason has two complimentary tickets which he is not using. He offers to sell one to Luster for a nickel, knowing full well that Luster has no

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[1] Ibid., p. 236. [2] Ibid., p. 237.

money. He teases Luster along, holding the tickets over the fire, finally dropping them in, as both Luster and the reader knew he would. Both scenes fall into the category of native humor. But whereas the one is rich and vital the other is bitter and sardonic. Old Bayard manifested a sense of responsibility for the clan, Jason none.

Faulkner has often been accused of stereotyping the Negro, particularly in his earlier works. Such criticism is valid as far as it goes. Certainly the passage just quoted is a stereotype of the faithful Negro retainer-indulgent old master scene. But the wealth of the humor and the symbolic implications save it from being a mere caricature. "Something has happened to the writing between these passages [scenes with old Bayard, Jenny, and Simon]. . . .and the sardonic humor of Faulkner's first books, a sudden acceptance of the world around Bayard Sartoris and a pervading sense of enjoyment and participation in it."[1]

The same affectionate wrangling experienced between Bayard and Simon underlies the warm relationship between old Bayard and his Aunt Jenny. Certainly native humor plays a strong part in their character development. In all of Faulkner's writings where there is an extensive use of native humor, it acts as a structural principle in the establishment of character relationships. Miss Jenny and Bayard get into a heated quarrel about the importance of an ugly black sore

[1]Robert Cantwell, Introduction to Sartoris, p. xiii.

which appeared on Bayard's face. Bayard scoffs away its importance; Jenny believes it should have medical attention. When she learns that he has been letting old man Falls (a contemporary of Bayard who lives in the poor house and visits him once a month) treat the sore with one of his quack remedies her wrath almost gets the best of her. Falls has the same easy-going way of getting through life that Bayard has. He looks forward to the simple pleasures in life, such as his trip in to see Bayard once a month for his gifts of candy and whiskey, which he takes back to the poor house to distribute among his fellow tenants. Other than these few gifts he will accept no charity from Bayard, even declining a ride to and from the poor house on his monthly visits to town. "I ain't like you town folks. I ain't got so much time. I kin hurry it."[1] He views both time and progress with the skeptical eyes of one who places both in their proper perspective. He runs neither from death nor from life:

> "Ever' now and then a feller has to walk up and spit in deestruction's face, sort of, fer his own good. He has to kind of put a aidge on hisself, like he'd hold his ax to the grind-stone," he said, squatting before the pungent curling of the smoke as though in a pagan ritual in miniature. "Ef a feller'll show his face to deestruction ever' now and then, deestruction'll leave 'im be twell his time comes. Deestruction likes to take a feller in the back."[2]

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[1] Sartoris, p. 194.

[2] Ibid., p. 205.

This attitude is in marked contrast to the destructive pursuits of so many of Faulkner's characters, such as young Bayard; and the timidity to face life found in others, such as Horace Benbow.

Old man Falls and Bayard in their discussion of the old days express Faulkner's ambivalent attitude toward the pre-Civil War South. On the one hand there was the exploitation of the land and the sin of slavery. On the other, there was the gracious living, the prevalence of ethical values, and the reckless gallantry of the Confederate army in the Civil War. Falls and Bayard repeat endless stories of the daring recklessness of legendary figures, such as Stuart and old Bayard's father.

> Old Bayard shook the ash from his cigar. "Will," he said, "what the devil were you folks fighting about, anyhow?"
> "Bayard," old man Falls answered, "be damned if I ever did know."[1]

Falls concludes his visit by telling Bayard that the preparation he put on Bayard's sore will cause it to be cured by the ninth of the following month.

Miss Jenny finally persuades Bayard to see a young doctor in the town about his sore, which the doctor diagnoses as cancer, stating that it should be removed by operation immediately. Bayard insists upon consulting with old Doc Peabody, a member of the in-group.

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[1] Ibid., p. 199.

> This was Doctor Lucius Quintus Peabody, eighty-seven years old and weighing three hundred and ten pounds and possessing a digestive tract like a horse. He had practiced medicine in the county when a doctor's equipment consisted of a saw and a gallon of whisky and a satchel of calomel; he had been John Sartoris' regimental surgeon, and up to the day of the automobile he would start out at any hour of the twenty-four in any weather and for any distance, over practically impassable roads in a lopsided buckboard, to visit any one, white or black, who sent for him, accepting for fee usually a meal of corn pone and coffee, or perhaps a small measure of corn or fruit, or a few flower bulbs or graftings.[1]

The consultation takes place over violent protests on the part of Miss Jenny who, although she and Peabody were very close, had little respect for his medical ability.

> "Sit down, Jenny," Dr. Peabody repeated, and he drew out a drawer and removed from it a box of cigars and a handful of faded artificial trout flies and a soiled collar, and lastly a stethoscope; then he tumbled the other things back into the drawer and shut it with his knee.
>
> Miss Jenny sat trim and outraged, fuming while he listened to old Bayard's heart.[2]

Peabody is not particularly interested in Bayard's sore, but in his heart. (And, of course, it is Bayard's heart which finally kills him.) He tells Bayard that he doesn't see any reason to start cutting on him at such a late date. Both Jenny and the young doctor are outraged at such unprofessional behavior. They finally compromise by getting Bayard to agree to go to a specialist in Memphis. The first appointment they can get is several weeks in advance. On the day of their visit they have to wait in the waiting room with

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[1] Ibid., p. 100. [2] Ibid., p. 104.

Dr. Alford (the young doctor who diagnosed the sore as cancer had come with them) for some time before the specialist had a chance to see them. When he finally does appear he mistakenly understands that Jenny is his patient. As he is dragging her into his office he notices the sore on Bayard's face:

> "What's that on your face?" he demanded, jerking his hand forth and touching the blackened excrescence. When he did so the thing came off in his finger, leaving on old Bayard's withered but unblemished cheek a round spot of skin rosy and fair as any baby's.
>
> On the train that evening old Bayard, who had sat for a long time in deep thought spoke suddenly.
>
> "Jenny, what day of the month is this?"
>
> "The ninth," Miss Jenny answered, "Why?"
>
> Old Bayard sat for a while longer. Then he rose. "Think I'll go up and smoke a cigar," he said. "I reckon a little tobacco won't hurt me, will it, Doctor?"
>
> Three weeks later they got a bill from the specialist for fifty dollars, "Now I know why he's so well known," Miss Jenny said acidly. Then to her nephew: "You better thank your stars it wasn't your hat he lifted off."
>
> Toward Dr. Alford her manner is fiercely and belligerently protective; to old man Falls she gives the briefest and coldest of nods and sails on with her nose in air; but to Loosh Peabody she does not speak at all.[1]

The young, university trained doctor against the kitchen table and the carving knife of the old country doctor. The old order versus the new order. This is a favorite motif in Faulkner's works. It functions symbolically in several ways: vital humanism as opposed to cold intellectualism, a sense of the past as opposed to the rootless new generation, an easy-going way of life as opposed to a compelling

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[1] Ibid., p. 210.

necessity to make money, a humorous acceptance of the human lot as opposed to a humorless rejection of the human condition, and identification with the land as opposed to Northern commercialism.

Jenny is one of Faulkner's most sympathetic characters. She represents true Southern womanhood as opposed to so many of the women encountered in his stories who are victims of a selfish egoism or of sexual passions. Miss Jenny is similar to Rosa Millard in The Unvanquished and Miss Habersham in Intruder in the Dust. Seen in total perspective, Faulkner's most sympathetic characters are the Negroes, poor whites who have their roots in the South, the very young and the very old. In all of her dealings with the Sartorises Jenny displays "with her 'fiddle-sticks!' the racy good sense of her comic relief."[1] The comic relief functions as an anodyne to the doom that hovers over the Sartoris household.

Miss Jenny has just been informed that young Bayard is locked up in jail because he has been disturbing the peace with his drunken serenading. "Serenading? Fiddlesticks. What would he want to go serenading for? He couldn't injure himself serenading, unless someone killed him with a flatiron or an alarm clock."[2]

"Miss Jenny is. . .a true optimist--that is, expecting

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[1]Wyndham Lewis, Men without Art (Edinburgh, 1934), p. 58.

[2]Sartoris, pp. 143-144.

the worst at all times and so being daily agreeably surprised."[1] Jenny's irony functions to give the impression that she is able to withstand the doom which faces the Sartorises. When she learns of young Bayard's death she decides to be sick awhile.

> "I think," Miss Jenny said, who had not spent a day in bed since she was forty years old, "that I'll be sick for a while."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And there Miss Jenny stayed until her while was up. Three weeks it was.[2]

However, although Jenny appears to take an ironical, philosophical attitude toward the catastrophes which surround her, she too is in reality a victim of the curse. Narcissa, young Bayard's wife, tries to break the Sartoris curse by naming their child Benbow. But Jenny insists on calling him John, after Bayard's twin brother who was killed in the World War. And in a later story, "There was a Queen," when her world of values collapses, she dies.

Young Bayard is a symbolic type of figure with which Faulkner is more intimately concerned than probably any other type. Speaking very generally, and realizing that there are many sub-divisions within the main divisions, I believe that Faulkner's characters fall into three categories: (1) the good people, who have not lost touch with the human equation; (2) the bad people, of both the upper and the lower classes,

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[1] Ibid., p. 182. [2] Ibid., p. 310.

who are unethical and are interested in only themselves; (3) those who are damned and know it. Many of the characters in the first two categories are also doomed, but they are not preoccupied with the problem of their fate. Discounting the first two novels, which are relatively unimportant--the divisions are first seen in The Sound and the Fury. Mr. Compson, Quentin, Caddy, and her daughter fall into the third category; Dilsey and Benjy into the first; Jason and Mrs. Compson into the second. Certainly there are many obvious parallels between Quentin and Bayard. Both are haunted by the ghost of a beloved:

> Almost daily, despite Miss Jenny's strictures and commands and the grave protest in Narcissa's eyes, Bayard went forth with a shotgun and the two dogs, to return just before dark, wet to the skin, and cold; his lips would be chill on hers and his eyes bleak and haunted, and in the yellow firelight of their room she would cling to him, or lie crying quietly in the darkness beside his rigid body, with a ghost [John] between them.[1]

Both leave their immediate surroundings in an attempt to escape their fate: Quentin to Harvard, Bayard to the woods. But "apart from the melodramatic 'Player'. . .'fate' seems to be with him [Faulkner] a scientific notion, centered in heredity."[2] Neither can escape his fate. "Faulkner's work reminds one forcibly of Greek tragedy, in the sense that man appears less the agent of action than the instrument of

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[1] Ibid., p. 253.

[2] Lewis, op. cit., p. 57.

the gods and their playground."[1] Both succeed in destroying the one they most cherish. Quentin's incestuous desire for Caddy contributes to her sense of damnation. Narcissa lives a life of misery because of Bayard's self-destructiveness. When she kisses him she tastes upon his lips "fatality and doom." Both have a death-wish; Quentin commits suicide and Bayard seeks death by undertaking the testing of a very unsafe airplane.

Unlike Jenny, Narcissa is unable to place a wall of humor between herself and life. And in this difference I believe there resides a fundamental principle in Faulkner's fiction: unless one is able to see the comic in life, to achieve an aesthetic distance, life is unsupportable. Narcissa is a victim (as the name would imply) of her own seriousness. She gives to her life no form. In Sanctuary she has crushed out her human instincts and is a mere hard and cold exterior. Having been hurt too often by life, because of her vulnerability, she denies life. Needless to say, the more genially one views the force, the more tolerable becomes his role. Thus Jenny and Simon manage to make of life a fairly pleasant experience; and in a later novel, The Hamlet, Ratliff is able to extract from life a great deal of pleasure. And even those characters who look upon life with a bitter irony, such as Jason and Mr. Compson, carry on with a certain degree of fortitude. They have created a form for

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[1]Rabi, op. cit., p. 134.

their life. They have erected a protective covering over the naked heart. Young Bayard has no such armor:

> "Hell," he said, lying on his back, staring out the window where nothing was to be seen, waiting for sleep, not knowing if it would come or not, not caring a particular damn either way. Nothing to be seen, and the long, long span of a man's natural life. Three score and ten years to drag a stubborn body about the world and cozen its insistent demands. Three score and ten, the Bible said. Seventy years. And he was only twenty-six. Not much more than a third through it. Hell.[1]

It is with the creation of such characters as Bayard and Quentin that Faulkner dramatizes his notion of doom and damnation. "People were predestined. . .They did not act of themselves; they were driven. 'A volitionless servant of fatality,' he calls one of his characters. His own peculiar twist was that they were always predestined to hell. Heaven was non-existent."[2]

A study of old Bayard and his son is a study in contrast. Faulkner uses the technique of dialectical juxtaposition frequently. Old Bayard's humanism is most clearly observed when opposed by young Bayard's lack of it; and, of course, vice versa. Old Bayard tries to ignore the inroads of industrial progress. He keeps a hitching post before the bank and rides to and from work in his carriage. But his son not only keeps step with the new tempo, he outdistances it.

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[1] Sartoris, p. 148.

[2] Edith Hamilton, "Faulkner: Sorcerer or Slave?" SRL, XXXV (July 12, 1952), 10.

Old Bayard instinctively tries to save him from destruction by placing himself in the road of his son's headlong flight, by driving in the car with him. However, his presence, which can do nothing to stop the new tempo, only causes his own death, and hastens young Bayard's.

After Bayard's crack-up he sends his car to Memphis to be fixed. His humorless attitude is expressed in the following scene:

> "Narcissa'll take you driving in her car, if you must ride," Miss Jenny told him.
> "In that little peanut-parcher?" Bayard asked derisively. "It won't do better than twenty-one miles."
> "No, thank God," Miss Jenny answered. "And I've written to Memphis and asked 'em to fix yours so it'll run just like that, too."
> Bayard stared at her with humorless bleakness. "Did you do any such damn thing as that?"
> "Oh, take him away, Narcissa," Miss Jenny exclaimed. "Get him out of my sight. I'm so tired of looking at you."[1]

Bayard, of course, is a product of the lost generation. He might be compared to Gilligan in Soldiers' Pay; but there is one significant difference. Gilligan had no roots to return to, Bayard did. But the needless destruction of his brother John has made it impossible for him to re-establish contact with his pre-war days. His illusions have been shattered, with the concomitant suggestion that a meaningful life is illusory--only death is real. There is always the suggestion in Faulkner that the dead are more alive than

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[1] Sartoris, p. 226.

the living. Certainly the presence of John is existential in the story. Also, in an early scene between Falls and old Bayard, Faulkner comments on the spirit of the dead Colonel John Sartoris, Bayard's father:

> Freed as he was of time and flesh, he was a far more palpable presence than either of the two old men who sat shouting periodically into one another's deafness while the business of the bank went forward in the next room and people in the adjoining stores on either side listened to the indistinguishable uproar of their voices coming through the walls. He was far more palpable than the two old men cemented by a common deafness to a dead period and so drawn thin by a slow attentuation of days.[1]

At the beginning of the story Bayard sneaks into his home town and at the end of the story sneaks out again. "'Wouldn't git off at de dee-po,' Simon continued, with a kind of fretted exasperation, 'de dee-po his own folks built. Jumpin' off de bline side like a hobo.'"[2] As implied by the manner of his ingress and egress Bayard is unable to face reality. When he kills his father he cannot return to his home and face his family; he is weak. Faulkner's strong characters, and those for whom he has the most respect, are they who face the impossibility of life courageously. Without this courage, life is indeed intolerable.

Just as Bayard for a time found peace and contentment through an identification with the land, so, for a time, love soothed his troubled soul:

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[1] Ibid., p. 27.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

> After that she would not go [hunting] with him again. So he went alone, returning anywhere between midnight and dawn ripping his clothing off quietly in the darkness and sliding cautiously into bed. But when he was still she would touch him and speak his name in the dark beside him and turn to him warm and soft with sleep. And they would lie so, holding to one another in the darkness and temporary abeyance of his despair and the isolation of that doom he could not escape.[1]

In the early days of her relationship with Bayard, Narcissa senses the fatality in him. She tries to escape her fatal attraction for him but is unable to do so; she is caught in the vortex of a powerful draw. Bayard too tries to stay away from Narcissa, realizing that no one can share his lonely existence. "'He treats her like a dog would treat a cut-glass pitcher, and she looks at him like a cut-glass pitcher would look at a dog,' she [Jenny] told herself."[2] But they are the pawns with whom the Player amuses himself; there is no escaping their fate.

Every time Bayard escapes destruction in one of his mad, reckless escapades Narcissa dies a little more. In one scene in which Bayard rides a wild horse, he jumps over Narcissa's small car and is eventually thrown, nearly killing himself.

> "You beast, you beast," she cried thinly, "why must you always do these things where I've got to see you?"
> "I didn't know you were there," Bayard answered mildly, with weak astonishment.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 248. [2] Ibid., pp. 182-183. [3] Ibid., p. 192

Part of Bayard's tragedy lies in the fact that he cannot comprehend the nature of his fatality. Both Quentin and Mr. Compson had a certain comprehension. Bayard is caught in the grip of his dark, uncontrollable, incomprehensible passions. When he escapes to the MacCallum farm after the tragic death of his father he hopes that in the homely, earth-bound surrondings of the MacCallum's he can find an answer.

> His blood ran again, and the covers felt like iron or like ice; while he lay motionless beneath the rain his blood warmed yet more, until at last his body ceased trembling and he lay presently in something like a tortured and fitful doze, surrounded by coiling images and shapes of stubborn despair and the ceaseless striving for. . .not vindication so much as comprehension; a hand, no matter whose, to touch him out of his black chaos. He would spurn it, of course, but it would restore his cold sufficiency again.[1]

If he cannot find a solution with the MacCallums he realizes he can find one nowhere. "Old Mr. MacCallum and his unmarried sons form a family rigorous in its standards of behavior yet bound in grave affection, their unity a contrast to the crumbling Sartorises."[2] So Bayard follows his destiny to its natural and precipitous culmination--death. "At least one of the meanings of Sartoris is that the family has always been under a compulsion to glamorous self-destruction--which is to say that the Southern tradition, badly flawed from within, drives toward its own death."[3] Or perhaps, as Sartre

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[1] Ibid., pp. 274-275. [2] Howe, op. cit., p. 33.
[3] Ibid., p. 32.

suggests, Bayard killed himself out of boredom.[1]

When Jenny receives the news of his death she says, "'Well'. . .Then: 'Thank God that's the last one. For a while, anyway. Home, Simon.'"[2]

Are Jenny's words prophetic? Is the Sartoris line to reappear in later works? So far, as with the Compsons, there has been no extension of the family line. Narcissa's child does not make significant reappearance at an older age. Narcissa, remember, called her child Benbow, in an attempt to erase the Sartoris doom.

One further scene which should be dealt with is the incident of Bayard's automobile accident. In this scene two Negroes come across the drowning Bayard.

> "Don't you get too close, ter dat thing, boy," he commanded. "Hit might blow up. Don't you hear it still grindin' in dar?"
> "We dot to git dat man out," the young one replied. "He gwine drown."
> "Don't you tech 'im. White folks be sayin' we done it. We gwine wait right here 'twell some white man comes erlong."[3]

But the son overrules his father's objections and they drag Bayard from the stream.

> "Is he daid, pappy?"
> "Co'se he is," the elder answered pettishly. "After dat otto'bile jumped offen dat bridge wid 'im en den trampled 'im in de creek? Whut you reckon he is if he ain't daid? And whut you gwine say when de law axes you how come you de onliest one dat foun' 'im dead? Tell me dat.'

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[1]Jean Paul Sartre, "William Faulkner's Sartoris," Yale French Studies, 1952, p. 96.

[2]Sartoris, p. 309. [3]Ibid., p. 184.

"Tell um you halp me."[1]

The humor in the scene rests in the Negroes' disinclination to become involved in white folks' affairs, no matter how serious the provocation. But even more important is the ironic contrast between the poor, ignorant Negroes, who yet have survival value, and the son of a wealthy family who is the victim of progress. Always there is the ironic Negro comment, spoken or felt: "White folks!"

To conclude this discussion of Sartoris let me say a word about the affair between Horace Benbow, who plays an important part in Sanctuary, and Belle Mitchell. Belle is married to Harry Mitchell: "He was a cotton speculator and good one; he was ugly as sin and kind-hearted and dogmatic and talkative, and he called Belle 'little mother' until she broke him of it."[2] Belle and Horace are in love with each other. However, they are very dissimilar. Belle is a creature of passion, selfish, and with no sense of tradition. Horace, on the other hand, is gentle, kind, and has a strong feeling for the Southern tradition. He is indeed on the horns of a dilemma. He is hopelessly in love but the whole sordid affair is very distasteful to him. He is a man who likes the beautiful in life. His greatest pleasure is the pursuance of his hobby, glass-blowing. Here he can create flawless beauty--far different from the ugliness of mankind.

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[1] Ibid., p. 185. [2] Ibid., p. 169.

Narcissa, his sister, of whom he is very fond, is violently opposed to the match, seeing in Belle all that true Southern womanhood abhors. Belle, of course, in this fallen world, wins Horace away from Narcissa. In a later novel, Sanctuary, Horace appears as a weakling whose power for decisive action has been destroyed by his corrupt passion for Belle's daughter.

The structure of the novel is to be found in the polarity of old Bayard and young Bayard. The one represents tradition and roots, the other has severed his roots; and cut adrift wanders the earth pursued by the fates. For a short time young Bayard finds a haven in the old homestead; but this is not to be allowed for long. And indeed he makes of this haven a hell--not only for himself but for those with whom he comes in contact. Narcissa is consumed with an unrewarding love. Old Bayard is affected by the desperate search of his son, loses his sense of identification, and is destroyed. Young Bayard, doomed to destroy that which he yearns to join, and horrified at the evil nature of his destiny, tries to escape the curse through death.

And always, hovering over the blasted earth, there are the ghosts of Colonel Sartoris and John Sartoris, who have quit the world in a blaze of glory, leaving the others behind--living integers of the curse.

CHAPTER V

AS I LAY DYING

So far the myth has been centered around the planter-aristocratic families. This class reappears in later novels but seldom does it receive the attention it did in The Sound and the Fury and Sartoris; a notable exception is The Unvanquished, which deals with an earlier generation of the Sartoris family. The class is also treated in Requiem for a Nun, but the emphasis is on an individual rather than a family. With the writing of As I Lay Dying (1930) Faulkner begins to turn to the Southern poor farmer for his material. Gradually there emerges from his writings the possibility that the lowly may bring about a rejuvenation of the South. When they are first introduced they are victims of the curse, along with their aristocratic brethren. But in Light in August a counterpoint movement is seen: the Lena-Byron saga ends on an optimistic note in contrast to the pessimistic futility of Joe Christmas' life. The Christmas story commands the center of the stage, but it is viewed against the background of rising optimism.

Certainly there is very little optimism in the story of the Bundren family. When Addie Bundren dies, the family

respects her wish to be buried in Jefferson. Before they reach their destination with the coffin they have experienced every conceivable hardship. The journey gradually assumes the proportions of a nightmare. Although there is a quality of endurance about them, each member of the family, in one way or another, is a victim. Addie dies an embittered woman. Anse, her husband, is a selfish parasite. Darl and Vardaman go mad. Jewel wages a constant and bitter battle with life. Dewey Dell is unable to have her illegitimate child aborted; and Cash, although he maintains a certain spiritual serenity, is crippled during the journey. But the family survives; it is decimated but not destroyed. Malcolm Cowley says about the symbolic implications of the Bundren journey: "By whatever road we travel, we always catch sight of our goal, always learn more about it and are always forced back; till at last we find the proper path and reach the heart of the city just as it is about to be overwhelmed by fire or earthquake."[1] But at least they reach their goal. In previous novels the characters have either had no goal or have been unable to reach it. Irving Howe has a different interpretation of the journey:

> The wretched Bundrens, carrying their mother's putrescent corpse through the summer sun, wandering aimlessly across the land, defeated by obstacles

[1]Malcolm Cowley, "William Faulkner's Legend of the South," A Southern Vanguard, ed. Allen Yate (New York, 1947), p. 13.

> inescapable and induced, torn by obscure inner rivalries--all this suggests the condition of the homeland itself: unable to dispose of, or come to terms with, its ancestors.[1]

Both interpretations are correct in the over-all symbolic meaning of the journey.

The theme of cosmic pessimism is never in more evidence than in As I Lay Dying. Nature seems to unleash her malignant forces in her attempt to prevent the Bundrens from reaching their destination. The theme of cosmic pessimism counter-balances the farcical actions of the Bundrens and prevents the story from degenerating into mere farce. Similarly, their comic antics lessen what would otherwise be tragedy. The extreme and incongruous effect produces a surrealistic humor. Cowley calls this a blend of "psychological horror, often close to symbolism,. . .and frontier humor and realism."[2] Thus "the frontier humor is seldom without a Swiftian undercurrent of bitterness."[3]

There is very little humor, frontier or otherwise, connected with Jewel. He is one of the silent, dark, bitter characters which often appear on the Faulkner horizon. He is the forerunner of Joe Christmas. His desire to be alone with his mother is reminiscent of Quentin's wish to escape the "loud world" with Caddy. Jewel says, "It would just be me

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[1]Howe, op. cit., p. 44.

[2]Malcolm Cowley (ed.), The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951), p. 22.

[3]Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 137

and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces."[1] Like Quentin, however, his wish cannot be realized. But the way of suicide is not for Jewel; he finds a substitute on which he can focus his love, the love which cannot come to fruition with his mother. Once he makes the transference he pursues his quest nightly, and is hardly able to stay awake to do his chores in the daytime. Darl and Cash speculate on Jewel's strange behavior:

> "'Taint any girl," Cash said. "It's a married woman somewhere. Ain't any young girl got that much daring and staying power. That's what I don't like about it."
>
> "Why?" I said. "She'll be safer for him than a girl would. More judgment."
>
> He looked at me, his eyes fumbling, the words fumbling at which he was trying to say. "It ain't always the safe things in this world that a fellow . . ." . . "You mean, the safe things are not always the best things?"
>
> "Ay; best," he said, fumbling again. "It ain't the best things, the things that are good for him. . . A young boy. A fellow kind of hates to see. . .wallowing in somebody else's mire. . ."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "She's sure a stayer," I told Cash. "I used to admire her, but I downright respect her now."[2]

Of course it is not a girl, but a horse. Jewel has been spending his evenings clearing a neighbor's land in order to make enough money to buy a horse. Although the horse has the same raging instincts as Jewel, he is able to control

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[1]William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying ("The Modern Library"; New York, 1946), p. 347.

[2]Ibid., pp. 430-431.

the horse, something he could never do with himself. He could never reach his mother in her lifetime; but when she is dead he commits the supreme sacrifice by selling his horse in order to bury her in Jefferson. The living are unable to communicate with each other in the fallen world. Only after she is dead is Jewel able to express his love for his mother. The theme of isolation is one of Faulkner's most important, and it is powerfully dramatized in the person of Jewel.

Addie, too, is a figure of isolation. Symbolically, she represents the complete disillusionment that is life.

> So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who had never had the pride.[1]

And so Anse dies in Addie's mind. And she knows "that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead."[2] She tries to escape her misery by taking a lover. Jewel is a product of her union with the Reverend Whitfield. And although Jewel is closer to her than anyone else because he was conceived in love, the dark stain of her guilt is a cross she must always bear.

In contrast to the gloomy soul of Addie is the boundless and unshakeable faith of Cora Tull. "One day I was

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[1] Ibid., p. 463. [2] Ibid., p. 467.

talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too."[1] Cora is conceived in the true spirit of frontier humor. She is an exaggeration. Her religious fervor is carried to such an extreme that it becomes comical. The words of Addie quoted above give the key to the comic nature of Cora.

> And of course Cora with her eggs and her God is so completely unconscious of the seriousness of the problem that her intrusion into the family affairs becomes a source of comedy. Her intimate association with the deity makes her quite unable to understand the Bundrens or even to help them effectively. But the picture of her "bounding toward my God and my reward". . .is irresistibly funny.[2]

Cora sings this song while Addie lies dying alone with her bitter and gloomy thoughts. Everything is a judgment to Cora. All of the trouble with which the Lord has seen fit to afflict the Bundrens was brought about by their sinful actions. Ironically, she is probably right, even though she has no conception of sin. Her husband's wry comments on the perserverance of Cora's goodness and her serene "trust in my God and my reward"[3] add to the comic lustre of the Cora passages in the book.

> I reckon she's right. I reckon if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with His mind at rest, it would be Cora. And I reckon she would make a few changes, no matter

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[1] Ibid., p. 468.

[2] Olga Vickery, "As I Lay Dying," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 204.

[3] As I Lay Dying, p. 391.

> how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastways, we would have to like them. Leastways, we might as well go on and make like we did.[1]

Tull is always poking mild fun at her boundless faith. Whenever he ties her up in an argument she just retires to serene contemplation. In one such discussion, on the Bundren's mishap when their wagon turned over while crossing a raging river, Cora is somewhat inconsistent.

> "I don't know what you want, then," I said. "One breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next you jump on Anse because he wasn't with them." Then she begun to sing again, working at the wash-tub, with that singing look in her face like she had done give up folks and all their foolishness and had done went on ahead of them, marching up the sky, singing.[2]

Anse and Addie serve as opposite focal points in the novel: the dead and the living. Addie dies spiritually long before her actual death. Anse has endurance, but it is endurance on a very low level; whereas in later studies of the poor whites, their durability is strengthened by a certain amount of insight. Anse has none. As Addie says of him, he is dead but doesn't know it. Although he professes certain ethical principles the reader soon realizes that they are based on selfishness. The motive for carrying out Addie's wish to be buried in Jefferson, his struggle against inhuman odds to fulfill his promise to her, is based on his desire to purchase some store teeth. He says when she dies, "God's

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[1] Ibid., p. 391.

[2] Ibid., p. 449.

will be done. . .now I can get them teeth."[1] The disparity between the way a man should act and the way Anse does act makes of him a comic figure. According to Howe, Anse is the inept schlemihl whose bumbling is so unrelieved that he ends up by eliciting from people a sort of irritating sympathy.[2] As a consequence, his neighbors are always helping him out. As Tull says: "Like most folks around here, I done holp him so much already I can't quit now."[3] Tull believes that Addie is simply tired out, after keeping Anse at work for over thirty years. And so his neighbors go on helping him even though they know they'll regret it the next day. Because Anse is not an easy person to help, always exploiting the kindness of other people, and adopting a tragic, resigned, philosophical air when aid is not forthcoming. The only time Anse is believed is when lying would give him no particular advantage.

Anse constructs a nice theory which keeps him from overworking. "He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it."[4] His very attitude towards dressing expresses a complete dislike of manual labor. "He puts his shoes on, stomping into them, like he does everything like he is hoping all the time he really can't do it and can quit trying to."[5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 375. [2] Howe, op. cit., p. 137.
[3] As I Lay Dying, p. 360. [4] Ibid., p. 348.
[5] Ibid., p. 359.

Anse's true meanness of spirit can perhaps best be grasped in the episode in which Dr. Peabody comes to see about Addie. Some of the neighbors have informed Peabody of her critical condition and, knowing that Anse would never send for him, he takes it upon himself to determine the nature of her illness. Anse protests that he never sent for him, and therefore Peabody has no right to charge him for the visit. But finally Anse is pressured into sending for him:

> When Anse finally sent for me of his own accord, I said "He has wore her out at last." And I said a damn good thing and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God. . .And I knew that if it had finally occurred to Anse himself that he needed one, it was already too late.[1]

The humanitarianism of Peabody appears in sharp contrast to the self-love of Anse. Peabody is constantly uttering cynical comments on the nature of his mission and on the state of mankind in general. But his is not the cynicism of a Jason, but of a Ratliff (The Hamlet). It is a deliberate attempt to cloak his humanitarian outlook on life. It acts somewhat as a facade behind which he can protect himself from his realization of the tragic plight of man.

In order to get to Addie's bedside he has to be pulled on a rope up a mountainside. He makes sure that Anse holds it tight:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 366-367.

> "I done already wrote this visit on to my books, so I'm going to charge you just the same, whether I get there or not."
> "I got hit," Anse says. "You kin come on up."
> I'll be damned if I can see why I don't quit. A man seventy years old, weighing two hundred and odd pounds, being hauled up and down a damn mountain on a rope. I reckon it's because I must reach the fifty-thousand dollar mark of dead accounts on my books before I can quit.[1]

Peabody is received with hostility by the members of the family, particularly Dewey Dell and Vardaman. Vardaman chases away his wagon, and Dewey Dell's hatred causes him to pause in his administrations to Addie. Even Addie views his presence with hatred:

> She watches me: I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them. I have seen it before in women. Seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than pack-horses. That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding.[2]

They are unable to articulate their hatred, but subconsciously they are attempting to preserve the family unit. As noted earlier, the preservation of the family is an important conception in Faulkner's world view. The saga of the Bundrens symbolizes both the cohesiveness and the fragmentation of the family. Their endurance is found in their unity, but the destructive elements are very much in evidence. Anse's clan-protectiveness is based on self-interest, and a sort of foolish pride. Addie introduces a wedge with her

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[1] Ibid., pp. 367-368. [2] Ibid., p. 370.

illicit love affair. Jewel, because of his mixed blood, has little affection for any member of the family except his mother. One of the reasons Darl tries to burn up the body of his mother is because he intuitively realizes that the mission to reach Jefferson is based not on family homogeneity but on individual selfish interests--Anse wants his store teeth and Dewey Dell wants an abortion. And finally the clan spirit is severely weakened when Jewel helps the officers subdue Darl so that he can be taken to an institution; and Anse appears on the scene with a new wife, the day Addie is buried. "'It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell,' pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn't look at us. 'Meet Mrs. Bundren,' he says."[1]

And yet despite these crippling blows to the family unit there is a preservative force in operation, seen mainly in the figure of Cash. Through all their difficulties he maintains a spiritual composure. He understands that in the total scheme of things life and death are integral. He senses the fact that his mother faces her death with a certain amount of stoicism; that her life has been a hard one and that she is looking forward to the long sleep. His matter-of-fact acceptance of her death is demonstrated by his construction of her coffin outside her window where she can see

[1] Ibid., p. 532.

it being built. Cash's warm feeling for his mother transcends the boundaries set by life. Peabody posits what Cash intuits:

> She has been dead these ten days. I suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be. I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind--and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town.[1]

The uncomplaining fortitude with which Cash endures the pain of his broken leg (an accident which befell him while crossing the river), and allowing cement to be poured over the leg in order to save doctor's fees, is effectively contrasted to Anse's cry of lamentation: "Was there ere a such misfortunate man."[2]

Each catastrophe which befalls the Bundren family is interpreted by Anse as one more trial for him to endure. His comment when Addie dies is, "Durn them boys."[3] (They have not returned from their trip to town, thus delaying the transportation of the body.) Anse is so wrapped up in his own miserable plight that he is unable to feel any identification with his wife or family. It is significant that most of the critical insight into the Bundren family is given by Tull (with the exception of Darl whose insight has a streak of the mad in it). The disintegrating Bundren family is incapable

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[1] Ibid., p. 368. [2] Ibid., p. 452. [3] Ibid., p. 372.

of true insight. Tull exhibits a certain skepticism over Anse's belief that each catastrophe is a judgment on him:

> If it's a judgment, it ain't right. Because the Lord's got more to do than that. He's bound to have. Because the only burden Anse Bundren's ever had is himself. And when folks talks him low, I think to myself he ain't that less of a man or he couldn't a bore himself this long.[1]

Anse's belief that he is the object of divine wrath gives him a certain satisfaction, a certain feeling of importance. He interprets even the natural catastrophes, like the storn, as being concocted by God in His effort to thwart the plans of Anse Bundren: "Again he looks up at the sky with that expression of dumb and brooding outrage and yet of vindication, as though he had expected no less."[2] Anse's pious "The Lord giveth"[3] has a hollow ring when the reader realizes the particular nature of Anse's piety. It is in marked contrast to the same comment made by the neighbors, with whom it has a ring of sincerity. The philosophical notion that is so often encountered in Faulkner, of the Player and the pawns, becomes farcical when applied to Anse. Actually this philosophical conception is an extremely pessimistic one, but Anse is such a willing pawn that the pessimism is replaced by ridiculousness. Anse is, of course, a pawn, but an amazingly unaware one. Anse's belief in his ultimate reward only heightens the ridiculousness: "Sometimes I

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[1] Ibid., pp. 390-391. [2] Ibid., p. 393.

[3] Ibid., p. 399.

wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above."[1] Anse sees his hardship on earth as a preparation for his heavenly reward: "I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He don't take some curious ways to show it, seems like."[2] Despite his boundless faith in a reward after death he is not above creating for himself a little comfort on earth: "But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will."[3]

Anse's pride in the independence of the family unit, when viewed in its total context, loses its potential meaningfulness. Actually he drains dry the milk of human kindness by exploiting it to further his own selfish aims and ambitions; but he refuses help when it is a sincere expression of neighborly compassion. His refusal of Samson's hospitality with the statement that he has "never been beholden to no man,"[4] only serves to irritate his would-be hosts. He refuses their aid when it is offered with deep sympathy, but demands it when it is not forthcoming. And each time he does refuse a friendly gesture, his family, in whose interest he should accept the help, suffers. Samson is outraged that they refuse his hospitality. His wife, on the other hand, is incensed that he should offer it. She sees in Anse's persevering struggle to get Addie to Jefferson, rather than burying

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[1] Ibid., p. 414. [2] Ibid., p. 415.

[3] Ibid., p. 415. [4] Ibid., p. 419.

her rotting corpse decently, an affront to all womanhood.

> "I just wish that you and him and all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country--"
> "Now, now," I says. "You're upset."
> "Don't you touch me!" she says. "Don't you touch me!"
> A man can't tell nothing about them. I lived with the same one fifteen years and I be durn if I can. And I imagined a lot of things coming up between us, but I be durn if I ever thought it would be a body four days dead and that a woman.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And then when I come back to the house, Rachel jumped on me because I wasn't there to make them come in to breakfast. You can't tell about them. Just about when you decide they mean one thing, I be durn if you not only haven't got to change your mind, like as not you got to take a raw-hiding for thinking they meant it.[1]

Wherever the Bundrens move, chaos reigns. When they pass through a town the stench of the corpse is so strong that the townspeople go around with handkerchiefs over their faces, and the sheriff orders them out of the town. Symbolically, then, the family, while exhibiting outward solidarity, is afflicted with a malignant disease emanating from a rotting core.

Darl is the most complex character in the story. He is very sensitive and has a keen insight. He is a lonely, tragic figure because he feels unwanted, and he senses the truth about Jewel and his mother. Cash's comment that Darl tried to burn up the value of Jewel's horse when he tried to

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[1] Ibid., p. 420.

destroy the coffin by fire has much more truth in it than Cash realizes. Vardaman says that Jewel's mother is a horse. And actually Jewel transfers to his horse his love for his mother. Darl could never reach his mother while she was alive; but dead, his attempt to burn her corpse is an unconscious cry for the love that was denied him.

Vardaman, who is crazy, recognizes the strain of madness in Darl. Their insanity gives them a kinship, and they form an alliance against the others with the body of their dead mother. Darl's insanity has important implications. Most men go through life without any insight into the world, or their existential relationship to it. It is this lack of insight into the tragedy of the human situation which makes life bearable. Most of Faulkner's characters who have such an insight are in some way destroyed by what they see--unless they build around themselves a hard wall of cynicism.

> Darl, the seer, the only lucid one of all these lost beings (who will, for this reason, sink into madness), feels in himself the encroachment of the frenzied world: "I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not."[1]

Darl's tragic awareness of the existential problem drives him insane. If man does not exist then all life is a diabolical dream; if he does exist, his cursed state is unbearable.

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[1]Rabi, op. cit., p. 121.

In his later novels love plays an important role in man's salvation. In As I Lay Dying the desperate need and search for love bring about the downfall of the family. Because he is neither loved nor needed, Anse picks up a trull in Jefferson. Darl's and Vardaman's need for mother-love drives them insane. Jewel, unable to rest secure in his love for his mother, leads a wild and aimless life. Addie is forced to sin in her desperate search for love. Dewey Dell is the victim of an illicit love affair. The Reverend Whitfield, unable to marry Addie, takes refuge in a hypocritical piety. Only Cash finds security in his love for his family.

Symbolically, chaos and disintegration flourish in a loveless world.

CHAPTER VI

SANCTUARY

In the new world, which has displaced the old, the accent is on mechanization. Human values tend to become de-emphasized and human activity is geared to the pace of the machine. The machine symbolizes uniformity and standardization. This in turn has a similar effect on man; the individual is lost in the mass product. The machine looks not backwards but keeps its eyes steadily on the present, while it moves inexorably into the future. The trouble with the modern South is that it has lost contact with its roots and its traditions, with a consequent loss of ethical values. I. H. Herron quotes Alan R. Thompson's statement that "Faulkner's view of life 'is consonant with that of many other moderns and represents, broadly speaking, a pessimistic scepticism to which morals and aspirations are merely customs and dreams, and the world is an inhuman mechanism.'"[1]

Faulkner's concept of time is closely linked to his concept of the machine: man is defeated because he is in

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[1]Ima Honaker Herron, The Small Town in American Literature (Durham, 1939), p. 420.

time; because the machine is not time-conscious, it is not subject to the life flow which time embraces. Sanctuary (1931) is a dramatically symbolical presentation of mechanical modernity. It is the picture of a society which is being destroyed by amoral modernism.

Two college students, Temple and Gowan, go to Lee Goodwin's to buy bootleg whisky. They are examples of the new generation, devoid of ethical consciousness. Because they have no moral foundations they act according to their instincts. Temple is frustrated by her fear of giving in to her sexual drive. Her stay at the bootleggers' takes on the quality of a nightmare because of her constant fear of being raped. Gowan is so ashamed of his inability to hold his liquor (all Southern gentlemen could hold their liquor) that he runs off and leaves Temple to extricate herself as best she can. Because Temple is incapable of conscious choice she finally has the choice taken out of her hands and loses her virginity to a corncob, wielded by the hand of the impotent, dehumanized Popeye, who then carts her off to a whorehouse in Memphis, where her sexual appetites are satiated by Popeye's stand-in, Red. But Popeye, when he learns that vicarious living is no substitute for the life flow, kills Red.

Lee Goodwin is tried for a murder committed by Popeye and is defended by the humane but ineffectual Horace Benbow. As a result of Temple's false testimony Goodwin is

burnt by a lynch mob. Temple goes to Europe to get away from it all but finds herself the victim of a soul-consuming ennui. Only in the later Faulkner is there hope for the Temple Drakes: she reappears in Requiem for a Nun married to Gowan; and they both learn that only through suffering lies salvation.

The main symbolical intent of the story is found in a study of Popeye:

> Popeye is one of several characters in Faulkner's novels who stand for something that might be called 'amoral Modernism,' considering that they are creatures of the time and have no social morality whatever; but it might also be called--more accurately, I think--the mechanical civilization that has invaded and partly conquered the South.[1]

The complete depravity of Popeye and many of the other characters is the result of living in a world which has no ethical consciousness--producing an extremely pessimistic world view.

> Faulkner's narratives combine impressive power of realistic treatment and implied acute criticism of society which produces such misfits and monstrosities. . .Faulkner has drawn attention to vicious social maladjustments in the South and their results in mangled personalities and lives. His confining his attention to the wrecks and depraved gives his work an effect of extreme morbidity and pessimism.[2]

Throughout his writings Faulkner's obsessive concentration on the derelicts in society emphasizes his pessimistic view of mankind. As I mentioned earlier, the pessimistic stress

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[1]Cowley, "Faulkner's Legend," p. 24.

[2]Halford E. Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion (Chicago, 1934), pp. 157-158.

is alleviated in later works by an emerging note of optimism. Sanctuary is the last of the novels in the Yoknapatawpha series of extreme pessimism.**except for Absalom, Absalom!.**

Popeye's mechanistic and amoral aspects are often magnified by his reactions to nature. Popeye is lord of the city, but a terrified child in the presence of nature. Horace Benbow suggests that they cut through the woods in order to reach the house sooner.

> "Through all them trees?" Popeye said. His hat jerked in a dull, vicious gleam in the twilight as he looked down the hill where the jungle already lay like a lake of ink. "Jesus Christ."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then something, a shadow shaped with speed, stooped at them and on, leaving a rush of air upon their very faces, on a soundless feathering of taut wings, and Benbow felt Popeye's whole body spring against him, clawing at his coat. "It's just an owl," Benbow said. "It's nothing but an owl."[1]

His very appearance suggests the antithesis of nature; he is described in mechanistic terms. It is the wild, uncontrollable and animalistic in nature which awes Popeye. When nature falls before the onslaught of the machine Popeye can cope with it. As Horace says to him: "I don't suppose you'd know a bird at all, without it was singing in a cage in a hotel lounge, or cost four dollars on a plate."[2]

There is such in Popeye's interior monologue to remind the reader of Jason. Both of them have barricaded

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[1]William Faulkner, Sanctuary ("The Modern Library"; New York, 1932), pp. 5-6. [2]Ibid., p. 3.

themselves behind a protective wall of cynicism. Each of them holds as suspect the worthiness and sincerity of peoples' motives; they see only evil and covetousness in the actions of their fellow-men. Neither of them has a healthy attitude toward love and marriage. They are victims of disintegrating families, with a consequent discontinuance of the family line. They consider the world a diabolical joke manipulated by a malignant God.

Popeye, of course, is impotent. All of the living juices have been squeezed out of this child of the machine age. The impulse is left but the wherewithal has been destroyed. The menacing atmosphere which he creates is frequently contrasted with his pitiful condition.

> Watching his face, she [Temple] saw it beginning to twitch and jerk like that of a child about to cry, and she heard him begin to make a whimpering sound. He gripped the top of the gown. She caught his wrists and began to toss from side to side, opening her mouth to scream. His hand clapped over her mouth, and gripping his wrist, the saliva drooling between his fingers, her body thrashing furiously from thigh to thigh, she saw him crouching beside the bed, his face wrung above his absent chin, his bluish lips protruding as though he were blowing upon hot soup, making a high whinnying sound like a horse.[1]

There is irony in the fact that Temple, with whom the sexual impulse is so strong should have Popeye as her first lover. As she is sitting in the car, whimpering and shaking, after her grotesque and horrible rape, Popeye is

[1] Ibid., p. 191.

forced several times to use physical force in order to keep her from becoming hysterical. His complete lack of humanity or comprehension of the human plight is summed up in his incredible understatement, "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"[1]

Certainly Popeye's background is greatly responsible for his condition and his warped outlook on life. His mother conceives him in union with a strike-breaker who not only deserts her but sends back postcards in which he laughs at her situation. It is ironic that Popeye, who was born mentally and physically deficient, was born on Christmas day. His mother not only has to bear alone the brunt of bringing up a retarded child, she also has to contend with her mother, who finally succeeds in burning up herself and the house in which they lived. His mother thought that Popeye too was consumed in the flames, and even when she knew differently she never got over the shock. And yet some of her motherly love left its imprint on her son. Once a year he would try to get back to California to visit her. Here is the only love he has ever known, but it was not enough to save his soul in this loveless world. In his early childhood his inability to understand love or nature is demonstrated by his sadistic destruction of two lovebirds, before running away from home.

Popeye's mechanism is successfully pointed up in his life of crime. He is not the passionate killer. He is more

[1] Ibid., p. 165.

like a thresher mowing down whatever trifling object gets in his way. He does not even obey the law of self-preservation. All life is cheap to him, his own as well as others. In fact, the very ridiculousness of the human situation is a source of constant amazement to him. The frequent reiteration of his cryptic "For Christ's sake," expresses his amazement at all human folly. When he is finally apprehended for his life of crime, the cosmic Joker is at his most ironic--Popeye is tried and convicted for a crime he didn't commit. Popeye, who has about as much interest in life as a machine has, appreciates the joke. He refuses the services of his Memphis lawyer; the joke is too good to be spoiled. When he is judged guilty and condemned to hang he can only remark in amazement, "Well, for Christ's sake."[1] Popeye's complete contempt for life never falters:

> On the night before, a minister came in.
> "Will you let me pray for you?"
> "Sure," Popeye said; "go ahead. Dont mind me."[2]

He expresses his final contempt the morning he stands on the gallows.

> Popeye began to jerk his neck forward in little sharp jerks. "Psssst!" he said, the sound cutting sharp into the drone of the minister's voice; "psssst!" The sheriff looked at him; he quit jerking his neck and stood rigid, as though he had an egg balanced on his head. "Fix my hair, Jack," he said.
> "Sure," the sheriff said. "I'll fix it for you"; springing the trap.[3]

[1] Ibid., p. 373. [2] Ibid., pp. 376-377. [3] Ibid., p. 378

Although Popeye actually commits the atrocity on Temple Drake, Gowan is almost as guilty as he. It was because of his moral cowardice and self-centered pride that Temple was placed in her predicament. And yet Gowan is a member of an old Southern family and has all the advantages which money and position can offer him. The rottenness that pervades the world affects the high and the low. Actually, in a comparison of Gowan and Popeye, the latter elicits more sympathy from the reader. He is amoral, unaware of right and wrong. Gowan does have an ethical consciousness but is too weak to do what he knows is right. Popeye holds his life cheap and flings it away with a flippant gesture in the face of the Joker: whereas Gowan cannot face life's stern demands, but crawls on his belly preserving his miserable being.

In contrast to these two is Horace Benbow. Horace is certainly one of the most sympathetic characters Faulkner ever created; he is a thoroughly good person. But his very goodness causes his downfall; he cannot cope with the evil which permeates the universe. And because of his ineffectual bumbling he is at least indirectly responsible for the death of an innocent man. Horace is not only defeated by the evil in life but by the female principle. In Sartoris, Horace, who is unable to find a healthy outlet for the great amount of love he has in his heart, falls before the cheaply voluptuous charms of Belle Mitchell, a person who had none of his

sensitivity. In Sanctuary he reappears, completely disillusioned with his marriage to Belle, but once again the victim of an unhealthy passion; this time for Belle's daughter. The first indication the reader has of his passion for little Belle is in the passage where he is telling Mrs. Goodwin of his scene with Belle after she had picked up a man on a train.

> I said, "Honey, if you found him on the train, he probably belongs to the railroad company. You cant take him from the railroad company; that's against the law, like the insulators on the poles."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I've found them in worse places than on the train."
> "I know," I said. "So have I. But you dont bring them home, you know. You just step over them and go on."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "What business is it of yours who comes to see me? You're not my father. You're just--just--"
> "What?" I said. "Just what?"
> "Tell Mother, then! Tell her. That's what you're going to do. Tell her!"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then she was saying "No! No!" and me holding her and she clinging to me. "I didn't mean that! Horace! Horace!" And I was smelling the slain flowers, the delicate dead flowers and tears, and then I saw her face in the mirror. There was a mirror behind her and another behind me, and she was watching herself in the one behind me, forgetting about the other one in which I could see her face, see her watching the back of my head with pure dissimulation. That's why nature is "she" and Progress is "he"; nature made the grape arbor, but Progress invented the mirror.[1]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

Horace frequently thinks of nature, particularly flowers, in terms of the female. In a later passage he describes the honeysuckle, with its sensual, cloying, sickeningly-sweet odor. Nature is in conspiracy with female flesh.

In an altercation with Horace, little Belle calls him a shrimp. The shrimp is an important symbol to Horace. He leaves his wife because she makes him bring shrimp home to her from work every Friday, and the bag always leaks. "Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk."[1] Horace's women have reduced him to an insignificant nonentity, and he feels that his life is being "measured out in coffee spoons." Horace is a Prufrock, the forerunner of the Reporter in Pylon. Nothing he does has any significance. Even to himself he is a pitiful creature. Jenny, the same one who had the penetrating insight in Sartoris, warns Horace that he better not run too hard against the halter, that it might not be fastened at the other end.[2] Without a woman's skirts to cling to, Horace would indeed be lost.

A further example of Horace's ineffectuality is seen in the encounter with Senator Snopes. Snopes is the crudest kind of cheap politician. He is a man without any principles, who would do anything for money. Horace takes delight in exposing him for the cheap fraud he is. When Snopes offers

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[1] Ibid., p. 19. [2] Ibid., p. 28.

to sell him information as to the whereabouts of Temple, Horace pays his price although he hates to soil his linen by coming in contact with such an unsavory person. Yet Snopes emerges triumphant over the defeated figure of Horace Benbow. The Snopeses, not the Benbows, are the rulers of the earth. In The Hamlet the Snopes tribe victimizes the community of Frenchman's Bend. A Snopes causes the death of Rosa Millard in The Unvanquished, and of Jenny in "There was a Queen."

When Horace takes up the defense of Lee Goodwin, his sister, as well as the entire community, believes that it is because of a desire for Lee's wife. Always, the worst interpretation is placed on men's actions. When Horace shelters Mrs. Goodwin in his house Narcissa demands that she leave. A group of church women then force her out of the town's one hotel. There are volumes of meaning in Horace's "Christians, Christians."[1] But he is too weak to fight back, to make a decisive blow for justice. For he understands, and even sympathizes with, his sister's belief in the importance of preserving the caste, although he realizes that it is riddled with rot. Also he is burdened with the guilty knowledge of his incestuous desire for his step-daughter. "Faulkner's people--burdened with guilt and madness--are spurred on, many of them, by desperate obsessions of ideal good. Over them hang the leaden skies of past glory and

[1] Ibid., p. 217.

present ruin. And pressing on them from all sides are the insoluble problems of caste and race."[1] Horace not only realizes frequently his powerlessness but the absurdity of his position as well. "The impassioned tension, which is Faulkner's strength, stems either from enslaving powerlessness. . .or from irreparable absurdity."[2]

The final irony for Horace occurs when Mrs. Goodwin is ready to offer herself to him as payment for his defense of her husband. She too had believed that that was the reason Horace had taken the case. "For a while longer he looked at her. 'Ah,' he said. 'O tempora! O Mores! O hell! Can you stupid mammals never believe that any man, every man--!'"[3]

Horace is finally defeated, and by the one he loved most--his sister. Her motivation was simply to get the whole dirty business over with as soon as possible and get Horace back to the people with whom he belonged. She goes to the district attorney and divulges information which was vital to Horace's defense. As he is being driven home after the trial he breaks down and cries. He realizes his impotence and his inability to exist as an individual, separated from

[1]Beach, op. cit., p. 142.

[2]Andre Malraux, "A Preface for Faulkner's Sanctuary," Yale French Studies, 1952, pp. 9-10.

[3]Sanctuary, p. 141.

the community. "Unless the controlling purposes of the individual are related in some fashion to those which other men assume, the individual is indeed isolated, and is forced to fall back on his own personal values, with all the liability to fanaticism and distortion."[1] Brooks accurately states, I believe, Horace's great defect. A man of great sensitivity and humanity, he was only too aware of the evils in society. He appointed himself champion of the innocent, using himself as a shield against society's cruel injustices; whereas he should have been working in society and through society in an attempt not to shield the victim but to try to change the conditions which make victims of the innocent. Horace, utterly defeated, refuses to fight with or against society any longer, and returns home to his wife.

Jenny functions in the same way she did in the earlier novel. Through her caustic and ironic comments the reader sees the action in its proper perspective. Always, her humanism shines through her irony. She is as unhappy as Horace about the state of mankind, but she manages to protect herself with her cynicism. Horace's cynicism is edged with his bitter awareness of his failure to set right the world. Jenny, the only one who sympathizes with Horace's attempt to protect the Goodwins, tells him that he will never conquer injustice. When Horace warns his sister not to

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[1]Cleanth Brooks, "Notes on Faulkner's Light in August," Harvard Advocate, p. 11.

divulge any of the information about his case that he has foolishly given them, Jenny says, "Do you think Narcissa'd want anybody to know that any of her folks could know people that would do anything as natural as make love or rob or steal?"[1] Jenny is wrong of course; to protect the family name Narcissa would go to any lengths (observable also in "There was a Queen"). Both Jenny and Horace are incapable of understanding the real depths that man can sink to.

When Horace gets caught up in his tragic awareness of the cruelty of man, Jenny, in her attempt to assuage Horace's bitterness, often places the whole thing in ironic perspective with a simple, acid comment.

> "This morning the Baptist minister took him for a text. Not only as a murderer, but as an adulterer; a polluter of the free Democratica-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha county. I gathered that his idea was that Goodwin and the woman should both be burned as sole example to that child; the child to be reared and taught the English language for the sole end of being taught that it was begot in sin by two people who suffered by fire for having begot it. Good God, can a man, a civilized man, seriously. . ."
> "They're just Baptists," Miss Jenny said.[2]

The rape of Temple Drake has very definite symbolic value:

> The violence of some of Faulkner's work is, according to Cowley, an example of the Freudian method turned backward, being full of sexual nightmares that are in reality social symbols. It is somehow connected in the author's mind with what he regards as the rape

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[1] Sanctuary, p. 141.

[2] Ibid., p. 151.

and corruption of the South.[1]

Temple is, speaking in psychological terms, rape-prone. Her hysterical running away from sex when it threatens her and her teasing of the college boys when it doesn't, are in reality a cover-up for her corrupting desires. Temple denies her natural instincts because she thinks of them as expression of filth. As a consequence, her normal sexual appetites become psychotic eroticisms. In the scene where Popeye is driving her away from the farmhouse after his attack on her, Temple's sexuality in contrast to nature (the natural) is presented symbolically.

> It was a bright, soft day, a wanton morning filled with that unbelievable soft radiance of May, ripe with a promise of noon and of heat, with high fat clouds like gobs of whipped cream floating lightly as reflections in a mirror, their shadows scudding sedately across the road. It had been a lavender spring. The fruit trees, the white one, had been in small leaf when the blooms matured; they had never attained that brilliant whiteness of last spring, and the dogwood had come into full bloom after the leaf also, in green retrograde before crescendo. But lilac and wisteria and redbud, even the shabby heaven-trees, had never been finer, fulgent with a burning scent blowing for a hundred yards along the vagrant air of April and May. The bougainvillea against the veranda would be large as basketballs and lightly poised as balloons, and looking vacantly and stupidly at the rushing roadside Temple began to scream.[2]

This is a most effective study in contrast. The description of nature is strongly suggestive of sex; one

[1]Warren, op. cit., p. 177.

[2]Sanctuary, p. 164.

thinks of the pagan fertility rites, of the god Pan sporting among the flowers as spring is being born. With Temple's scream the reader is brought back with a shock to the abnormal sexual experience Temple has just undergone. An experience which has nothing of the life-giving potency of the scene described; rather, an experience of impotent degeneracy. The theme of impotence runs strongly through the novel. "At the root of man's fears and aberrations lies a subconscious dread of impotence. Much horror and crime can be explained psychologically on the basis of the foregoing."[1] Campbell and Foster use the scene from Sanctuary quoted above to illustrate their contention that Faulkner's use of imagery often functions as a structural principle in the satirical passages. The natural sexual imagery is seen in ironic contrast to the rape of Temple.[2]

Temple's unhealthy attitude toward sex can be partially explained by her background. The Drakes, like the other planter-aristocratic families, have lost touch with humanity, dignity and aspiration. Temple is prohibited from having normal relations with a young man with whom she is in love because of the haughty, narcissistic pride of her father and brothers. When they find out about her love for Frank, a man they deem not worthy to consort with a Drake, they threaten

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[1]Lawrence S. Kubie, "William Faulkner's Sanctuary: An Analysis," SRL, XI (Oct. 20, 1934), 218.

[2]Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 37.

to kill him. Although Temple escapes her locked room and warns him of his danger, he shows a calm, steadfast courage in marked contrast to the corrupting emotionalism of the Drakes; he refuses to run, and goes to her father to ask for Temple's hand. "I got in front of Frank and father said 'Do you want it too?' and I tried to stay in front but Frank shoved me behind him and held me and father shot him and said 'Get down there and sup your dirt, you whore.'"[1] Temple, then, like Emily Grierson, because she was denied a normal, healthy pursuance of love, expresses her inhibited sexual drives in an excess of eroticism. Thus the irony goes deeper than Kubie indicates:

> The first part of the book is a troubled, and sometimes confused, nightmare, a nightmare which at moments is vivid and gripping, but which occasionally verges on slapstick and burlesque, with somersaults out of hay-lofts, rats that spring in the dark, dim figures that can be smelled in blackness, eyes that gleam in lightless corners, and so on. Yet all of this buffoonery is in subtle harmony with the sardonic and excrutiating denouement. For it is the uttermost limits of sour irony that this impudent, tantalizing and provocative young girl, who had played fast and loose with the men of her own world without ever giving them the gift she kept dangling in front of them should escape the relatively honest, erotic purposes of the healthy members of the band, only to taunt the impotent and tortured figure of Popeye into committing a criminal assault upon her by artificial means.[2]

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[1] Sanctuary, p. 71.

[2] Kubie, op. cit., p. 224.

In contrast to the descendants of the planter aristocracy, Temple and Narcissa, is the figure of Lee Goodwin's wife. Her loyalty and love for the worthless Lee Goodwin contrast favorably with the selfish egotism of Temple and Narcissa. Her life with Lee is one series of hardships after another. When she first takes up whoring, it is in Goodwin's behalf: "I lived two years in a single room, cooking over a gas-jet, because I promised him. I lied to him and made money to get him out of prison, and when I told him how I made it, he beat me."[1] All that Mrs. Goodwin has in life is a sickly baby who constantly hovers between life and death. She is grateful for the help of Horace Benbow but does not share in his optimism of winning an acquittal for her husband. She has gone through too much to have any illusions about the triumph of justice. She is a realistic person who faces life squarely, never running from the terrifying spectacle; nor does she don a protective armor of cynicism. There is a quality of naked endurance about her. Her endurability is similar to that of Lena Grove in Light in August. There is a difference however. Lena never has to undergo the horrors experienced by Mrs. Goodwin; and, more important, everyone is kind to Lena, whereas in the case of Mrs. Goodwin, society is continually persecuting her. The theme of humanism, is much more prominent in Light in August

[1] Sanctuary, p. 71.

than in Sanctuary or the previous novels.

The funeral episode of the gunman, Red, is extremely surrealistic in its humor. It is a parody on the orthodox burial of the dead. It is held in a bar and all of the pimps, whores, and criminals--friends of the dear departed--come to pay their tribute to the respected member of their community. The funeral service is conducted by the owner of the bar and the church music is furnished by the club's jazz band. There is some discussion as to what music should be played.

> "Let them play jazz," the second man said. "Never nobody liked dancing no better than Red."
> "No, no," the proprietor said. "Time Gene gets them all ginned up on free whisky, they'll start dancing. It'll look bad."
> "How about the Blue Danube?" the leader said.
> "No, no; don't play no blues, I tell you," the proprietor said. "There's a dead man in that bier."
> "That's not blues," the leader said.
> "What is it?" the second man said.
> "A waltz. Strauss."
> "A wop?" the second man said. "Like hell. Red was an American. You may not be, but he was. Don't you know anything American? Play I cant Give You Anything but Love, He always liked that."
> "And get them all to dancing?" the proprietor said. He glanced back at the tables, where the women were beginning to talk a little shrilly. "You better start off with Nearer, My God, To Thee," he said, "and sober them up some."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The orchestra played Nearer, My God, To Thee. The audience grew quiet. A woman in a red dress came in the door unsteadily. "Whoopee," she said, "so long, Red. He'll be in hell before I could even reach Little Rock."[1]

[1] Ibid., pp. 294-296.

The funeral comes to its final, catastrophic end when a drunken woman demands that the stiff be removed from the crap table so that the game can start. General pandemonium follows, in which the corpse tumbles off the crap table.

> When they raised the corpse the wreath came too, attached to him by a hidden end of a wire driven into his cheek. He had worn a cap which, tumbling off, exposed a small blue hole in the center of his forehead. It had been neatly plugged with wax and was painted, but the wax had been jarred out and lost. They couldn't find it, but by unfastening the snap in the peak, they could draw the cap down to his eyes.[1]

Throughout this scene the surrealistic effect is achieved by the emphasis on the macabre and the grotesque. Time and nature are a bitter travesty on man's spirituality and the modern wasteland of ritual that once was meaningful.

Although there is a suggestion of burlesque humor running through the funeral scene the dominant note is macabre. Most of the episodes occurring in Miss Reba's house of prostitution, on the other hand, fall into the category of the burlesque. Miss Reba, herself, is a wonderful portrayal of the whorehouse madam. She is huge, has a salty sense of humor, an intemperate disposition, a strong streak of sentimentality, and she likes her beer and gin even though they aggravate her asthmatic condition. One of the most hilarious scenes in the novel is the one where Miss Reba c...

[1] Ibid., p. 299.

entertains two of her women-friends after the funeral.

> They drank again, decorously, handling the tankards delicately, save Miss Reba who grasped hers as though it were a weapon, her other hand lost in her breast. She set her tankard down empty. "I get so dry, seems like," she said. "Won't you ladies have another?" They murmured, ceremoniously. "Minnie!" Miss Reba shouted.[1]

A little later:

> "Since we all been kind of tore up," she said, maybe I can prevail on you ladies to have a little sup of gin?"
> "No; reely," Miss Myrtle said.
> "Miss Reba's the perfect hostess," the thin one said. "How many times you heard me say that, Miss Myrtle?"
> "I wouldn't undertake to say, dearie," Miss Myrtle said.[2]

Their genteel conversation is continually punctuated by Miss Myrtle's ten year old nephew, Uncle Bud, who is always sneaking drinks of beer. She tells how embarrased she was the other day to be seen on the streets with a drunk boy.

They cannot be severe enough in their castigation of Popeye. Although they liked him when he showered money on the girls in the house and Miss Reba, they cannot forgive his killing Red. Because of this heinous crime all of his past actions are paraded forth for contemptuous review. Miss Reba decides that she is incensed over his action with the girls: "Me trying to run a respectable house, that's been running a shooting-gallery for twenty years, and him trying to turn it

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[1] Ibid., p. 303. [2] Ibid., pp. 304-305.

into a peep show."[1] Popeye kills Red, who had been fulfilling Popeye's function with Temple, while he watched, because Temple fell in love with him. The women wax indignant over such abnormal behavior:

> I says "I been running a house for twenty years, but this is the first time I ever had anthing like this going on in it. If you want to turn a stud in to your girl" I says "go somewhere else to do it. I aint going to have my house turned into no French joint."
>
> "The son of a bitch," Miss Lorraine said.
>
> "He'd ought to've had sense enough to got a ugly man," Miss Myrtle said. "Tempting us poor girls like that."
>
> "Men always expects us to resist temptation," Miss Lorraine said. She was sitting bolt upright like a school-teacher. "The lousy son of a bitch."
>
> . . . [Reba:] "Yes, sir, Minnie said the two of them would be nekkid as two snakes, and Popeye hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat took off, making a kind of whinnying sound."
>
> "Maybe he was cheering for them," Miss Lorraine said. "The lousy son of a bitch."[2]

Shortly after this Uncle Bud breaks up the party by getting sick on beer and vomiting all over the floor.

The implications evident in the conversation among the three madams embrace a much larger function when the extension is made. The three women, of course, represent the lowest dregs of humanity. And yet they sit around feeling self-righteous and virtuous because they have found a person on whom they can bend their scorn. They are oblivious of their own miserable characters in their castigation of another. There is little difference in their attitude than

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[1] Ibid., p. 307. [2] Ibid., pp. 311-312.

in the attitude of Narcissa and Gowan, for instance. They too receive sustenance and nourishment through their contempt for lesser beings. Thus Faulkner presents a whole society stratified by parasitic classes. Human inter-relationship is based on hatred, not love.

Miss Reba's whorehouse also acts as a microcosm with macrocosmic connotations. "The cathouse. . .is a good symbol of the world Faulkner is castigating, a world in which money and self-interest preclude or destroy affection or love, and a world in which sex writhes like 'cold smoke.'"[1]

The story ends with Temple in Europe recuperating from the horror of her past experiences. But of course she cannot escape. She is wilting away, caught in the grip of a destructive ennui:

> Temple yawned behind her hand, then she took out a compact and opened it upon a face in miniature sullen and discontented and sad. . .She closed the compact and from beneath her smart new hat she seemed to follow with her eyes the waves of music, to dissolve into the dying brasses, across the pool and the opposite semicircle of trees where at sombre intervals the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused, and on into the sky lying prone and vanquished in the embrace of the season of rain and death.[2]

Robert Coughlan says:

> Thus the land itself, the living earth, is hero, God, and protagonist in Faulkner's work as a whole. "People don't own land," one of his characters says. "It's the land that owns the people." If Faulkner has a philosophy, this may be its distillation; although it

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[1]William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis, 1954), p. 64.

[2]Sanctuary, pp. 379-380.

> is less a philosophy than a mystique, a religious revelation. As such it is beyond definition and beyond criticism.[1]

Coughlan is correct when he writes of Faulkner's mystical feeling for the land. But he mentions only one side of the equation; there is also the black side. It is true that the land, particularly in his later works, often has a calming effect on the troubled souls of its trespassers. This was first introduced, as previously mentioned, in Sartoris when young Bayard is for a time drawn by the land from his flight to self-destruction. But the land can also have an opposite effect; it wreaks vengeance on mankind for his exploitation of the land. There is a mystical quality about the land which can influence man for good or evil.

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[1]Robert Coughlan, The Private World of William Faulkner (New York, 1954), p. 91.

CHAPTER VII

LIGHT IN AUGUST

This novel plays an important part in the development of Faulkner's world view, in its gradual movement from extreme pessimism to a limited optimism. In his past novels characters with ethical values have occasionally made an appearance, but they have always been defeated. But in Light in August (1932) although goodness is surrounded by evil it is not stamped out.

The story centers around the tragic life of Joe Christmas; it is a study in isolation. Since Christmas has a mixture of Negro and white blood, he is unable to establish an identity with either group. He is unable to find a place in any community. Lena Grove, however, who has come from Alabama in search of her seducer, is accepted into the community wherever she goes.

> The various characters who act and suffer in this novel are all people outside the community, and whatever their special psychological isolation, it is given objective reference and dramatic meaning by their alienation from the community in which they live or into which they have come.[1]

[1]Brooks, op. cit., p. 10.

Whereas Joe Christmas brings out the worst in people, Lena Grove brings out the best. The community senses the antagonism of the outcast, Joe Christmas, just as it understands that Lena is one of them. It is this community feeling that Faulkner finds most encouraging in the South. The planter aristocracy has lost it, but it is still strong among the poor whites in rural areas.

The main characters in the story are Joe Christmas, Lena Grove, Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower, and Byron Bunch. Bunch is the counterpart of Lena. Through a sense of duty he helps Lena find Brown, her seducer. He even goes to the extent of trying to stop Brown from running a second time. But after he has done all he can and realizes that Brown is never going to marry Lena, he then feels that he may declare his love to Lena.

Christmas' life consists of moving from one place where he is not wanted to another place where he is not wanted. He finally dies, the victim of a horrible mutilation.

Joanna Burden is a Northerner who feels compelled to carry on her father's and grandfather's work of liberating the Negro. She is finally killed by her lover, Christmas, when she tries to convert him. She lives isolated in a large house on the edge of the community.

The Reverend Hightower comes to Jefferson to try to find the glorious past of his grandfather. He refuses to face the realities of the present, living only in his dreams

of the past. He too is isolated from the community.

In their discussion of Light in August James Linn and Houghton Taylor make much of the fact that Lena and Byron are presented straightforwardly, whereas the other three are handled by indirection. Only very gradually does the reader learn enough about Christmas, Joanna, and Hightower to understand what motivates them.

> In short, the author has used for these three characters methods of deliberate complication and mystification. It is as though he meant us to feel that human motives are mysterious at best--as though he desired not to clear up the mystery, not to reduce it to a clear set of principles, but rather to bring it out with all possible force so that we might be left with an impression of the incongruity and confusion of the human soul.[1]

This observation seems particularly valid. Most of Faulkner's good characters are relatively uncomplex. But his evil ones, or those who are doomed, symbolize the working out of dark and mysterious forces. The ways of evil are devious, those of goodness, brightly illuminated. Very little of the past of Lena and Byron is given the reader. Their past, like their present and future, is an open book. But with the other three Faulkner has not only explored their past lives, but the lives of those from whom they sprang. Faulkner's preoccupation with time is clearly manifested in his treatment of Christmas, Hightower and Joanna: to understand the present one must see it in terms of the past. The reader

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[1]James Weber Linn and Houghton Wells Taylor, A Foreword to Fiction (New York, 1935), p. 149.

learns that the past of each of these three characters plays an important formulative function in the shaping of their tragic destinies.

In his recent book William Van O'Conner gives an interesting and penetrating analysis of the force behind the tragic lives of the three main characters: "this novel at center is a probing into the terrible excesses of the Calvinist spirit."[1] Byron and Lena survive because they do not succumb to this force. "Joanna's helping the Negro is a duty undertaken, but. . .it is abstract and impersonal. She acts not out of sympathy for other human beings but out of an obligation to carry out God's design in a depraved world."[2] Joe Christmas is continually persecuted, in the name of Christianity. In his early childhood he learns the rigors of religious bigotry from his foster father, McEachern. Instead of running from the knowledge and turning to the love of his foster mother he recognizes it as the ruling force and spends his life battling it, and eventually dying by it. Hightower's religious fervor is all mixed up with the glorious past of his grandfather's generation; but his zealousness saps all of his sexual energy, causing his wife to commit suicide. Lena Grove "belongs among those who are fallible but who live in 'tranquil obedience. . .to the good earth.' She is a minor earth goddess. Harshness of spirit and rigidity of principle

[1] O'Connor, op. cit., p. 72. [2] Ibid., p. 76.

are completely foreign to her."[1] Although Byron is to a large extent governed by the Protestant tradition, he is free of its excesses. Also he has an ironic humor, usually directed at himself, which prevents him from becoming an instrument of righteous indignation.

Christmas first appears in the story when he hires on as workman in a sawmill. The first words he speaks demonstrate his bitter pride. Although he is broke and has not eaten in some time, when one of the men offers to share his lunch with him he retorts: "I ain't hungry. Keep your muck."[2] His intense bitterness creates the impression of a boiler about to burst. So much pent-up fury is bound to break forth, with disastrous results. When he takes on the insensitive and loquacious Brown (or Burch) as a partner in his bootlegging the reader knows that something is going to happen. Every time Brown opens his mouth it is as if a branding iron had been placed on Christmas' exposed nerve ends. Several times Christmas almost kills Brown. Once when he is holding Brown down he thinks, "Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something."[3] Always Christmas is aware of the doom and damnation which encompass him.

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[1] Ibid., p. 83.

[2] William Faulkner, Light in August (New York, 1932), p. 31.

[3] Ibid., p. 97.

> Thus one feels--particularly about his most thoroughly realized characters, like Jason Compson and Joe Christmas--that their suffering and their thinking incorporate the very momentum of life. It is as if their lives were thinking for them. All through the greater part of Light in August one seems to see Joe Christmas running, constantly running ahead on the public highway, yet with his face turned to us, amazed that everything he has expected so long should finally be happening to him--even as he runs. All through the great monologue of Jason Compson in The Sound and the Fury one sees him rushing about streets, or hunting his niece from his automobile, yet investing each terrible moment with this greater frightfulness--the fact that his whole life is present in his ordeal, and that he should have expected life to come to a crisis just so, for he has really spent his life thinking it over.
>
> I believe it is this expectancy, this forehand knowledge they bear about with them through each moment of their lives, that gives Faulkner's people that peculiar tension of watching and listening.[1]

A psychologist would probably say that Joe Christmas is a defensive psychotic. Because of the treachery he experienced in his contact with people as a child and youth he views all human kindness as suspect. Either the kindness masks falseness or it is offered in an attempt to emasculate his individuality. He furiously rejects the love of Mrs. McEachern. When she smuggles a meal into his room after he had received a severe beating from Mr. McEachern he dumps the food on the floor. He refuses to let her intrude on his manhood. He is subsconsciously fighting a fear of impotence. He has learned that life consists of one trial after another. If he were to give in to love and affection he would be admitting that he couldn't take it. He received pleasure from

[1]Alfred Kazin, "Faulkner's Vision of Human Integrity," Harvard Advocate, p. 29.

his liaison with Joanna, but every time she tried to possess him he would furiously repudiate her. Spiritual and mental repudiation was not sufficient, he must do it physically. In one scene he took the dinner she had prepared for him and hurled the dishes and food against the wall--asserting his independence. When she sewed buttons on his clothes he would take out "his pocket knife and with the cold and bloodless deliberation of a surgeon he would cut off the buttons which she had just replaced."[1] All Joe ever wanted was to be left alone, to be left in peace. The foreknowledge that he was one day going to do something terrible is realized when he kills Joanna Burden. "All I wanted was peace thinking, 'She ought not to started praying over me.'"[2]

It is appropriate that Joe's first love should be for a prostitute--symbolizing the impossibility of a rich and rewarding love for the lost souls that roam the earth in search of companionship, seldom finding it, rejecting it if they do. His introduction into the world of man and woman is shocking and bitter. He is terrified when he learns of menstruation. He sees in it a spoliation of love and affection. As soon as he adjusts to this shocking discovery he learns that Bobbie is a prostitute. Even this he learns to accept. The final disillusionment occurs when Bobbie, incensed at McEachern's calling her a harlot and a Jezebel, screams dirty

[1] Light in August, p. 100.

[2] Ibid., p. 104.

nigger at him and allows her companions to beat him up. After this he travels from town to town and from whorehouse to whorehouse, paying for his love, when he can't get it free (by telling the whores that he is a Negro, to get them to refuse his money). The road leads eventually to Joanna Burden's door where he finds an ironic fulfillment of his role as lover, ending in catastrophe.

In the early days of their love Joanna was wanton eroticism. Joe had released a spring in her, allowing her sex drive, which had become almost atrophied, to surge forth. She is like a young school girl with her first love, writing him notes and putting them in a secret place, and forcing him to come to her through a window. But these school girl antics take on a different color when seen in conjunction with her depravity.

> Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania. . . She would be wild then, in the close, breathing half-dark without talk, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!"[1]

Christmas realizes that their relationship is a diseased one, but his sense of fatality will not permit him to leave. They are bound together by the curse which hangs over the modern South, inherited from a "pre-war social system and

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[1] Ibid., p. 245.

ideology."[1] Joanna feels compelled to emancipate the Negro, sensing all along that she is doomed to the same fate of her brother and grandfather. It is ironically appropriate that Christmas should be the instrument of her doom, not only because he is her lover but because his mixed blood symbolizes the impossibility of Joanna's goal--integration of black and white.

Joanna is the victim of conflicting passions: a strong sex urge versus a powerful religious Puritanism. "Don't make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while."[2] Perhaps if they had married and had children Joanna would have experienced a certain degree of tranquillity. But as always, Christmas runs from the thought of sharing himself with another: "If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be."[3] He is afraid that marriage with Joanna would mean a lessening in the function of his ego; when in reality his ego (in terms of Freud) has never functioned as a positive force. His life has been determined by his environment working in conjunction with the cosmic Joker. Joe Christmas spends his life trying to escape his Negro blood, or else flinging it in the teeth of society. By attempting to find a purity in whiteness he rejects his own humanity. (Joe Christmas is much like Ahab

[1]Beach, op. cit., p. 135. [2]Light in August, p. 250.
[3]Ibid., pp. 250-251.

in this respect.) "His white blood (conscious principle) is constantly in conflict with his Negro blood (human feeling), and this conflict is one of Faulkner's recurrent themes."[1]

> Christmas's Negro and white blood represent the dual nature, human and divine, of Christ, and it is the hypostatic union of the two bloods, of the conscious principle and the human feeling, which is man. The failure of this fusion in modern society is the tragedy of Joe Christmas.[2]

Faulkner employs a clever technique in his handling of Joe Christmas. For three quarters of the book the account of his life is told in the past tense, thus allowing the reader to experience a certain degree of distance between himself and the mounting tension with which Christmas approaches his inevitable doom. But after he murders Joanna Burden his subsequent actions (except when described through the point-of-view of another character; for instance, Percy Grimm, the instrument of fate who butchers Joe Christmas) are described in the present tense. Hence the distance between the reader and the unfolding tragedy is lessened and he is more aware than ever of the electrifying tension in which Christmas moves. Analogically, it is like watching an approaching train which is bearing down on a stalled car. Only at the last moment does the observer realize that the occupant of the car waited too long to abandon it. Also, the shift in viewpoint moves from a certain impersonality to

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[1] Jerome Gavin, "Light in August: The Act of Involvement," Harvard Advocate, p. 35.

[2] Ibid., p. 37.

personality. Christmas' tragedy is symbolic and representative, yet at the same time it is personal and individual. It is necessary that the reader see it in its totality.

Propelled by the law of self-preservation Christmas for several days successfully eludes his hunters. But one day in mid-flight he realizes that he is tired of running and tired of living; he wishes to give himself up. But the fates have decreed otherwise:

> They all want me to be captured, and then when I come up ready to say Here I am Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs they all run away. Like there is a rule to catch me by, and to capture me that way would not be like the rule says.[1]

He must act out his role to the bitter end that the Player has decreed for him. To stop running would be to violate the pattern set up for him. All of his life he has run, and yet he has arrived at no destination: "I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo."[2] He might have added, what society has done to him. His flight is destinationless; he is not running toward something but away from something: his past, his blood, and his doom. These he can never escape, they keep pace with him. There is a prophetic ring in the words of Christmas' grandfather, the fanatic religious bigot who considers himself to be the instrument of God's will, when, having deposited the infant in an

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[1] Light in August, p. 319. [2] Ibid., p. 321.

orphanage, he tells his wife: "He is dead to you and to me and to God and to all God's world forever and ever more."[1] When his grandmother pleads with Hightower to stand false alibi for Christmas she says that if he could have one day when everyone's hand was not turned against him, one day in which the world would release him from bondage, she would then be willing for inexorable justice to claim him. But he is not to be granted that one day; there is no day of rest for the weary and harrassed pawns.

Whereas Joe Christmas tries to escape the past, the Reverend Hightower tries to escape to the past: "Seeing little hope in the future, he turns to the past, where he hopes to discover a legendary and recurrent pattern that will illuminate and lend dignity to the world about him."[2] The strong Calvinist strain that explains to a great extent the curse which hangs over the heads of Joanna and Christmas is also evident in the background of Hightower. His father was a stern religionist who believed in the innate depravity of man resulting from original sin. But of counteracting influence is the romantic and glamorous career of his grandfather, who said on first viewing his son's wife:

> "I reckon you'll do". . .His eyes were bluff and bold, but kind. "All the sanctimonious cuss wants anyway is somebody that can sing alto out of a Presbyterian hymnbook, where even the good Lord

[1] Ibid., p. 361.

[2] Cowley, "Faulkner's Legend," p. 27.

Himself couldn't squeeze in any music."[1]

Hightower is influenced by both men and attempts to reconcile the two seemingly opposing philosophies.

> It was as if he couldn't get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping horse untangled from each other, even in a pulpit. . .And how sometimes she [his wife] would not even come to church, where her own husband was preaching, even on Sunday, and they would look at him and wonder if he even knew that she was not there, if he had not even forgot that he ever had a wife, up there in the pulpit with his hands flying around him and the dogma he was supposed to preach all full of galloping cavalry and defeat and glory just as when he tried to tell them on the street about the galloping horses, it in turn would get all mixed up with absolution and choirs of martial seraphim.[2]

As Hightower's life becomes more and more tragic he retires further into the past, until it is as if he died on that day his grandfather was killed. On the conscious level he clings to his rigorous negation of the flesh and glorification of the soul. Because he lives so much in the past, denying the validity of the present, and because he glorifies the soul while spurning the flesh, he is unable to satisfy his wife, who seeks her sex with other men, and finally kills herself. The concept of impotence has important symbolical value in much of Faulkner's fiction. It functions with the theme of isolation and withdrawal. Much of the action in his fiction is expressed in terms of polarity. Most of his characters are studies in extremes: they live too much in the past or they

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[1] Light in August, p. 446.

[2] Ibid., pp. 55-57.

ignore the past and live only in the present; they become religious fanatics or they completely abjure the spirit; they are victims of a compulsive sex drive or they turn from sex, in disgust; they fling themselves to destruction or they exist, haunted by a fear of death and the unknown.

The decay which embodied Miss Emily ("A Rose for Emily") is also evidenced in the person and surroundings of the Reverend Hightower:

> As soon as Byron enters the house he feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and tauten with the thick smell of the stale, mankept house. And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing--that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed--is well nigh overpowering.[1]

Both Miss Emily and Hightower are isolated from the community and are living in the past. Hightower attempts, and almost succeeds, to inculcate within Byron a sense of sin and guilt because of his love for Lena. But Byron is a healthy person, and although he feels very inferior before Hightower's erudition and piety, he knows that his love for Lena is clean and wholesome. And thus he escapes the pit in which Hightower would lead him. Hightower, although he has a great and abiding sympathy for "poor mankind," never understands the enormity of his crime against his wife. After Byron leaves in search of love, uncorrupted by the Reverend's preaching, Hightower turns to his love:

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[1] Ibid., p. 282.

> It is Tennyson. It is dogeared. He has had it ever since the seminary. He sits beneath the lamp and opens it. It does not take long. Soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand.[1]

Just as Hightower fails his wife and Byron in their hour of need, so he fails Joe Christmas in his hour of need. He screams that he won't give him an alibi. He wants peace! peace! Just before Christmas' death, however, his humanitarian instinct comes to the fore and he cries to the grim executioner that he was with Christmas the night of the murder. But too late; always, his lack of decisive action emphasizes his ineffectuality. There is a sort of mystical bond between Hightower and Christmas that is never explained and is only vaguely felt in the novel. But Hightower takes an unusual interest in Christmas' tragedy, and Christmas is drawn by some inner compulsion to seek his final refuge in Hightower's house. It probably represents, symbolically, the fatal attraction of opposites: the one who lives in the past, the other who runs from the past. The answer, if there is one, must lie somewhere in between. And in later works Faulkner's characters who emerge triumphant (although this is perhaps too strong a word) are those who have not lost a sense of the past but understand it as it bears on the present.

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[1] Ibid., p. 301.

Whenever Hightower does venture into the world of present reality he finds it disillusioning:

> "So this is love. I see. I was wrong about it too," thinking as he had thought before and would think again and as every other man has thought: how fake the most profound book turns out to be when applied to life.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Not once since then has he seen the desperation naked in her face. But neither had he seen passion again. And he thought quietly, without much surprise and perhaps without hurt: I see. That's the way it is. Marriage. Yes. I see now.[1]

And so he leaves reality and escapes to the world of illusion, to the glorious and romantic past: "And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed.[2] The vision which he has seen so often, and which has ruined his life, comes to him most forcefully when he is dying:

> He hears above his heart the thunder increase, myriad and drumming. Like a long sighing of wind in trees it begins, then they sweep into sight, borne now upon a cloud of phantom dust. They rush past, forward-leaning in the saddles, with brandished arms, beneath whipping ribbons from slanted and eager lances; with tumult and soundless yelling they sweep past like a tide whose crest is jagged with the wild head of horses and the brandished arms of men like the crater of the world in explosion. They rush past, are gone; the dust swirls skyward sucking, fades away into the night which has fully come. Yet, leaning forward in the window, his bandaged head huge and without depth upon the twin blobs of his hands upon the ledge, it seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves.[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 255-257. [2] Ibid., p. 465.
[3] Ibid., pp. 466-467.

"Hightower dies, ironically during a dream of glorious and heroic violence, mainly from the shock of having witnessed a scene of most inglorious and horrible violence."[1]

The comic subplot of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch furnishes a much needed release from the terrific tension in the Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower sections of the novel. But it functions more importantly than as mere comic relief.

> They are a part of the complexity of the community, and by what they are and the way they act they insinuate powerfully what is wrong with the community . . .Neither she nor Byron Bunch is the intelligent refractor, in Henry James' terms, of the action; it is by being what they are that they imply a community.[2]

Hightower allows the tradition of the past to destroy him; Christmas and Joanna are outside the tradition. That which was admirable in the tradition is being preserved by the lowly of the earth.

Both Lena and Byron escape the excessive extremes of the other three. They manage to roll with life, so to speak. Their abiding humor saves them from total involvement. (None of the other three were able to view their lives and the world around them with humorous detachment.) Lena is able to view her illegitimate pregnancy with a bovine acceptance. She moves at an early age into the home of her brother

> with his labor-and childridden wife. For almost half of every year the sister-in-law was either

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[1]Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 72.

[2]O'Connor, op. cit., p. 82.

> lying in or recovering. During this tine Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. Later she told herself, "I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself."[1]

She takes her condition in stride.

> She had lived there eight years before she opened the window for the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, "That's just my luck."[2]

When she runs away from her brother's home she is so pregnant that she can hardly climb over the sill. She remarks sardonically that if it had been that difficult before, she wouldn't be in her present condition now.

The journey motif, with its archetypal symbolism, is always prominent in Faulkner's works. Whereas Christmas' journey is a torturous and friendless one, Lena is continually befriended on hers. The men are kind and courteous, the women gruff and somewhat hostile; but both proffer aid. When Armstid gives her a lift in his wagon and takes her to his home for a night's lodging he knows that he is going to take a beating from his wife: "'Yes,' he thinks with sardonic ruefulness, turning the mules into the open gate, 'I know exactly what she is going to say. I reckon I know exactly.'"[3] And of course he is right: "'You men,' she says, 'You durn men.'"[4] Mrs. Armstid is ruthless in her

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[1]Light in August, p. 3. [2]Ibid., p. 3

[3]Ibid., p. 12. [4]Ibid., p. 14.

cross-examination of Lena, forcing her to admit that she is not married.

> Lena is looking down now, as though watching her hands upon her lap. Her voice is quiet, dogged. Yet it is serene. "I dont reckon I need any promise from Lucas. It just happened unfortunate so, that he had to go away. His plans just never worked out right for him to come back for me like he aimed to. I reckon me and him didn't need to make word promises. When he found out that night that he would have to go, he---"
>
> "Found out what night? The night you told him about that chap?"[1]

And yet she breaks open their bank to give the change to Lena.

Although Lena's journey is in pursuit of her missing lover, she takes great delight in the journey itself. "'My, my,' she says; 'here I aint been on the road but four weeks, and now I am in Jefferson already. My, my. A body does get around.'"[2]

Byron does everything in his power to bring Lena and Burch together even though he is very much in love with Lena all the time that he is trying to get her married to another man:

> I took care of his woman for him and I borned his child for him. And now there is one more thing I can do for him. I cant marry them, because I aint a minister. And I may not catch him, because he's got a start on me. And I may not can whip him if I do, because he is bigger than me. But I can try it. I can try to do it.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 15. [2] Ibid., p. 26.

[3] Ibid., p. 403.

He is so humble in his goodness that he cannot conceive that she could possibly return his love.

The novel opens with the Lena--Byron section and it also closes with it. The tragic lives in the counterpoint sections are consumed in the flames of frustrated despair; whereas the lives of Lena and Byron have an endurance. Their journey is without destination but they are content to move with the flow of life.

Faulkner employs one of his favorite devices in the presentation of the windup of the Lena-Byron story. The information comes to the reader via a minor point-of-view character. The author achieves a fine comic effect by allowing the incidents to be interpreted by the husband as he tells his wife, while they lie in bed, his version of the scene. And also the world of the husband and wife is continually intruding into the world of the main action. The husband, who gave Lena, Byron and the baby a lift in his truck tells how he first discovered that they weren't married: Byron insists that Lena and the child sleep in the truck and that he will sleep on the ground, although there is plenty of room in the wagon for all three of them. Later that night, while the husband feigned sleep, Byron sneaks into the wagon.

"What was it he aimed to do? the wife says.

"You wait till I come to that part. Maybe I'll

show you, too."[1]

Sometime later his wife still wants to know why Byron sneaked into the wagon:

"What was it? the wife says.

"I just showed you once. You aint ready to be showed again, are you.?

"I reckon I dont mind if you dont."[2]

He explains to his wife that they weren't married. But he teases her along about his other great discovery:

"Found out what? What it was he wanted to do?

"Not right then. I reckon she had a little more patience than you."[3]

The husband relates what he was thinking when Byron sneaked into the wagon. He was pulling for him but he didn't know what action he should take if she started hollering.

> "But I ought not to worried. I ought to have known that from the first look I'd taken at her and at him."
>
> I reckon the reason you knew you never had to worry was that you had already found out just what she would do in a case like that the wife says.
>
> Sho the husband says. I didn't aim for you to find that out. Yes, sir. I thought I covered my tracks this time.[4]

He finally recounts the seduction scene to his wife:

> "Why, Mr. Bunch. Aint you ashamed. You might have woke the baby, too." Then he come out the back door of the truck. Not fast, and not climbing down on his own legs at all, I be dog if I dont believe she picked him up and set him back outside on the ground like she would that baby if it had

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[1] Ibid., p. 472. [2] Ibid., p. 472.

[3] Ibid., p. 474. [4] Ibid., p. 476.

> been about six years old, say, and she says, "You go and lay down now, and get some sleep. We got another fur piece to go tomorrow."
>
> Well, I was downright ashamed to look at him, to let him know that any human man had seen and heard what happened. I be dog if I didn't want to find a hole and crawl into it with him. I did for a fact. And him standing there where she had set him down good now and I couldn't hardly see him at all. But I knew about how I would have been standing and feeling if I was him. And that would have been with my head bowed, waiting for the Judge to say, "Take him out of here and hang him quick."[1]

The next day, much to the husband's dismay, Byron disappears. But Lena takes it with her usual equanimity. As they drive around a bend in the road there Byron is waiting for them: "'I done come too far now,' he says. 'I be dog if I'm going to quit now.'"[2]

The husband analyzes the incident for his wife: he believes that Lena was enjoying herself too much traveling about the countryside to settle down just yet. When she had seen a bit more of the world she would then marry Byron. "My, my. A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee."[3]

Lena and Byron are pawns being moved on the chessboard no less than are Miss Burden, Hightower, and Christmas. Perhaps it is because they do not fight their fate that they are permitted a certain amount of happiness.

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[1] Ibid., p. 477. [2] Ibid., p. 479. [3] Ibid., p. 480.

CHAPTER VIII

PYLON

With the writing of Pylon (1935) Faulkner moves out of Yoknapatawpha although he is still writing about the doomed and the damned. Like Soldiers' Pay this is a story of the lost generation. The central characters accept none of society's values, living by their own peculiar code. They are continually trying to escape life's constrictiveness. The ineffectiveness of the reporter (a Prufrock type of character, except that he does not have Prufrock's awareness) is a dramatic statement that meaning and significance cannot be found in the meaninglessness of the post-war society. There is, however, little attempt in the novel to examine the society of the lost generation. But the reader is constantly aware that the central characters are moving in a society where values are determined by money and the machine.

Pylon is a story of speed. Faulkner stated that he wanted to capture in this novel the very feel of terrific motion. Although he is not completely successful, he does in many passages capture the feeling of terrific speed. The humor, too, is hard, fast and brutal.

The main action of the novel takes place at an air

meet during carnival time in New Valois (New Orleans). The forced and artificial gaiety of the mardi gras symbolizes the frantic escape from the boring, hum-drum existence that is man's lot on earth; while in the foreground the central characters try to escape the ennui that is life, through speed. Shumann, Jack, Laverne, and their child go from air meet to air meet eking out a precarious living by racing and stunting. Both Shumann and Jack are in love with Laverne, who returns their love equally, sharing their beds alternately. But when she gets pregnant they roll dice to see who will marry her and Shuman wins, although they still continue to share in her affections.

The reporter first runs across them when he hears their boy being teased about who his old man is. The reporter is both fascinated and horrified by the situation. When he falls in love with Laverne he becomes a dedicated but hopeless follower, doing everything in his power to aid all four of them. Much that is tragic about the reporter lies in his desire and need to love and be loved, and his inability to fulfill his need. Either his aid is rejected or accepted contemptuously, or, if accepted gratefully, it leads to disaster. Realizing the impossibility of winning Laverne's love, he tries to help her and those she loves, but he succeeds only in making her hate him.

When Shumann, the only character who really comes to life, is killed, Jack and Laverne leave the boy with Shumann's

father and continue their mad race against life. The reporter, destroyed by an unconsummated love, promises to send the body home when it is recovered from the lake, pre-paid.

Some of the action is related by Jiggs, an alcoholic mechanic who follows the air meets with Jack and the Shumanns. Jiggs is a vagabond, with no roots or ties. Most of the humor is supplied by the bitterly cynical comments of the thoroughly disillusioned mechanic.

> "Your first visit down here?" the driver said. "Where you from?"
> "Anywhere," Jiggs said. "The place I'm staying away from right now is Kansas."
> "Family there, huh?"
> "Yair. I got two kids there; I guess I still got the wife too."
> "So you pulled out."
> "Yair. Jesus, I couldn't even keep back enough to have my shoes half soled. Everytime I did a job her or the sheriff would catch the guy and get the money before I could tell him I was through; I would make a parachute jump and one of them would have the jack and be on the way back to town before I even pulled the ripcord."[1]

The reporter receives his information about the Shumanns and Jack from Jiggs. He listens with mounting amazement as the incredible tale unfolds. His imagination catches fire, and his reportorial instinct causes him to attach himself to the Shumanns. Before long he is caught in the grip of a hopeless and unrewarding love. When the reporter tells his editor his incredible tale he realizes that they are trying to escape their human limitations:

[1]William Faulkner, Pylon (New York, 1935), p. 16.

> Because they aint human like us, they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn't want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight and they dont even holler in the fire; crash one and it aint even blood when you haul him out: it's cylinder oil the same as in the crankcase.[1]

The reporter intuitively understands that they dare not stop in their headlong flight. If they should stop, humanity might catch up with them, which they could not face. They race to keep ahead of the human condition, to ignore its retarding influences. They live on speed and excitement. They shun aloneness and silence. There is much of the Hemingway code to be found in Pylon. Hemingway's characters live dangerously, with emphasis on the physical. They too dread the penetrating silences and the long nights. Yet the characters of both authors live by a code: courage and restraint. But the characters in Pylon go further than any of the Hemingway characters: they hold in complete despair and bitter contempt the standards and values of society. There is a bitterness in Pylon that Hemingway, in his blackest hours, never approximated.

Humor is often used by Faulkner to give to his more sympathetic characters human dimensions. His characters who are doomed and damned are often described as humorless. Thus were old Bayard and his son contrasted. So too, Byron Bunch and Joe Christmas. When Shumann is first introduced to the reporter he (Shumann) looked at him with an "open and fatal

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[1] Ibid., p. 45.

humorlessness."[1] These characters do not find life humorous; life is hard, treacherous and bitter. The only humor in life is to regard it as a diabolical joke. Thus Mr. Compson was able to derive a certain sardonic satisfaction out of the absurd spectacle. But he was able to view the spectacle with a certain amount of detachment, while young Bayard, Joe Christmas, and Robert Shumann were not. Jiggs manages a certain aesthetic distance, which enables him to view life with a certain perspective. Always on the fringe, he is never sucked into the dynamo which ensnares the Shumanns and the reporter. Jiggs, then, despite his rough exterior and his flippant dismissal of human values, is actually a member of the human race. He is essentially a humanitarian. Throughout the novel he shows an inordinate pride in his one cherished possession, a pair of boots. He goes to incredible lengths to get the boots, the ownership of which has become an obsession with him. Yet when Jack, Laverne, and the boy leave New Valois he sells the boots at a great loss in order to be able to buy them a few gifts. "Because what the hell do I need with a pair of new boots for christ's sake, when probably this time next month I wont even have on anything to stuff into the tops of them?"[2] Certainly, he would never admit his humanity.

The contrast between Jiggs and the Reporter is a marked one--intellectually, spiritually, and physically.

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[1] Ibid., p. 64. [2] Ibid., p. 265.

> As they stood side by side and looked at one another they resembled the tall and the short man of the orthodox and unfailing comic team--the one [the reporter] looking like a cadaver out of a medical school vat and dressed for the moment in garments out of a flood refugee warehouse, the other filling his clothing without any fraction of surplus cloth which might be pinched between two fingers with that trim vicious economy of wrestlers' tights.[1]

The reporter is one of those completely lost and ineffectual souls that are so often encountered in Faulkner's novels. He was first introduced as Mr. Talliaferro in Mosquitoes. But whereas Talliaferro was merely a comic figure the reporter is a tragic figure. Talliaferro was too shallow ever to be deeply affected by his inability to cope with life. Such is not the case with the reporter. It is true that he is never enough realized as a character to achieve the status of a tragic figure. He can almost be called a walking symbol. Faulkner is occasionally guilty of this error. Sometimes he loses sight of the character in his desire to symbolize a particular aspect of the human tragedy. As a consequence the character becomes an abstraction: a victim of over-symbolization.

The sixth chapter of Pylon is entitled "Lovesong of J. A. Prufrock." The reporter is referred to as J. A. Prufrock, and he is conceived as a Prufrock type of person. Everything he tries to do is of no consequence. He is considered a nuisance by the Shumanns, who accept his aid with

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[1] Ibid., p. 56.

complete indifference. But there are significant differences between Eliot's Prufrock and Faulkner's Prufrock. The central characters are finally forced to take notice of the reporter when, through his interference, Shumann manages to fly a discredited plane in an air meet and is killed.. He has finally made his presence felt. He has never been able to reach Laverne with his love but he has received her bitter hatred for his part in Shumann's death: "'You see, she didn't understand,' he said. 'She told me to go away. To let her alone.'"[1] It is all part of the cosmic joke that he who tries to do good causes disaster. But at least he has made Laverne aware of his presence; the plight of Eliot's Prufrock was that nothing he could do would cause the slightest ripple--for good or evil. Eliot's Prufrock was aware of his ineffectuality, whereas the reporter never really understands the nature of his plight. Also he experiences a hopeless love; Eliot's Prufrock never experienced love. Something happened to the reporter whereas nothing happened to Prufrock.

A great irony operates in the case of the reporter. He is completely cynical in his outlook on mankind; he holds few illusions regarding the cheap sensationalism he feeds the readers of the newspaper.

> And there was a big crowd still there, standing around and looking at the air where this guy Burnham had flew in it and at the scorched hole in the field where he had flew in that too, and we couldn't stay out there because they only got beds for a hundred visiting

[1] Ibid., p. 245.

> pilots and Colonel Feinman is using all of them for his reception. Yair, reception. You build the airport and you get some receptive women and some booze and you lock the entrances and the information and the ticket windows and if they dont put any money into the tops of their stockings, it's a reception.[1]

But when it comes to his own participation in the human comedy, when he should call on his cynicism to save himself from his hopeless love, he is unable to bring the same detachment to bear. He too is a victim of human frailty, the frailty he so contemptuously condemns in others. Furthermore, although he understands the shallowness of man's deeds and the motivation of these deeds, he is unable to maintain a cynical detachment, but is always cursing society in impotent rage.

The description of the reporter's room suggests his characterless and ephemeral surroundings:

> It was filled with objects whose desiccated and fragile inutility bore a kinship to their owner's own physical being as though he and they were all conceived in one womb and spawned in one litter--objects which possessed that quality of veteran prostitutes, of being overlaid by the ghosts of so many anonymous proprietors that even the present title-holder held merely rights but no actual possession--a room apparently exhumed from a theatrical morgue and rented intact from one month to the next.[2]

The characters in Pylon are without roots. Only Shumann has any family ties; but like young Bayard something compels him to leave the sedentary life in search of disaster. The land cannot hold him. The land in modern times has become a waste-land.

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[1] Ibid., p. 73. [2] Ibid., p. 91.

The reporter's restless search can be partially explained by his background. The only indication the reader has of his shadowy past is through the reference to his mother, a buxom blond who drifts from one husband to another. He borrows money from his boss, Hagood, to buy his mother a wedding present. Hagood congratulates him.

> "Thanks," the reporter said. "I dont know the guy. But the two I did know were o.k."
> "I see," Hagood said. "Yes. Well. Married. The two you did know. Was one of them your-- But no matter. Dont tell me. Dont tell me!" he cried.[1]

The fact that he comes from a nebulous past and that he is never called by name, has obvious symbolical implications. He is mere flotsam, as is most of contemporary society.

The reporter risks his life by using himself as ballast in the defective airplane Shumann is going to try to fly. As he lies on the floor boards of the plane he feels what it is that makes of the Shumanns dedicated pursuers of speed. In this passage Faulkner comes closest to capturing in the novel what he was after:

> He lived and relived the blind timeless period during which he lay on his stomach in the barrel, clutching the two bodymembers, with nothing to see but Shumann's feet on the rudderpedals and the movement of the aileron balancerod and nothing to feel but terrific motion--not speed and not progress--just blind furious motion like a sealed force trying to explode the monococque barrel in which he lay from the waist down on his stomach, leaving him clinging to the bodymembers in space. He was thinking, "Jesus, maybe we are going to die and all it is is a taste like sour hot salt in your mouth,"

[1] Ibid., p. 95.

> even while looking out the car window at the speeding marsh and swamp through which they skirted the city, thinking with a fierce and triumphant conviction of immortality, "We flew it! We flew it!"[1]

The reporter never realized any fulfillment of his hopeless love for Laverne. He is not able to conceal under his cynical exterior his essential sentimentality. And yet he realizes the ridiculousness of his position, even though his realization does nothing to assuage his pain:

> "It started out to be a tragedy. A good orthodox Italian tragedy. You know: one Florentine falls in love with another Florentine's wife and he spends three acts fixing it up to put the bee on the second Florentine and so just as the curtain falls on the third act the Florentine and the wife crawl down the fire escape and you know that the second Florentine's brother wont catch them until daylight and they will be asleep in the monk's bed in the monastery? But it went wrong. When he come climbing up to the window to tell her the horses was ready, she refused to speak to him. It turned into a comedy, see?" He looked at Jiggs, laughing, not laughing louder but just faster.
>
> "Here, fellow!" Jiggs said. "Here now! Quit it!"
>
> "Yes," the reporter said. "It's not that funny. I'm trying to quit it. I'm trying to. But I can't quit. See? See how I can't quit?" he said, still holding to the strap, his face twisted and laughing, which as Jiggs looked, burst suddenly with drops of moisture running down the cadaverous grimace which for an instant Jiggs thought was sweat until he saw the reporter's eyes.[2]

There is a suggestion in the above passage that the reporter planned Shumann's death in order to enhance his chances with Laverne. But there is little in the novel to support this belief. I think it erroneous to ascribe any such dark motivation to the reporter. In fact, one of the reasons that the novel is somewhat of a failure is because it is never

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[1] Ibid., pp. 216-217. [2] Ibid., p. 279.

clear exactly what does motivate him.)

And so the reporter faces a bleak future in which his only function will be to endure: "The thin black coffee, the myriad fish stewed in a myriad oil--tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow; not only not to hope, not even to wait: just to endure."[1] But there is a great difference between the level on which the Prufrocks will endure and that on which the Negroes will endure. On the one level there is complete despair; on the other, resigned acceptance.

> He sees the urban world as even harsher than Eliot's character sees it, smells of cooking, sawdust restaurants, and men in shirt sleeves leaning out of windows. He sees it as screaming headlines, mad speed, and close to a dehumanized existence with creatures who will soon be "incapable of suffering, wombed and born complete and instantaneous, cunning and intricate and deadly, from out some blind iron bat-cave of the earth's prime foundation."[2]

As I have mentioned several times sex is one of Faulkner's most important symbols. In Soldiers' Pay and Mosquitoes the lack of sexual fulfillment symbolized the inadequacy of man to cope with modern times. In The Sound and the Fury Quentin realizes that he cannot escape the meaninglessness of life even if he committed incest with Caddy. And so on. In almost every novel sex has an important symbolic function. In Pylon the sex is brutal and unsentimental, heightening the over-all tempo of the novel:

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[1] Ibid., p. 284.

[2] O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

> In the same instant of realizing (as with one hand she ripped her skirt hem free of the safety with which they had fastened it bloomer-fashion between her legs) that she was clawing blindly and furiously not at the belt across his thighs but at the fly of his trousers, he realized that she had on no undergarment, pants. She told him later that the reason was that she was afraid that from fear she might soil one of the few undergarments which she now possessed. He tried to fight her off for a while, but he had to fly the aeroplane, keep it in position over the field, and besides (they had been together only a few months then) he soon had two opponents; he was out-numbered, he now bore in his own lap, between himself and her wild and frenzied body, the perennially undefeated, the victorious. It was some blind instinct out of the long swoon while he waited for his backbone's fluid marrow to congeal again that he remembered to roll the aeroplane.[1]

When she parachutes to the ground, having forgotten to pin down her skirt, the onlookers become frenzied in their aroused passions. Always, the emphasis is on sex, not love, except in the case of the reporter, who experiences love but is unable to consummate his love through sexual fulfillment.

Pylon is a return to unmitigated pessimism. Faulkner has left the region where tradition and values hover like ghosts of a past glory. In Pylon the machine determines the ethical consciousness of the modern wasteland. The human spirit cannot flourish in such an environment.

In his chapter on Pylon O'Connor gives a good summing up of both the virtues and the defects of the novel:

> One is asked, not to like such characters, but to give them a little margin of admiration for having come to terms with a mechanized order, finding a part of their very being in it. If this is so, one would like to be

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[1] Pylon, p. 195.

> able to see a little more deeply into the forces motivating them, to understand, if we may borrow a term from physics, the dialectical leap from machine to human spirit. That we don't understand it is the chief fault of Pylon.[1]

And yet, one can understand the "leap" if he view it in the total context of Faulkner's work. In the modern world the machine has replaced the human spirit. Faulkner's despair over the encroachment of the machine age is evident from his first novels. In Pylon he attempts through symbol to effect the metamorphasis.

The novel fails primarily because the reporter never comes to life. Faulkner's characters usually do carry about with them a great amount of symbolic meaning, but when he is at his best the character is never lost in the symbol, except in his last novel, A Fable, which requires a different critical approach from that given to the rest of his work.

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[1] O'Connor, op. cit., p. 93.

CHAPTER IX

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

Absalom, Absalom! (1936) is the last of the novels of complete pessimism in the Yoknapatawpha series. It is the story of a poor white, Sutpen, who made aware at an early age of the inequality between rich and poor, tries to establish a position for himself in the planter-aristocratic hierarchy. But since his design which to an extent symbolizes the South's failure is without human compassion, it is doomed to failure. The land also plays an important part in his failure; Sutpen attempts to possess the land, instead of identifying himself with it, as Isaac does in Go Down, Moses.

Sutpen's death is bitterly ironic: he is killed by one of the poor white caste which he is trying to escape. A further bitter irony is observable throughout the novel in the destruction of the Sutpen line with the exception of Jim Bond, who is left to carry on the design--an imbecilic Negro. The nature of the design contained the seeds of its own destruction: "Generation after generation the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons; this, Faulkner's philosophical concept of man's basic ethical problem, furnishes the fundamental theme of the Yoknapatawpha county

group."[1] The title of the novel suggests its tragic motif. The sins of the fathers visited on the sons has been treated by Faulkner in earlier novels, for instance in the case of the Compsons and the Sartorises, with the symbolical implications that the sins of the old South are visited on the new South. And yet the past must not be discounted. "Without any sense or knowledge of the past, Sutpen, through his son, would belong only to the future."[2] Sutpen will belong to the future--through Jim Bond. There is the suggestion that the Jim Bonds will inherit the earth.

The story is variously told by Rosa Coldfield, who received an indecent proposal from Sutpen, and Quentin Compson, just before he commits suicide. Each point-of-view character has his own particular bias. Miss Rosa, of course, views Sutpen as some kind of monster, and sees in his design the work of the devil. She tells Quentin that the curse of the house of Sutpen pervades the whole South, "a land primed for fatality." The people of the South, like Sutpen, are responsible for their fate. Rosa's analysis of the tragic tale is just what Quentin didn't want to hear. He tries to find in the violence and evil which surround Sutpen some sort of moral explanation. In The Sound and the Fury Quentin was

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[1]Walter Sullivan, "The Tragic Design of Absalom, Absalom!," South Atlantic Quarterly, L (1951), 552.

[2]William R. Poirer, "'Strange Gods' in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of Absalom, Absalom!," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 223.

unable to find an operable code of ethics. A similar lack in the Sutpen saga furnishes a further motivation for Quentin's suicide. He is forced to realize the symbolic nature of the Sutpen tragedy. As stated by Cowley:

> Sutpen's great design, the land he stole from the Indians, the French architect who built his house with the help of wild Negroes from the jungle, the woman of mixed blood whom he married and disowned, the unacknowledged son who ruined him, the poor white whom he wronged and who killed him in anger, the final destruction of his mansion like the downfall of a social order: all these might belong to a tragic fable of Southern history.[1]

Sutpen is well on his way to realizing his dream, before the Civil War. He is the owner of a large tract of land on which he has built a mansion. He has married the "right" woman, who gives him a son to carry on the family name. Then the Civil War comes along and destroys all that he has built up. The symbolic implications of his design are sensed by Rosa as she tells the story to Quentin.

> It's because she wants it told, he thought, so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth.[2]

Quentin believes that the curse operates through the land. He tells his father that the land destroyed Sutpen and Rosa's family, and that eventually it will destroy all of them. The same preoccupation with the land was evidenced in

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[1]Cowley, "Faulkner's Legend," p. 13.

[2]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York, 1936), p. 11.

The Sound and the Fury in the varied reactions of the Compsons to the parceling off of the estate to meet financial obligations and to send Quentin to Harvard.

In the relating of the Sutpen saga Rosa interprets almost every event as a manifestation of God's curse. She detects a supreme irony in the fact that Sutpen met Ellen, her sister, in church. He who had gone to

> church but three times in his life--the once when he first saw Ellen, the once when they rehearsed the wedding, the once when they performed it. . .that man to discover Ellen inside a church. In church, mind you, as though there were a fatality and curse on our family and God Himself were seeing to it that it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed.[1]

Just to be born into this world is to objectify the curse. Even at a young age Rosa instinctively knew the answer to Ellen's request to protect her daughter, Judith: "Protect her? From whom and from what? He has already given them life: he does not need to harm them further. It is from themselves that they need protection."[2] Ellen struggles with her husband most of her life for the souls of her children, but even with the aid of heaven she is fighting a losing battle. She finally gives up the struggle, retiring behind a

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[1] Ibid., pp. 20-21. [2] Ibid., p. 22.

neurotic ineffectuality. One of the events that rings the death-knell of her struggle was the oft-repeated fight between Sutpen and one of his wild Negro slaves, when she realized that their young daughter watched the bloody spectacle with animalistic relish.

Rosa Coldfield is functional as the point-of-view character for Faulkner's pessimism. Unable to accept her tragic life as an isolated case, she reads into her personal tragedy cosmic signification. Thus Faulkner achieves what Henry James managed in his best works: a rendering of the main action with an undercurrent of self-exposure of the point-of-view character. Miss Rosa comes through to the reader as an extremely neurotic egoist.

It has been noted earlier that the only optimism (a sort of negative optimism) which is attached to certain of Faulkner's characters is in the quality of endurance found among a few of the Negroes and poor whites. Sutpen's fall is explained partially by his attempt to acquire rather than to endure. Thus Sutpen appears to be responsible for his own doom. And yet there is an ambivalence in Faulkner's conception of his tragic hero: at the same time that Sutpen is bringing about his downfall through his own actions, there is the concomitant suggestion that he is the victim of a cosmic arrangement. "The fatality that engulfs the house of Sutpen is a doom of Sutpen's own contrivance, but projected through Mr. Compson's consciousness, it becomes darker, more ominous,

an outmoded Fate seemingly springing from the causeless whim of the Omnipotent Jester."[1] Mr. Compson, of course, interprets everything in the light of a diabolical joke. It is his extremely pessimistic philosophy which is the dominating factor in Quentin's suicide. Rosa, on the other hand, puts all of the blame for Sutpen's downfall squarely on his own shoulders. But she too is not free of the cosmic shadow, seeing in his tragedy universal symbology. Thus Quentin is caught in a cross-fire.

There is more than the atmosphere of fatality which prevents Absalom, Absalom! from becoming pure tragedy (although it comes closer than any of his other novels), and that is Sutpen's innocence. He is so preoccupied with his design that he is unable to view the world and human activity as separate from his obsession. A character who brings down disaster on his head through his innocence and naivete may still come under the conception of tragedy if before his death he understands the nature of his fall. Sutpen never does; he goes to his death without an awareness of the flaws in his design:

> Yet remembering that Faulkner as moralist is not writing of Sutpen alone but of something in the nature of modern civilization, then Sutpen's failure to understand the nature of his guilt becomes necessary because it is a failure of rational man to understand the moral universe. In one of the rare omniscient passages in

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[1]Robert D. Jacobs, "Faulkner's Tragedy of Isolation," Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore, 1953), p. 184.

> the story Faulkner comments that the cold room at Harvard in which Quentin and Shreve sat talking of Sutpen was "dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's morality and Miss Coldfield's demonizing."
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> . . . . . .
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> Faulkner's tragic theme is solipsism, the isolation of the individual behind the walls of Self, but he shows clearly the way to breach those walls. It is the old way [of Christian love].[1]

Quentin does not see the nature of Sutpen's tragedy, because he too is a victim of solipsism (this was first apparent in The Sound and the Fury). (His suicide can be partially explained by the fact that he was overly preoccupied with self, and unable to find meaning in his existence, he killed himself.) Neither, of course, could he find meaning in the lives of others. Nor could he find any moral order to the universe. He did not understand that this was not the fault of the universe but of the individuals. Although it is true, as Jacobs said, that there is hope for humanity implied in Absalom Absalom! through adherence to Christian morality, it is only in his later novels that such a hope is realized to any great extent.

Sutpen's lack of humanity is his most observable characteristic. It is in early evidence when he leaves his first wife because she has a touch of Negro blood in her. When he appears on the scene with his wild Negro slaves it is generally believed that he not only owns their bodies but also

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[1] Ibid., pp. 190-191.

their souls. When he is ready to try again for a wife, "the women merely said that he had exhausted the possibilities of the families of the men with whom he had hunted and gambled and that he had now come to town to find a wife exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves."[1] When the townspeople speculated on the character of Sutpen they never thought of pity, love, respect and justice, but of ruthlessness and fear. They realized when they looked at him that "given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything."[2] Because of his inhumanity Ellen, who struggles valiantly in the early years of the marriage for her own soul and the souls of her children, retires into a world of illusions from which she seldom emerges.

His greatest display of inhumanity is in his attitude toward his son, Charles Bon, by his first wife. He refuses to acknowledge his son's existence, because he fears that he is a threat to his plan. This pretense that he has no son actually seems to depersonalize Charles Bon: "Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all."[3] Throughout the novel Bon seeks for recognition from his

[1] Absalom, p. 42. [2] Ibid., p. 46.

[3] Ibid., p. 104.

father. Beneath all of his urbane sophistication there is the crying search for a father. Bon wants only that moment of recognition. "He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son."[1] Because Sutpen refuses him that moment of recognition tragedy engulfs the house of Sutpen. Without a sign from his father Bon feels that he is "doomed to live." He therefore strives in every way to make his father recognize him. He successfully woos his half-sister, Judith, and threatens to marry her over the violent protests of his half-brother, Henry (who can accept the incest but not the miscegenation. Throughout his works Faulkner demonstrates a duality in his attitude toward the Negro-white relationship. On the one hand there is the sin of slavery and the injustice of the white man toward the Negro; on the other hand there is the horror of intermarriage--most forcefully expressed by his most noble character, Isaac McCaslin, in "Delta Autumn." Faulkner is not ready to accept the final and only solution of the problem.). Bon forces Henry, who loves him, to kill him. The father, too, places on Henry's shoulders the responsibility of preventing the marriage. The search for a father is probably the strongest theme in the book.

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[1] Ibid., p. 319.

> Many lives, black and white, are destroyed by Sutpen's inability to acknowledge Charles, to break the terrible taboo that separates black from white. The tragedy is southern, but it is more than that--it is the tragedy of the son whose father refuses him his proper and needed recognition and acceptance. In our modern idiom, it is called the search for a father.[1]

The power of the novel is found not only in the greatness of its theme (the father-son theme has appeared in great literature in every age) but in the technical brilliance of its execution. The gradual unfolding of the grand design and the inevitable doom of the final outcome works in conjunction with the character revelation. The harmonious welding of theme and character has never been more successfully achieved by Faulkner. Those critics (and there are surprisingly many of them) who have found this novel boring have simply not plumbed its deep and rewarding depths.

Sutpen's lack of humanity is caused solely by his dream. The grandeur and magnificance of the dream and his titanic struggle to realize it, make of him a tragic figure--in the grand manner. He will allow nothing--none of humanity's basic ethical instincts--to swerve him from his plan. It is thus that the reader must view his callous treatment of mankind.

Early in the novel Mr. Compson tells his son that Sutpen was instinctively aware of the doom that waited him if he followed out the lines he laid down for himself, but even

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[1] O'Connor, op. cit., p. 95.

such a knowledge would not sway him from his chosen path.

> Only I have always liked to believe that he intended to name Clytie [Clytemnestra: his daughter by a Negro slave], Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augus of his own disaster, and that he just got the name wrong through a mistake natural in a man who must have almost taught himself to read.[1]

Clytie does symbolize the destructive force resident in the Sutpen situation: black blood versus white blood. And it is Clytie who puts the final torch to the Sutpen dream by burning down his mansion in which his son, Henry, was hidden. This is a literal enactment of man's vanity turning into dust. "Henry and Clytie are burned up in the final holocaust, the ritualistic destruction of the house of hell and doom that is in part repeated from Light in August."[2]

Actually his blindness to everything except his design caused his design to fail. Rosa Coldfield had always had great pride. She protected her father when, in protest against the war, he nailed himself up in the attic. She carried on the affairs of the store, sending food up to him daily in a basket manipulated by a pulley system. When he died and the store no longer paid for itself she came very close to starving to death. But she would permit no help from the townspeople. Instead she would steal vegetables from neighboring gardens. But she "would not even use a

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[1] Absalom, p. 62.

[2] Bernard DeVoto, "Witchcraft in Mississippi," SRL, Oct. 31, 1936.

stick to reach through the fence and draw the vegetables to where she could grasp them, the reach of her unaided arm being the limit of brigandage."[1] Only a person who had lost complete contact with his fellow-man could have made the proposal to this woman that Sutpen made: that they would marry if she bore him a boy. Despite his incredible insensitivity, only desperation could have prompted such a proposal. When Sutpen returned from the war his design lay almost shattered at his feet. Henry had committed murder and was living in exile (doomed to wander the earth pursued by the Furies), his land had been reduced to a few square miles, the prohibitive taxes levied by the victor kept him destitute, and worst of all, he was approaching old age. Therefore he could not risk another marriage unless a male issue were a certainty. As Shreve, who was Quentin's roommate at Harvard--a Northerner to whom the tale is fantastic, says: he chose "her with a kind of outrageous bravado as if a kind of despairing conviction of his irresistibility or invulnerability were a part of the price he had got for whatever it was he had sold the Creditor, since according to the old dame he never had a soul."[2] It is incorrect to say that Sutpen never had a soul; it would be more correct to say that his soul atrophied in the face of his blind dedication.

[1] Absalom, p. 171.

[2] Ibid., p. 180.

A recurrent theme in Faulkner, and most vividly evident in Absalom, Absalom!, is the conception of God sitting in judgment on his creation, allowing man to struggle hopelessly on the wrong path, and then demanding payment in full for his erring life. In the case of Sutpen, the Creditor exacts a grim penalty. As stated previously, it comes in the form of a bitterly ironic retribution. The white caste that he tries to escape, and that he finally turns to in desperation for the furtherance of his design, kills him.

He was first made aware of the inequality between the rich and the poor when as a young boy he was given a note by his father to deliver to the owner of the big house. He was met at the door by a Negro servant and told scornfully to always use the back door. "He had been told to go around to the back door even before he could state his errand, who had sprung from a people whose houses didn't have back doors but only windows and anyone entering or leaving by a window would be either hiding or escaping, neither of which he was doing."[1] The boy is so enraged that he wants to kill someone. But he knows instinctively that killing the Negro would not be getting at the root of the problem. And it is at this point that the first seeds of his design are sown. It is an ironic commentary on the state of man that instead of opposing that which he knows is wrong he tries to join it. Sutpen spends

[1] Ibid., p. 233.

his life trying to become that which he inherently despises. Thereafter all of his activity is channeled into the one drive--the drive for social recognition, a sort of defensive self-projection. So he went to school where he "learned little save that most of the deeds, good and bad both, incurring opprobrium or plaudits or reward either, within the scope of man's abilities, had already been performed and were to be learned about only from books."[1] When he read that young men had often gone to the West Indies and returned with wealth he, after first terrorizing the teacher into admitting that the book hadn't lied, ran away to this land of promise. In Haiti he learned French "maybe not to get engaged to be married, but which he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her."[2]

When Sutpen returns with his slaves and enough money to erect the house which is to symbolize his triumph over his past, he brings with him a French architect whom he keeps a virtual prisoner until the house is completed. The Frenchman's life is indescribably lonely and unrewarding. Unable to communicate with the Negroes, who are little more than wild animals, and with Sutpen, who is all-absorbed in his scheme, in desperation he finally runs away into the abysmal

[1] Ibid., pp. 241-242.

[2] Ibid., p. 248.

swamplands. Such an event calls forth a general celebration on the part of the Negroes, Sutpen, and Sutpen's cronies. The chase takes on the appearance of a ghoulish holiday. The Negroes regard the victim as meat for the stew-pot. In fact, when they caught him they would have eaten him uncooked if Sutpen had not disbanded them with a club. But the little architect, harried to earth, hungry, wounded, and desperate, carries the day, emerging as a much nobler specimen of the human race than his pursuers.

> He took the bottle in one of his dirty little coon-like hands and raised the other hand and even fumbled about his head for a second before he remembered that the hat was gone, then flung the hand up in a gesture that Grandfather said you simply could not describe, that seemed to gather all misfortune and defeat that the human race ever suffered into a little pinch in his fingers like dust and fling it backward over his head.[1]

Finally, of course, Sutpen's inhumanity, his final outrageous behavior, brings about his death. He is reduced to making one last effort to beget a son, with the fifteen year old Milly, grandchild of the poor white trash, Wash Jones, whom Sutpen has allowed around the place because Wash would administer to him during his long periods of drunkenness in which he would for the moment escape to the past glory of the Sutpen name. Wash, a sycophant who was never allowed in the house until after the war, when Sutpen's grand manner began crumbling at the edges, idolizes him, seeing in him all that was glamorous and glorious in the old South; Wash finds

[1] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

his identity by basking in the glory of Sutpen's sun. Sutpen's final inhuman stroke destroys the world of illusion in which Wash has been living. When Sutpen learns that Milly has borne him a girl, that his last gambit has lost, his only comment is, "Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable."[1] Wash Jones realizes that with this remark Sutpen is voicing his complete and utter contempt for Wash Jones and all of his kind; that Sutpen had never regarded him with anything but disdain. And so Wash kills him. The cycle is complete; the heritage Sutpen has spent his life repudiating has finally caught up with him and destroyed him.

> Wash Jones, the grandfather, not enraged by the seduction but by this final denial of humanity, of responsibility to flesh and blood, beheads Sutpen with a scythe, symbol of the eternal justice of Time. But at least it was a decapitation, the death of a monarch.[2]

Wash then assumes the mantle of glory worn by Sutpen. All of his life he had been a sniveling lackey, groveling at the feet of the noble aristocracy. But in his final hour he repudiates his past actions:

> Better if his kind and mine too had never drawn the breath of life on this earth. Better that all who remain of us be blasted from the face of it than that another Wash Jones should see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 286.

[2] Jacobs, op. cit., p. 189. [3] Absalom, p. 290.

When the townspeople close in on him he, after first killing Milly and the baby so as to erase the Sutpen stain from the earth, rushes at them with the scythe raised; no longer content to live in the shade of the glory of the sons of the confederacy, he becomes one of them in his charge against all of the evils in the world which make possible the miserable lives of the Wash Joneses. The symbology of the onrushing Wash is that of inexorable time mowing down the lie that was the glory of the old South.

The preoccupation with time, discussed often when dealing with the earlier novels, is plainly evident in Absalom Absalom!. Sutpen, repudiating his own past, nevertheless tries to create a new past through the totality of the design. But he never matures with the passage of time. He never emerges from his world of innocence. Through life's struggle wisdom should come. Uncle Isaac, for instance, realizes that one must struggle with nature. But from the struggle (which is conducted with humility) comes wisdom.

> Sutpen never really acquires wisdom, for he never loses his innocence. He will never learn. The figure of Time with his scythe never received a more grim embodiment than it does in the grizzled Wash Jones wielding his rusty implement.[1]

All of his life Sutpen tries to conquer time. He tries to out-distance time in the completion of his design. He

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[1]Cleanth Brooks, "Absalom, Absalom: The Definition of Innocence," Sewanee Review, LIX (1951), 557.

understands that time is the one implacable foe that might defeat him. His defeat "is the terrifying finality of the most formally realized of Faulkner's tragedies, with its theme of a titanic ego pitted against time itself."[1] Sutpen goes to his death in his original state of innocence--a rather grim innocence.

Rosa cannot accept the fact of his death because, "how can he be allowed to die without having to admit that he was wrong and suffer and regret it."[2] Rosa, of course, is as much a victim of time as is Sutpen. She lives solely in the past, a past that has ruined her. In the final scene when she faces the ghosts of the past, and causes the death of Henry and Clytie, she is trying to deal a final death blow to the curse under which she has lived all these years. All she manages to do, however, is to pass on to Quentin her sense of fatality and doom.

It is his sense of the past which causes Quentin to commit suicide. Unable to find a moral order in the past, he can see no hope for the future. The glory and beauty of the old South have been destroyed, only the evil remains.

> This sense of the past continuing in and acting upon the present is an impressive feature of his [Faulkner's] work. It explains, among other things, those of his characters who seem to think of life as an act of devotion to the dead. These people are like ghosts caught between a real world which they cannot accept

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[1] Jacobs, op. cit., p. 190.

[2] Absalom, p. 305.

and a lost world to which they can never return, citizens in spirit of a nation that ended in 1865.[1]

Shreve's forceful queries about the South make Quentin come to grips with the problem: just how does he feel about the South? Shreve: "Tell me about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all."[2] The story of the destruction of the house of Sutpen is the answer to Shreve's question. But Shreve can make nothing of the answer. It only serves to make the South more enigmatic than ever. "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it."[3] To Shreve the tale is full of sound and fury signifying nothing. To Quentin it is a symbol of man's tragic lot in the South. If Quentin could either identify himself with the South by accepting its good and working to correct its evil, or repudiate the South, he would perhaps find salvation. But he is unable to do either, being both repelled by and attracted to the South. Shreve:

> "Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?"
> "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. I dont hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron

[1] Dayton Kohler, "William Faulkner and the Social Conscience," The English Journal, XXXVIII (1949), 546.

[2] Absalom, p. 174. [3] Ibid., p. 217.

> New England dark; I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it![1]

Quentin cannot live with his heritage nor can he escape it.

The importance placed on suffering, in Requiem for a Nun, makes its first appearance in Absalom, Absalom!. In the later book it introduces a strong note of optimism into Faulkner's world view: that through suffering man may eventually expiate the sins of his forefathers. In the early novel there is no such note of optimism; man must suffer, but there will be no reward for his suffering:

> "Suffer little children to come unto me": and what did He mean by that? how, if He meant that little children should need to be suffered to approach Him, what sort of earth had He created; that if they had to suffer in order to approach them, what sort of Heaven did He have?[2]

[1] Ibid., p. 378.

[2] Ibid., p. 198.

CHAPTER X

THE UNVANQUISHED

The Unvanquished (1938) is Faulkner's most romantic treatment of the Southern myth. It is a story of the heroic struggle of the confederacy, whose members were the victims of life, just as all mankind is. Bayard wins a mild repose, which only serves to emphasize the general tone of doom.

In the first few sections (the book consists of six related stories forming a novel) there is an abundance of regional humor, furnished to a large extent by the point of view of the children. It is a gentle humor, stressing the healthy, warm relationship of the Sartoris household. The humor also functions to heighten the contrast between the world viewed by the boys and the grim reality of the war years. The seeds of destruction are in early evidence. And eventually, of course, the forces of devastation win out. At this point there is little room for the kindly humor found at the first of the book. Such humor cannot flourish in a fallen world.

Young Bayard Sartoris (the old Bayard in Sartoris) and his Negro companion, Ringo, help Granny (Rosa Millard) steal horses and mules from the Union forces and distribute

them to their own forces and to the needy people in the surrounding countryside. All goes well until Granny oversteps the boundaries of common sense and, through the auspices of Ab Snopes, is killed by Grumby, leader of the Independents. Grumby and his Independents ravage and pillage in areas where there are no troops. Bayard and Ringo, with the help of Uncle Buck McCaslin, track Grumby down and kill him.

John Sartoris, Bayard's father, returns after the war, in which he engaged in many colorful and romantic episodes, and tries to restore his disintegrating estate, and to bring order into the Southern political scene by killing two Northerners (brother and grandfather of Joanna Burden) who have promised the vote to the Negroes. Finally, drunk with his own power and grown calloused with so much killing, he is killed by his former partner, whom he has hounded and taunted for years. Whereupon Bayard, who is away at college, is called home to avenge the death of his father. He is goaded to vengeful retribution by his cousin Drusilla, his father's second wife, with whom he is in love. But Bayard has seen enough death and refuses to participate any longer in the blood bath (but not before he has proven himself no coward by facing his father's murderer), thus losing the love and respect of Drusilla and Ringo, but gaining his own peace of mind.

This is the last of the novels which deal primarily with the planter-aristocratic families--the Sartorises and

the Compsons. Also, it is the earliest direct record of the chronological development (or disintegration) of the house of Sartoris. And in this fact lies much of the disappointment experienced by readers of Faulkner; for this novel deals with the Civil War years, during a period when the old South was disappearing and the new South was emerging. Such a crucial period, many readers felt, demanded a penetrating and exhaustive treatment. This, Faulkner had failed to do.

> It is perverse of Mr. Faulkner. . .to remain on so comparatively trivial a level when he comes to write directly about the Civil War, for obviously he has always attributed the purulence of his contemporary South to the war and we were justified in expecting a much more fundamental examination.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> When Bayard Sartoris, a sixteen-year-old boy, pursues and kills the guerrilla who has murdered his grandmother, and then nails the corpse to a cabin door and sets up its amputated hand on his grandmother's grave, we are in the presence of one of the shadows which the war has thrown across the South of Mr. Faulkner's other work. It is part of the evil heritage that engulfs his contemporary characters but it is the only part treated in these stories, and there is nothing here to explain the fierce and masochistic heartbreak, the trumpets blowing yellowly in copper light, that the war means to impotent Southerners of the later books who had grandfathers in it. For a full understanding of the Faulkner South we need a statement of that heartbreak and its history. Perhaps the post-war career of John Sartoris in these stories supplies a clue which will be added to later.[1]

Perhaps, but not to date. However, I do not entirely agree with DeVoto that the answer does not lie concealed in The Unvanquished. He himself says in the same article that the

[1]Bernard DeVoto, "Faulkner's South," SRL, XVII (Feb. 19, 1938), 5.

murder of John Sartoris makes of him "the first victim of the curse that has pursued the Sartoris family through a large part of Mr. Faulkner's work."[1] If his murder is the beginning of the curse then the actions leading up to the murder should reveal the motivation of the killing. Also the symbolical extensions must be apparent, otherwise the murder does not take on the appearance of a curse, but is merely an issue of local homicide.

John Sartoris represents both the glamor and the evil of the South; a combination of romanticism and realism. DeVoto mentions how important the romantic aspect of the old South is to the descendants of the brave sons of the Confederacy. Certainly there is much of the romantic in this novel. John Sartoris and his daredevil exploits in the war symbolize that facet of the South which was glorious and chivalrous. In the eyes of the boys and the townspeople, Colonel Sartoris is almost a living legend. Is it any wonder that to future generations, who have had to accept the bitter penalty of defeat, the John Sartorises represent that which is grand and magnificant in their heritage? Without this pride, the humiliation of defeat and the knowledge of the basic evil, slavery, which caused the war, would make life intolerable. In many of Faulkner's novels those citizens of the new South, who can feel no identification with the past glory of the South, abjure their roots and are buffeted about in their anchorless

[1] Ibid., p. 5.

existence; or they commit suicide, or they spend their days caught in the grip of a soul-searing pessimism.

But John Sartoris also symbolizes the disintegrating force in the South. He is proud and haughty, willing to kill to get his own way. And he works constantly to reinstitute the two evils which brought about the destruction of the South: re-establish white supremacy and repossess the land through individual ownership. It is the evil in this novel which causes Kronenberger to write:

> I do not see where this book does more than repopulate a scene that Faulkner would do better to forget about. We are told, quite sensibly, that novelists should deal with the material they know best. But not forever, surely, and not if that material is a swamp, slowly, voraciously sucking the novelist in.[1]

On the other hand, it is the goodness which causes Calverton to write:

> In The Unvanquished Faulkner goes back to the Civil War for his types, and it must be said at once that as types these people are far superior to those in Sanctuary and Light in August. But these characters spring from a South which was old and defeated but not yet decadent, and there is a naturalness about their developments, their actions, their devotions, their deaths, and a simplicity which Faulkner has never attained in his previous novels.[2]

Both critics are right and both are wrong, refusing to see the other half of the equation.

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[1]Louis Kronenberger, "Faulkner's Dismal Swamp," Nation, CXLVI (Feb. 19, 1938), 214.

[2]V. F. Calverton, "Steinbeck, Hemingway and Faulkner," Mod. Qu., XI (Fall, 1939), 42.

Howe says of The Unvanquished that it dramatizes an historical moment suspended between a dead past and an unavailable future.[1] This, I believe, is a particularly acute observation. Certainly the Civil War functions structurally in Faulkner's world view. His South divides into three distinct periods: before the war, during the war, and after the war. There are many subdivisions, of course, but these are the main ones. The Civil War acts as a sort of interregnum period. Before the war the South was a land of culture and gracious living. The evils of slavery and exploitation of the land were in evidence, but they were overshadowed by the beauty. During the war the evils, particularly slavery, were spotlighted. No longer were they surrounded with beauty and grace. Once they were exposed for their essential evil they were never again able to be hidden. The post-war generations were forced to witness the catastrophe which resulted from these evils. Hence, unable to find any beauty and meaning in their surroundings, they turned more and more to the past. Thus in one way or another they were able to adjust to their present condition. With all of Faulkner's characters the old South functions integrally in the shaping of their destinies.

And always there are the Negroes, who never lose a sense of the past. Theirs is not an intellectual identifica-

[1]Howe, op. cit., p. 202.

tion but an emotional, instinctive one. "But I was just talking too, I knew that, because niggers know things; it would have to be something louder, much louder, than words to do any good."[1] Some little space in The Unvanquished is devoted to the question of freeing the Negroes. As a child Bayard bolsters up Ringo's courage to shoot a Yankee by threatening him that he will be free if he doesn't fire. They are afraid of freedom, afraid of the responsibility it entails, afraid that it might be another device of the white man to exact more labor from them. Ringo does not understand the concept of freedom: "I ain't a nigger any more. I done been abolished."[2] Even when he grows up he can understand the meaning of his life only in terms of the Sartoris family. The whole problem of the emancipation of the Negro is effectively dramatized in the movement of the Negro toward the River Jordan. As they move in hordes through the bottom lands there rises a constant moaning and lowing as of cattle going to the stockyards. They have become one huge, black mass moving toward salvation. As a chorus they serve as constant reminder of the disruption of the land. If a member fall along the wayside he is left to die, unheeded. The Negroes are no longer human, they are simple mass movement. When they reach a river where the

[1] William Faulkner, The Unvanquished ("A Signet Book"; New York, 1952), p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 126.

Yankees are blowing up a bridge as part of a military operation, they become frenzied in their desire to reach it, convinced that it is the River Jordan. They are displaced souls wandering the earth, having repudiated the South, unwanted by the North. ("I guess the general will be glad to give them twice the silver and mules just for taking that many niggers."[1]) When they realize that they have been deluded by a dream they slink back to the land of their fathers and attempt to regain a past that had meaning for them.

Much of the regional humor resides in the Negroes in this novel, as in most of Faulkner's novels where regional humor plays an important part. Beneath the humor the reader senses the Negro's attachment to the way of life he has always known. The scenes between Granny and her Negro retainer, old Joby, are very similar to those between Jenny and Toby, in Sartoris. There is the same emphasis on the laziness of the old servants; for instance, in the episode where Granny decides to move the trunk of silver from its burying place to her bedroom, preparatory to leaving, so that she can be sure it is not pilfered of its contents:

> "Take it into the house," Granny said.
> "We'll just load hit now and save having to handle hit again in the morning," Joby said. "Come on here, nigger," he said to Loosh.
> "Take it into the house," Granny said. So, after awhile Joby moved on toward the house. We

[1] Ibid., p. 71.

> could hear him breathing now, saying "Hah!" every few steps. Inside the kitchen he let his end down, hard.
>
> "Hah!" he said. "That's done, thank God."
>
> "Take it upstairs," Granny said.
>
> Joby turned and looked at her. He hadn't straightened up yet; he turned, half stooping, and looked at her. "Which?" he said.[1]

This characteristic of laziness is more than just a caricature, it is highly symbolic. It suggests the quality of endurance which the Negro has. He refuses to be caught up in the swift movement of progress. He retains the old values and the old relationships. Granny and Joby have a deep-rooted relationship based on past associations, which transcends the petty bickering in which they constantly indulge. When Granny tells old Joby to get the trunk down from her bedroom the same interchange takes place that accompanied the movement of the trunk upstairs. At this point Faulkner takes time out to comment on their relationship:

> "Now go get the trunk," Granny said. Joby was still putting the musket into the wagon; he stopped, his head turned a little.
>
> "Which?" he said. He turned a little more, still not looking at Granny standing on the steps and looking at him; he was not looking at any of us, not speaking to any of us in particular. "Ain't I tole you?" he said.
>
> "If anything ever came into your mind that you didn't tell to somebody inside of ten minutes, I don't remember it," Granny said. "But just what do you refer to now?"
>
> "Nummine that," Joby said. "Come on here, Loosh. Bring that boy with you." They passed Granny and went on. She didn't look at them; it was as if they

[1] Ibid., p. 29.

had walked not only out of her sight but out of her mind. Evidently Joby thought they had. He and Granny were like that; they were like a man and a mare, a blooded mare, which takes just exactly so much from the man and the man knows the mare will take just so much and the man knows that when that point is reached, just what is going to happen. Then it does happen; the mare kicks him, not viciously but just enough, and the man knows it was going to happen and so he is glad then, it is over then, or he thinks it is over, so he lies or sits on the ground and cusses the mare a little because he thinks it is over, finished, and then the mare turns her head and nips him. That's how Joby and **Granny** were and Granny always beat him, not bad; just exactly enough, like now; he and Loosh were just about to go in the door and Granny still not even looking after them, when Joby said, "I done tole um. And I reckin even you can't dispute hit." Then Granny, without moving anything but her lips, still looking out beyond the waiting wagon as if we were not going anywhere and Joby didn't even exist, said,

"And put the bed back against the wall." This time Joby didn't answer. He just stopped perfectly still, not even looking back at Granny.

. . . . . .

"Go and help them" Granny said without looking back. "Remember, Joby is getting old."[1]

When Granny goes on her campaign of stealing mules and horses she always collects a good many Negroes who have left home and now, disillusioned, are ready to return; and who sense in her a kindred spirit. She always lectures them with a great deal of asperity in her voice but she understands their problems and is anxious to return them to where they belong.

The characterization of Rosa Millard is one of the strongest points in the story. Except for the one instance which brought about her death, she never loses perspective.

[1] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

The world may be going up in flames but she tends to her own garden--literally. When they left the homestead for the duration of the war, as the Yankee troops were closing in and her home was in imminent danger of being destroyed, she insisted upon going out of her way to visit Mrs. Compson "and to ask her to drive out home now and then and look after the flowers."[1]

No matter what the exigency she will tolerate no vulgarity. Ringo and Bayard are constantly washing their mouths out with soap. When a soldier swears in her presence Ringo whispers, "Git the soap." And yet she is human. When a final indignity is committed she joins the boys: "Then we were all three saying it--Granny and me and Ringo, saying it together: 'The bastuds!' we cried. 'The bastuds! The bastuds!'"[2] The reader knows when Granny forgets herself to the extent of swearing that life has taken a particularly grim turn.

Even though she steals for a worthy cause she asks God's forgiveness. Or as Ringo says, she tells the Lord what she aims to do, and then does it. And with divine right on her side nothing can stop her. For there is nothing humble in Granny's attitude of what is right and wrong. As she tells God,

> I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that first time, I sinned for more than justice; I

[1] Ibid., p. 32. [2] Ibid., p. 50.

> sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves--for children who had given their fathers, for wives who had given their husbands, for old people who had given their sons to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause. . .And if this be sin in Your sight, I take this on my conscience. . .Amen.[1]

It is in the characters of the Rosa Millards, Jenny DuPres, and Rosa Coldfields that Faulkner finds the backbone of the South, the backbone which will never permit them to accept defeat or to forgive and forget. These are the women who walked out of the movie, Gone With the Wind. "And so now Father's troop and all the other men in Jefferson, and Aunt Louisa and Mr. Habersham and all the woman [sic] in Jefferson were actually enemies for the reason that the men had given in and admitted that they belonged to the United States but the women had never surrendered."[2]

And yet the gentlemanly code of conduct which Rosa Millard lives by is not regional, it is the one code which links North and South and black and white. This is humorously and poignantly demonstrated in the scene between Granny and the Yankee Colonel. Bayard and Ringo--mere boys--in attempting to kill an enemy officer accidentally kill one of the enemy's horses. The boys are espied running into the house and are followed by the troops who are ready to tear the place apart to find them. (They are hiding under the

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[1] Ibid., p. 94. [2] Ibid., p. 119.

rocking chair engulfed by Granny's voluminous skirts, while she sits calmly rocking to and fro.) When the colonel enters the room he understands all at a glance.

> "So you have no grandchildren. What a pity in a place like this which two boys would enjoy--sports, fishing, game to shoot at, perhaps the most exciting game of all, and none the less so for being, possibly, a little rare this near the house. And with a gun--a very dependable weapon, I see. . .Though I understand that this weapon does not belong to you. Which is just as well. Because if it were your weapon--which it is not--and you had two grandsons, or say a grandson and a Negro playfellow--which you have not--and if this were the first time--which it is not--someone next time might be seriously hurt. But what am I doing? Trying your patience by keeping you in that uncomfortable chair while I waste my time delivering a homily suitable only for a lady with grandchildren--or one grandchild and a Negro companion." Now he was about to go too; we could tell it even beneath the skirt; this time it was Granny herself:
>
> "There is little of refreshment I can offer you, sir. But if a glass of cool milk after your ride--"
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I [the Colonel] won't apologize; fools cry out at wind or fire. But permit me to say and hope that you will never have anything worse than this to remember us by."[1]

Certainly a Sartoris never acted more handsomely, more chivalrously. If mankind could live by such a code the world would be a far better place. It is because this code has been forgotten by the new generation, that cheap and mechanical modernism has been substituted for the code.

> What he admires about them [members of the old order] is not their wealth or hospitality or florid manners, but rather their unquestioning acceptance of a moral code

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[1] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

> that taught them "courage, and honor and pride, and pity and love of justice and of liberty." The code was the secret lost by their heirs and successors.[1]

It is the presence of this moral code which endears the old South to Faulkner, and the absence of it which causes him to despair over the new South. In "A Rose for Emily" the code is most effectively and artistically dramatized, and it plays an important role in practically all of Faulkner's stories.

John Sartoris is an attractive and sympathetic figure when he acts as an exemplar of the code. This can best be seen in a discussion of his marriage to his niece, Drusilla. She ran away from home to join his regiment and fought by his side for a year as would a man. When they return from the war they work laboriously together rebuilding his estate. Neither of them think of love nor marriage. Both are completely dedicated to first preserving the South; later, rebuilding the South. To such dedicated people there can be no thought of personal considerations when their country lies bleeding around them. In fact, Drusilla can only find meaning and purpose in life, through devastation. She thrives on the excitement of the war; and after the war, on the attempt to defeat the Northern carpetbaggers. The war has changed a potential wife and mother into an agent of destruction. She would rather destroy than create.

Into the middle of the picture comes Aunt Louisa--in

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[1]Cowley, The Portable Faulkner, p. 26.

mourning. She is horrified that Drusilla and John have spent a year together in such intimate companionship, unmarried. Even when it is perfectly apparent to all concerned that the relationship has been innocent, Aunt Louisa is not satisfied--it's the principle of the thing. So she forces the rather unwilling victims to promise to get married. Colonel Sartoris comes gallantly to the fore, asking for Drusilla's hand. On the day they are to be married there is a lot of excitement over a forthcoming election, and they forget to get married. Aunt Louisa is simply incredulous. Eventually she carries the day and the marriage takes place. John proves to be a loving and considerate husband. The whole marriage incident is treated ironically, of course. It is the irony here and in other places which keeps Faulkner from becoming one-sided about the glorious old South. "And it is this characteristic of satire sometimes running into cosmic pessimism that keeps Faulkner from being, what he has sometimes been accused of being, a Southern romanticist glorifying the virtues of an ante-bellum aristocracy by an exaggerated contrast with present-day degenerate society."[1]

Kronenberger does not understand the symbolic implications of Faulkner's irony. He believes that the irony expressed by Faulkner's characters is simply a cover-up of their own warped identification with a past that is no longer.

[1]Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 161

> The twisted heritage which the Confederate South bestowed upon its descendants is something few of them have renounced. It has got into their blood, and all that their weakened minds can do is resort to a rather vague, rueful, and inadequate irony. The truer irony is that they are its victims, forever driven on to commemorate their loss of Eden till one greater man (and where will he come from?) restore them and regain the blissful seat. The South languishes in race infantilism. The South is a fetishist because of something that disrupted its childhood; it goes on fondling a faded gray uniform with epaulets, a sword put up in its worn tired scabbord.[1]

It would seem that Mr. Kronenberger is more bitter than the bitterest of Faulkner's characters. What he says about the true irony inherent in the Southern situation is true enough, but what he apparently misses is that many of Faulkner's characters are well aware of the nature of their victimization. Furthermore, the "gray uniform" and the "worn tired scabbard" are symbols representing on the highest level a preservation of that which was admirable in the ante-bellum South. What Faulkner would like to see, of course, is a preservation of the high qualities and a discarding of the base qualities. Not a few of his characters have done just this.

To return to John Sartoris: as long as he is a replica of the moral code he comes across to the reader most sympathetically; but when he becomes steeped in race suppression and in killing he becomes a figure of doom--his own as well as the South's. When the evil in him gained ascendency

[1] Kronenberger, op. cit., p. 212.

over the good, his death was inevitable. As stated by Bayard's professor at college: "Ah, this unhappy land, not ten years recovered from the fever yet still men must kill one another, still we must pay Cain's price in his own coin."[1] It is ironical that even the professor, who utters such worthy sentiments, is a slave to the South's perverted code of honor. Bayard realizes that the professor would not understand his refusal to kill his father's killer. He comments to himself that it would be too much to ask of him at his age to accept Christ's teachings.

It is Bayard's refusal to live by Cain's example that so enrages Drusilla. She believes that killing is a divine act. When she gives the Colonel's duelling pistols to Bayard she says, "Oh you will thank me, you will remember me who put into your hands what they say is an attribute only of God's, who took what belongs to heaven and gave it to you."[2] Both Drusilla and her husband believed that if the dream were worthy enough, killing was not only justified, but even glorious. They, of course, have abrogated the power that should be God's alone. Bayard repudiates this philosophy. He believes that if there is any one truth in the Bible it is the truth that "thou shalt not kill." And yet such a truth is hard to live by when the whole world believes otherwise. And so he compromises with the world's standards by facing his enemy and almost certain death. Perhaps he must

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[1] The Unvanquished, p. 135. [2] Ibid., p. 150.

prove to himself as well as to the world his manhood. "Manhood in the face of doom is what is important."[1] Bayard accepts his father's dream--reestablishment of the old South--but he deplores his methods of realizing the dream. "Bayard has a margin of admiration for the dream with which his father had lived, but he knows that it invited arrogance, theatricality, heroics, violence, and even murder."[2] He does not understand that the dream is false; that in addition to its beauty and splendor, it rests on the evils of slavery and exploitation of the land.

It is the wise Aunt Jenny who understands the nature of Bayard's stand, and who perceives his excrutiating pain when Drusilla, whom he dearly loves, is repelled by his action. She tries to prepare him for the essential disappointment that is life, by telling him of an English mercenary's words, "No bloody moon." In other words, he must realize that if an individual can be true to himself, that is the most he can expect out of life.

The land plays an important part in this novel, and sets the stage for "The Bear." Colonel Sartoris' attitude toward the land is a continuation of the selfish possessiveness of the old South.

Sutpen appears briefly in this novel in connection with the land. When Sartoris and the townspeople are forming the Ku Klux Klan they try to get Sutpen to join them. He

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[1]Warren, op. cit., p. 176. [2]O'Connor, op. cit., p. 102.

refuses, telling them to take care of their land and the world will take care of itself. Although the reader is more sympathetic to this attitude, it is still based on the same acquistive desire to exploit the land.

But the attitude toward the land which functions so forcefully in "The Bear," is also in The Unvanquished. Buddy and Buck McCaslin, a branch of the aristocracy with which Faulkner has always been most sympathetic, share their plantation with the poor dirt farmers and the Negroes--working it in communal ownership. They believed that the people belonged to the land, rather than the land to the people. Thus is introduced a concept which is to assume almost mystical proportions in "The Bear."

CHAPTER XI

THE WILD PALMS

In this novel there are two unrelated stories juxtaposed so as to point up the impossibility of winning over life. Each story treats a different way of grasping a measure of happiness from life. In The Wild Palms (1939) Harry and Charlotte, in attempting to extract the last measure of happiness from life (all the while cognizant of the treachery inherent in life), overreach themselves and are defeated. In a sense they were fighting life--which is always a losing battle. Harry, however, unlike Quentin, achieves a certain dignity in preferring to suffer with his memories than to give up his life. He refuses to give in to the cosmic Joker.

At the other extreme, the convict in Old Man attempts to escape the burdens which life imposes on one. He too is nearly a victim; flood-nature refuses to let man live in peace. He finally manages to accept life on his own terms, but at a very low level of existence. Ironically, he can "face" life only if he is shut away from it in prison. The Player seems content to allow the lowly to endure--but not ~~without making their stay on earth burdensome. The convict~~

manifests an intuitive understanding of his battle with nature; he begins to see himself as a plaything of the Gods. The story is almost picaresque. The basic situation, of course, is humorous: frustrated man's attempt to withdraw from life, thwarted at every point. The tall tale type of humor in Old Man is seldom of a bitter turn--nor is this a bitter story.

As with so much of Faulkner's fiction, sex has an important function in The Wild Palms; it acts as a metaphor and symbol of life. It is through sex that Harry and Charlotte define themselves. Whether or not they can find meaning in the world depends on whether or not their sexual love for each other comes to fruition. But in order to achieve fulfillment they must violate the society-imposed order in which they live. Charlotte violates her order by leaving her husband and two children. Harry violates his by quitting his interneship just before he is to receive his medical degree. The disruption of a particular order or world view functions importantly in Faulkner's work, as with most great writers. Only through this disruption or violation is a character able to realize himself. Joe Christmas is unable to find meaning in life because he is unable to break out of the circle. Quentin cannot accept the lines on which his life is laid out, but he is unable to repudiate them. Lena Grove, on the other hand, refuses to act as a fallen woman should act, thereby finding life rich and

rewarding. Harry and Charlotte make the break and live intensely for a few months, but are eventually destroyed by the order from which they emerged.

And yet there is a paradox apparent in the need to escape from one's controlling order: once man has made the break and assumes the role of outcast, a desire to return to the fold, to get back into his frame of reference, sets in. This often takes the form of a remembrance of his childhood or of an identification with a generation and period which existed before he was born. "But always there is a return to one controlling image, an image of longing and memory."[1] In his discussion of the image of longing Howe says:

> Beneath the white man's racial uneasiness there often beats an impatience with the devices by which society keeps men apart. Ultimately the whole aparatus of separation must seem too wearisome in its constant call to alertness, too costly in its tax on the emotions, and simply tedious as a brake on spontaneous life. The white man is repeatedly tempted by a memory playing on the ruin of his consciousness: a memory of boyhood, when he could live as a brother with his Ringo or Henry Beauchamp--his Nigger Jim or Queequeg--and not yet wince under the needle of self-consciousness. The memory--is it a longing in the guise of memory? --can be downed by the will and blunted by convention, but it is too lovely and in some final sense too real to be discarded entirely.[2]

This is a penetrating insight on the part of Howe; the image of longing functions throughout Faulkner's work. Hightower, for instance, breaks the pattern of his ministerial function. The disorder in his life stems from the fact that there is an intermingling of two patterns in his life. There is the

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[1]Howe, op. cit., p. 75. [2]Ibid., p. 77.

pattern set forth by his father: religion and devotion to one's calling. Then there is the pattern of his grandfather's world: the glamor and the glory of the confederacy. He partially succeeds in breaking the religious pattern, but his longing and memory focus not on his own chilhood but on the glorious and romantic charge his grandfather made in a Civil War battle; a charge which to him symbolized the glamor of the old South. He goes down to defeat because he is unable to completely identify himself with either order.

Harry and Charlotte come to the tag end of their days in a cottage rented from a middle-aged doctor and his wife, who represent the bourgeois morality from which they have been trying to escape. Much of the final action is reported by the doctor as he interprets their lives from the viewpoint of the order from which they separated. Needless to say, he only partially understands the motivating force behind their actions. For instance, he senses Charlotte's hatred of men but does not understand the reason for it. It is up to the reader to arrive at the correct understanding: that she is bitter toward the sex drive which has forced her to give up her home and children.

Likewise, Marthe, the doctor's wife, with her code of rigid morality, is unable to grasp the significance of Charlotte's act. The very description of Marthe strengthens the conception of grim morality: "her shadow. . .monstrous, gorgonlike from the rigid paper-wrapped twists of her gray

hair above the gray face above the high-necked night-dress which also looked gray, as if every garment she owned had partaken of that grim iron-color of her implacable and invincible morality which, the doctor was to realize later, was almost omniscient."[1] Marthe, of course, believes that one's function in life is to perform one's duty as prescribed by the mores of society. Charlotte, on the other hand, felt that one's first duty was to oneself. To subordinate love and passion to duty was to subordinate life to death.

Charlotte is strongly addicted to the physical. In her relationship with Harry she seldom talks of love, but of sex--with emphasis on the animalistic. Her interest in sculpture accents her interest in the flesh:

> That's what I make; something you can touch, pick up, something with weight in your hand that you can look at the behind side of, that displaces air and displaces water and when you drop it, it's your foot that breaks and not the shape. Not poking at a piece of cloth with a knife or a brush like you were trying to put together a jig-saw puzzle with a rotten switch through the bars of a cage.[2]

Faulkner often pictures woman as the stronger of the two sexes. It is the woman who can face up to any situation and come off the victor; who knows what she wants and knows how to get it. Narcissa defeats Horace in Sanctuary because she knows what she wants and is ruthless in getting it. Rosa Coldfield forces Quentin to her will. Lena Grove carries

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[1] William Faulkner, The Wild Palms (New York, 1939), pp. 14-15.

[2] Ibid., p. 41.

Byron Bunch in her wake. Charlotte's strength is the cohesive force in her love affair. In the dramatic meeting between Harry and Rat, her husband, just after she has run away from home, Harry senses the oppressiveness of the female principle: "it seemed to him that they both stood now, aligned, embattled and doomed and lost, before the entire female principle."[1] When she and Harry have their first assignation in a hotel room Harry is at a loss as to how to carry it off, while Charlotte instinctively knows just what to do. Woman's instinct is a powerful force in Faulkner's world.

Charlotte is willing to place herself at odds with society because she "believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself."[2] Society imposes a heavy penalty on its members who stray off the path. Harry refuses to believe that what he and Charlotte are doing is sinful: "You are born submerged in anonymous lockstep with the teeming anonymous myriads of your time and generation; you get out of step once, falter once, and you are trampled to death."[3] Percy H. Boynton sums it up thusly:

> The times are out of joint; civilization offers nothing to commend it. The vast majority, living in desperate and unacknowledged resignation, surrender to the twin desires for money and social status. Love has no place in the world, and there is no place for religion, only for the pretense of it. Thrift and

[1] Ibid., p. 57. [2] Ibid., p. 48. [3] Ibid., p. 54.

> conformity reign. Security breeds the virtues that go with ease and the expensive enjoyment of the good things of life; but these virtues breed "fanaticism, smugness, meddling, fear, and worst of all, respectability." Faulkner proceeds inexorably to his conclusion that in refuge from drabness ecstasy must be achieved in defiance of all conformity and must be paid for at whatever price life and society demand.[1]

Just when Harry and Charlotte decide that their situation is hopeless, that they would be destroying themselves to run away without any money, Harry finds a purse containing over twelve hundred dollars. This is a deus ex machina with a rather grim twist to it. The Jester furnishes his subjects with the wherewithal to give meaning to their lives, only to cut them down when their struggle ceases to amuse Him.

Charlotte insists that they eschew the practical, the controlling force that has made of their lives a duty; it has to be all honeymoon:

> Listen: it's got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It cant be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentence overtakes us.[2]

This attitude is strikingly similar to Quentin's in The Sound and the Fury. Because he could find neither a heaven nor a hell he killed himself. Every time Charlotte or Harry forgets this credo, the other takes positive action to remedy

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[1]Percy H. Boynton, America in Contemporary Fiction (Chicago, 1940), p. 108.

[2]The Wild Palms, p. 83.

the situation. When Charlotte becomes overly dedicated to her job and he realizes that their drive is going into making money rather than into their love for each other, he pulls up stakes and accepts a job as medic in a remote Northern mining district.

> We came back here and I thought we were going great guns, until that night before Christmas when she told me about the store and I realized what we had got into, that starving was nothing, it could have done nothing but kill us, while this was worse than death or division even: it was the mausoleum of love, it was the stinking catafalque of the dead corpse borne between the olfactoryless walking shapes of the immortal unsentient demanding ancient meat.[1]

When Charlotte gets pregnant she makes Harry give her an abortion, believing that a child would force them back into the world from which they escaped. Throughout their short life together they are constantly reaffirming their belief that a moment of happiness is worth a lifetime of misery. "Isn't it worth it, even if it all busts tomorrow and we have to spend the rest of our lives paying interest?"[2]

Despite the fact that Charlotte is the vein of iron which holds them together, there is a desperation in her fight which is seldom seen in Harry. Faulkner seems to be saying that with weakness comes optimism, with strength, pessimism. Harry never gives up hoping that society will eventually let them live in peace, after it has exacted a heavy penalty. Charlotte has no such hope. "She's worse off than I am, he

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[1] Ibid., p. 139. [2] Ibid., p. 88.

thought. She doesn't even know what it is to hope."[1] Jean-Paul Sartre gives an interesting analysis of the nature of Charlotte's hopelessness: "The loss of all hope. . .does not deprive human reality of all possibilities; it is simply 'a way of being in terms of those possibilities.'"[2] There is, for instance, a great difference between the loss of hope of Charlotte Rittenmeyer and that of Mr. Compson. She comes to terms with the loss; he does not. Harry's hope, however, is often negativistic. He believes that surely God will allow a few of His creation to live and flourish. And because Charlotte has fought so hard it would seem that she of all the human race would receive divine sanction.

McCord, the only friend they make, furnishes the cynical viewpoint by which the reader realizes the futility of their struggle. When Harry tells him that despite all of the difficulties, he has been happy with the decision he made, McCord responds:

> Now, aint that sweet. Listen. Why dont you give me that damn check and send her back with me and you can eat through your hundred bucks and then move into the woods and eat ants and play Saint Anthony in a tree and on Christmas you can take a mussel shell and make yourself a present of your own oysters.[3]

McCord functions much as Mr. Compson did. He never departs from his stand of complete cynicism. But he does not have

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[1] Ibid., p. 92.

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Time in Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 188.

[3] The Wild Palms, pp. 102-103.

the depth of Mr. Compson. Obviously representing Faulkner himself, he is always ranting and raving against the shallowness of society:

> Christmas, McCord had said, the apotheosis of the bourgeoisie, the season when with shining fable Heaven and Nature, in accord for once, edict and postulate us all husbands and fathers under our skins, when before an altar in the shape of a gold-plated cattle-trough man may with impunity prostrate himself in an orgy of unbridled sentimental obeisance to the fairy tale which conquered the Western world, when for seven days the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in amnesty: the whitewashing of a stipulated week leaving the page blank and pristine again for the chronicling of the fresh. . .revenge and hatred.[1]

This angry outburst could have been written by Philip Wylie, or spoken by one of the characters in Mosquitoes. One of the defects that mars Intruder in the Dust is the speeches Gavin Stevens makes on the Negro issue. Practically all of McCord's passages detract from what would otherwise be a tightly structured story. Or to put it in McCord's own words: "We don't talk, we moralize at each other like two circuitriding parsons travelling the same country lane."[2]

One of the treacherous pitfalls that lie in their path is boredom. Always this is of consuming concern with Faulkner. Life is essentially a bore. Much of the crime and misery can be traced to boredom. (This is most powerfully dramatized in "Dry September.") Mr. Compson was a victim of a soul-consuming ennui. Often at the root of this mental state is found a lack of human intercourse. Unless a person feels

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[1] Ibid., p. 130. [2] Ibid., p. 138.

that he is needed and wanted he gets lost in the black depths of his own entity. This is what happens to Harry at a certain point during their life together. Charlotte is so self-sufficient that he feels unnecessary.

> I am bored. I am bored to extinction. There is nothing here that I am needed for. Not even by her. I have already cut enough wood to last until Christmas and there is nothing else for me to do.[1]

Ironically, only when Charlotte lies dying does he feel her dependence on him. It is the memory of a Charlotte who needed his love that keeps him from committing suicide after her death.

The theme of the journey and of the quest functions importantly in The Wild Palms. Once the lovers have torn away from their roots they are like flotsam tossed about by contrary winds. They are unable to find a niche for themselves, to establish new roots: "They waited for McCord at the apartment where they had lived for two months and left no mark other than the cigarette scars on the table."[2] Life is indeed paradoxical. If one is to have roots he must accept the responsibility which is part of his heritage. And yet the acceptance of responsibility often results in a negation of the life force, as in Charlotte's case, for instance. On the other hand, if one throws over the traces and demands his quota from life he runs the risk of wandering aimlessly on "deserts of vast eternity." Throughout the story Faulkner

[1] Ibid., p. 112. [2] Ibid., p. 129.

uses images and symbols of man's blundering path through life. There is so little time and opportunity in our blundering course to grasp love and happiness that the attempt to hold on to what little there is often has about it a quality of desperation. It is this desperation that leads Kazin to say that Harry and Charlotte have a hatred of life: "he is bound to a woman, and she to him, by a passion that has gone beyond desire, a passion they have inflicted upon themselves out of some retching hatred of life."[1] Kazin misses the point; it's not that they have a hatred of life, but of that in life which refuses to let one live.

When the old doctor is called in by Harry, who no longer trusts himself as a doctor when administering to Charlotte, he is horrified to discover that not only has she had an abortion but that her lover had performed it:

> This is too much! There are rules! Limits! To fornication, adultery, to abortion, crime, and what he meant was To that of love and passion and tragedy which is allowed to anyone lest he become as God Who has suffered likewise all that Satan can have known.[2]

Unless they love by the rules their love will not be sanctioned; but if they do love by the rules there is no love. Even as she lies dying--and bitterly resenting her approaching death--Charlotte says that the love they had has made it worth while.

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[1]Alfred Kazin, "A Study in Conscience," N. Y. Her. Trib. Book Rev., XV (Jan. 22, 1939), 2.

[2]The Wild Palms, p. 280.

Harry refuses to run away when the opportunity is offered to him, realizing that with Charlotte dead there is no place to run to. But he refuses to take his life: "between grief and nothing I will take grief."[1] In this conclusion there is the suggestion that Harry Wilbourne is willing to expiate his sins through suffering. But this is only one final irony in the cosmic irony: Harry is suffering for a sin that he does not consider sinful. His only sin was that he tried to grasp a measure of happiness from life. He only sinned because of the diabolical nature of the human condition. This makes of his suffering a mockery. Only in Faulkner's most recent fiction is suffering meaningful.

The inclusion of Old Man makes of the novel a bridge between the novels of extreme pessimism and those of a limited optimism. The title story is one of the most pessimistic stories Faulkner ever wrote; Old Man introduces a strong note of optimism. On the surface of the story there is little indication of its underlying suggestion of affirmation. One might well ask as does Kazin: "Behind bars or not, is a Faulkner character in prison?"[2]

Two convicts have been sent out to rescue a man and a woman who have been stranded in separate places during

[1] Ibid., p. 324.

[2] Kazin, "A Study in Conscience," p. 2.

Mississippi's worst flood. The convict who is the protagonist loses his friend, Whitey, and is reported drowned, by the authorities. In the meantime the convict locates the woman who is far along in her pregnancy, and they spend many harrowing days trying to get back to the area from which he started. When he finally does reach his goal he has another ten years added to his sentence, for trying to escape. Certainly there is nothing optimistic discernible in the bare telling of the story; indeed, the Joker, with his penchant for creating ironic situations, seems to be working overtime. The optimism occurs in the way the convict reacts to life's treachery. He not only adjusts to prison life (with its symbolic reference that life itself is a prison), but actually finds peace and contentment. Life itself is a sentence but it is a sentence which can be endured if the victim accepts it with a certain degree of stoicism. The optimism is, of course, negativistic. Always, the convict chooses to run from life rather than to battle it.

> He could be tried in Federal Court under the Mann Act and for the automobile, that is, by electing to pass through the anteroom where the woman raged he could take his chances on the lesser crime in Federal Court, or by accepting a sentence for manslaughter in the State Court he would be permitted to quit the room by a back entrance, without having to pass the woman.[1]

He chooses the stiffer penalty. It is, however, almost as difficult to run from life as to stay and do battle with it.

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[1]<u>The Wild Palms</u>, p. 27.

Throughout the story there is the cosmic metaphor of man fighting nature. Whereas Harry and Charlotte had only to contend with society, the convict has both society and the cosmos ranged against him. He wins out, whereas they lost, because he is only trying to endure, while they were trying to conquer.

Always in the background there is the eternal river, the Old Man. The Old Man is an instrument of the Jester; nature itself takes a hand in moving the pawns about on the chessboard. The river decided which convict should escape from the boat to the security of the tree and which should remain in the boat. The convict muses

> with impotent and terrified fury upon that arbitrariness of human affairs which had abrogated to the one the secure tree and to the other the hysterical and unmanageable boat for the very reason that it knew that he alone of the two of them would make any attempt to return and rescue his companion.[1]

Nature (Providence or the Joker) manipulates the affairs of men so as to experience the utmost pleasure from its playthings. As the convict lies on the bottom of the surging boat he realizes that soon he must get up and do battle. He sees his position as typical of what life has to offer. Life consists of getting up until it is permissible to lie down. It is the convict's humorous attitude toward the impossibility of life that makes it possible for him to weather its snares. Rather than getting enraged at the spectacle of himself

[1] Ibid., p. 146.

floundering around helplessly (although he occasionally becomes hysterical), he views each mounting obstacle with a certain detached irony, as if he expected no less. When he learns that the woman whom he has rescued is pregnant all he says is, "And this is what I get. This, out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with."[1] (It fits!)

In Old Man nature is almost sentient, not only symbolically but literally. The skiff

> began to flee beneath him with terrific speed, they were in an eddy but did not know it; he had no time to draw conclusions or even wonder; he crouched, his teeth bared in his blood-caked and swollen face, his lungs bursting, flailing at the water while the trees stooped hugely down at him.[2]

On the other hand Faulkner often welds nature to the cosmos through the metaphor.

> Sometime about midnight, accompanied by a rolling cannonade of thunder and lightening like a battery going into action, as though some forty hours' constipation of the elements, the firmament itself, were discharging in clapping and glaring salute to the ultimate acquiescence to desperate and furious motion, and still leading its charging welter of dead cows and mules and outhouses and cabins and hencoops, the skiff passed Vicksburg.[3]

By combining man, nature, and cosmos in a functioning metaphor, Faulkner achieves, structurally, the de-emphasis of man. At the same time, by attributing human qualities to the inanimate, the author is suggesting that there is a malignant force in the universe: man is not simply a victim

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[1] Ibid., pp. 149-150. [2] Ibid., p. 151. [3] Ibid., p. 157.

of a blind fate. The convict always thinks of the river in life-like metaphors:

> That was when it occurred to him that its [the river's] present condition was no phenomenon of a decade, but that the intervening years during which it consented to bear upon its placid and sleepy bosom the frail mechanicals of man's clumsy contriving was the phenomenon and this the norm and the river was now doing what it liked to do, had waited patiently the ten years in order to do, as a mule will work for you ten years for the privilege of kicking you once.[1]

Not only, then, does nature appear life-like, but conversely man often becomes larger than life. The convict regards the pregnant woman, for instance, as "one single inert monstrous sentient womb,"[2] whose presence was all-pervasive and from whom there was no escape. Even when he is finally safe and secure in prison, "riveted warranted and doubly guaranteed by the ten years they had added to his sentence for attempted escape, something of the old hysteric incredulous outrage came back into his face, his voice, his speech."[3]

Always there is his fear that the child will be born before they are able to find land. It is this over-riding fear that makes his inability to surrender doubly ironic. Whenever he appears at a settlement his prison garb gives him away, so that the people shoot at him before he can give himself up. He is not to be allowed to reach his goal until the final indignity has been perpetrated--the child is born in the midst of the raging river.

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[1] Ibid., p. 160. [2] Ibid., p. 163. [3] Ibid., p. 164.

If the convict had grown bitter over his inability to reach his goal, and had decided to escape imprisonment rather than life, he would undoubtedly have been destroyed. He is tempted many times, but remains steadfast in his belief. The most alluring temptation came when he was on a river boat, having been rescued temporarily from the flood. A doctor on the boat who takes an academic interest in his case offers him clothes, money, and passage to New Orleans. In his vehement refusal there is "the cry of final and irrevocable repudiation of the old primal faithless Manipulator of all the lust and folly and injustice."[1]

The convict and the woman found momentary respite from their wearying voyage, in a settlement of Cajuns, where the convict spent many happy hours hunting alligators. When he learns that he is about to be driven from this temporary haven because the dam up above is to be dynamited he can not believe it:

> What he declined to accept was the fact that a power, a force such as that which had been consistent enough to concentrate upon him with deadly undeviation for weeks, should with all the wealth of cosmic violence and disaster to draw from, have been so barren of invention and imagination, so lacking in pride of artistry and craftmanship, as to repeat itself twice. . . .that now the cosmic joker, foiled twice, had stooped in its vindictive concentration to the employing of dynamite.[2]

It is as if the cosmic force allowed its victim to rest momentarily in order that the victim may regain the strength

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[1] Ibid., p. 247. [2] Ibid., pp. 264-265.

necessary to wage battle. Otherwise the battle would soon be over and the Player's game would have been short-lived. Revive the sufferer so that he can endure further tortures.

The convict clings to the boat as if it were his last hold onto reality. The boat is his one link with the security and comfort he knew in prison. Without the boat (which, after all, is prison property) his connection with that past would be severed. Just as the boat is his connection with a past, the river has been so much a part of his life for so many days that he feels as if it were omnipresent, as if it defied time and space. It has always been with him and always will be. Even when he gains the security of the prison the haunting memory of his days on the river is continually flooding to the surface of his mind to remind him that the destructive force in life hovers nearby, waiting to take its victims into its bottomless depths. "It was now ineradicably a part of his past, his life; it would be a part of what he would bequeath, if that were in store for him."[1]

The convict's stoical endurance is summed up in the scene in which he finally manages to surrender: "Yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse."[2]

This story has often been compared to Huckleberry Finn. Certainly there are many similarities: both are

[1] Ibid., p. 277. [2] Ibid., p. 278.

picaresque, and both are held together structurally by the presence of the river. But Twain's has greater breadth of experience; whereas Faulkner's has greater depth of symbolic meaning.

The Wild Palms and Old Man are united structurally by the journey motif. Harry and Charlotte move from one locality to another in an attempt to find a place where they can rest secure in their love for one another. They are searching, continually searching and reaching for happiness. Theirs is a flight from stultifying conventionality, where love and passion are stamped out. But because, after all, they too are members of the human race, and are subject to human limitations, they are defeated. The convict, also, is fleeing from the rigors of society. But his flight is in a different direction: he is not trying to find a meaning in life, he is trying to escape life, refusing to face the problems of existentialism. It is almost as if he were trying to return to the womb, safe from the harsh realities of the world. "His one aim is to get away from the woman (and her child, born in their wanderings), to get away from the need for making decisions and get back to his sanctuary in prison."[1] The two stories form a dialectic of withdrawal and return--a withdrawal from an impossible world (society) and a return to an impossible world (prison). Each story represents an antithesis to an impossible thesis; but there is no synthesis.

[1]Malcolm Cowley, "Sanctuary," NR, XCVII (Jan. 25, 1939), 349.

CHAPTER XII

THE HAMLET

In The Hamlet (1940) Faulkner writes of two types of people, one of whom he likes, the other he abhors. Although the Snopeses have made their appearance in previous novels this is the first time he has systematically portrayed the rise of Snopesism. In his article on Mississippi Faulkner says that the Snopeses are the members of the Ku Klux Klan; they are the despoilers of the earth. They have no ethical consciousness, acting out of an instinctive desire to possess.

On the other hand there are the poor farmers who feel an attachment to the land and the community. These are the inhabitants who have come from the Tennessee mountains and from the Atlantic seaboard. "They took up land and built one and two-room cabins and never painted them, and married one another and produced children and added other rooms one by one to the original cabins and did not paint them either."[1] In this novel Faulkner evinces friendliness as well as pity. He likes the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend (about twenty miles from Jefferson). True, the good characters are still

[1]William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York, 1940), p. 5.

defeated, but most of them take their defeat in a healthy manner. These characters are not, of course, of the aristocracy; the curse still operates on the aristocratic class. (This can be seen in the fate of Houston, an aristocratic type of man. He is a figure of doom and damnation.) The novel is a reaffirmation of the common man.

The Hamlet is Faulkner's most humorous novel. And although there is some bitter irony, on the whole the humor is of the frontier variety. There is the philosophical suggestion that they who can laugh at their defeat may be saved.

Will Varner is the most important man in Frenchman's Bend. Through trickery and shrewdness he has gained a great deal of property--half of the community is in debt to him. His son, Jody, is a hot-tempered young man who runs his father's store. He lacks the innate shrewdness of his father. Eula, the daughter, is the prototype of female sexuality. Houston is a landowner who lives a lonely, bitter life, having lost his young wife shortly after their marriage. The residents of Frenchman's Bend are the small farmers who have to struggle from day to day to keep themselves clothed, housed, and fed--the Bookwrights, Tulls, McCallums, Armstids, and Littlejohns. The most sympathetic character in the novel is Ratliff, an itinerant sewing machine salesman. It is through his eyes that much of the action unfolds. He serves as a sounding-board, weighing and evaluating the actions and motivations of the people in the community. More than any

other Faulkner character, Ratliff serves as a spokesman for the author.

Into this hamlet comes a new species of mankind, the Snopeses--an amoral, naturalistic group who conquer the humanists. They have no heritage, hence, no ethical anchors. They are ruthless and impersonal (machine-like) in their conquest. To defeat a Snopes one would have to adopt Snopesism; such a thing is impossible for the humanists. The leader of the tribe is Flem, who before the novel ends, manages to thoroughly demoralize the inhabitants, and to own half the town. He brings in hordes of Snopeses to run the stores, farms, blacksmith shops, and the school, which have come under his control. He finally outdistances Will Varner himself (the difference between the treachery of Varner and of Snopes will be discussed later), marries his daughter who is pregnant with another man's child, defeats the shrewd Ratliff, and leaves the community at the end of the novel, in search of further conquests.

O'Donnell breaks all of Faulkner's characters up into two main categories, the Snopeses and the Sartorises:

> The characters and the conflict are particular and credible. But they are also mythological. In Mr. Faulkner's mythology there are two kinds of characters; they are Sartorises or Snopeses, whatever the family names may be. And in the spiritual geography of Mr. Faulkner's work there are two worlds: the Sartoris world and the Snopes world. In all of his successful books, he is exploring the two worlds in detail, dramatizing the inevitable conflict between them.
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> It is a universal conflict. The Sartorises act

> traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality, humanism. Being anti-traditional, the Snopeses are immoral from the Sartoris point-of-view; acting only for self-interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty. Really, then, they are a-moral; they represent naturalism or animalism. And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism.[1]

Although this statement is very general and rather sweeping, and certainly there are many **subd**ivisions in each group, it is true that much of the conflict in Faulkner's fiction stems from the struggle between the traditionalists and the anti-traditionalists. In The Hamlet the anti-traditionalists win, as they usually do in Faulkner's world. Cowley has the following to say about the one-sided struggle:

> What he does tell us is that there used to be men in the South who were capable of good and evil, who observed or failed to observe a traditional code of ethics. These men, he says, were defeated by Northern armies. Surviving into a new era, they were weakened by a sense of guilt resulting from their relations with the Negroes; and they were finally destroyed by new men rising from among the Poor Whites. The point is made symbolically in Absalom, Absalom. where the plantation owner is killed by a white squatter. His only surviving descendant is a half-witted mulatto.
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> But in Faulkner's novels the war has never ended. It has merely been transformed into another struggle between the heirs of the slaveholders, who try rather feebly to live by the old code, and the new bankers and demagogues who have absolutely no standards but pecuniary success.[2]

The Sartorises lose the struggle because their strength has been vitiated by past evils. Only when the curse has been

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[1]O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 39.

[2]Malcolm Cowley, "Faulkner by Daylight," NR, CII (April 15, 1940), 510.

lifted will ethical consciousness defeat amoral modernism.

The provincialism in The Hamlet has universal implications. I believe that one of the primary ingredients in Faulkner's evocation of the universal is humor. Irving Howe sums up his analysis of The Hamlet in this manner:

> Distinctly American in idiom and observation, heavily sprinkled with the salt of folk humor, the book releases its theme with an ease that is a sign of true seriousness. In its flow of ancedote and comedy lies its depth of meaning--in the passage, for example, in which Flem and Ratliff, cagily trading, face each other in the store, their very gestures reflecting the social and moral meanings of their struggle.[1]

If The Hamlet were not permeated with humor, if the humor were not actually a structural principle, the pathetic condition of the victims of the Snopeses would be unbearable. On the other hand, if the pathos, the abject misery were absent, we would have frontier humor without that extra dimension--the real and terrible suffering and deterioration of a community in the grip of the Snopeses.

> Despite the terror-stricken atmosphere that was to fill his novels, and an almost ferocious misanthropy, Faulkner's was essentially a boyish mind for all his complexity, a mind humorous in the broad country fashion, and given to lazy improvisations, and a certain shyness, an indirectly comic view of life, at once racy and tormented and ambiguous, appeared in his work from the first.[2]

On the same subject V. F. Hopper has this to say: "His grotesqueries waver between humor and pathos, becoming

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[1]Howe, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

[2]Kazin, "Faulkner: The Rhetoric and the Agony," p. 394.

often intentionally bathetic."[1] Whether or not there is any of the bathetic in The Hamlet is open to discussion. In the incident of the wild ponies there is a scene which would be bathetic if the tragic element were missing. The Armstids, an incredibly poor family--poor as only Faulkner can describe poverty--came to the auction of these mad beasts, the husband determined to purchase one with the five dollars that his wife had accumulated over the months, by untold hardship, in order to buy her "little chaps" some shoes for the coming winter. But Henry was oblivious to everything except owning one of the ponies. The Texan, somewhat moved by the plight of Mrs. Armstid, and disgusted with Henry's conduct at the auction, refused to sell him the horse which he had bought with the five dollars. He told Mrs. Armstid that she would get the money from Flem Snopes the next morning. By this time the reader knows in his soul how much that money means to the poor woman. The reader also has a sickening awareness that Flem Snopes is not going to give it to her when she calls for it the next morning. And, of course, he doesn't. Never once during all these difficulties does Mrs. Armstid betray any emotion; it has all been beaten out of her--she is the living embodiment of the principle of stoicism. As she is leaving, after Flem's denial of having the money, he calls her back and gives her a five-cent bag of candy for her

[1] V. F. Hopper, "Faulkner's Paradise Lost," VQR, XXIII (July, 1947), 420.

"little chaps." Her reaction: "You're right kind."[1]

Now this of course is humor. But it is humor heightened by pathos. If anyone but Mrs. Armstid had made that response it would have been the most obvious kind of intentional irony.[2] But by this time Faulkner had so depersonalized her (in the sense that so much misery has dried up her juices) that it was inconceivable she could have been purposefully ironical. No, the irony (a very bitter irony) was in the situation, not in the character's attitude towards the situation. Thus, as is often the case with Faulkner, the reader responds on two levels: identification with character and identification with situation; or to state it another way, the reader is reacting both subjectively and objectively, the final reaction resulting from an integration of the two.

Faulkner often achieves his powerful effects by letting the situation speak louder than the characters. Such a scene is the one between Ab Snopes and his wife as reported by Ratliff. It is a scene from Ratliff's boyhood at a time before Ab had become embittered and soured over his inability to cope with the grim reality of grasping a living from the reluctant earth. The scene Ratliff describes is the famous horse trading incident. This is truly a tall tale in

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[1] The Hamlet, p. 362.

[2] For the reader who is interested in observing the stylistic advance of the later Faulkner over the early

the best style of frontier humor. Mark Twain never surpassed it. But again there is a strong undertone of the pathetic. This differs from the previous example in that in this instance the dominant tone is one of humor with an undercurrent of pathos, whereas the converse was true in the other incident. Underlying this humorous tale is a tragic motif.

Ab Snopes' wife sends him to town to get her a milk separator with the money she had most laboriously accumulated. Ab returns without the money or the separator, having been victimized in a horse trade by Pat Stamper.

> It was the fact that Pat Stamper, a stranger, had come in and got actual Yoknapatawpha County cash dollars to rattling around loose that way. When a man swaps horse for horse, that's one thing and let the devil protect him if the devil can. But when cash money starts changing hands, that's something else. And for a stranger to come in and start that cash money to changing and jumping from one fellow to another, it's like when a burglar breaks into your house and flings your things ever which way even if he don't take nothing. It makes you twice as mad.[1]

After this calamity Ab's wife completely broke down. Ab's defense? "He had always been a fool about a horse."[2] Mrs. Snopes had longed for the separator so intensely and had worked so hard to make her desire realizable that life without the separator was unthinkable. Therefore she took their lone remaining capital investment, a cow, to town and swapped

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Faulkner may I suggest a comparative study of his short story, "Spotted Horses," Scribner's Magazine, LXXXIX (June, 1931), 582-597, with the same tale expanded and developed in The Hamlet.

[1] The Hamlet, p. 39. [2] Ibid., p. 50.

it for the separator. Now, of course, they had no milk to separate. They received a gift of a gallon of milk from a neighbor and she spent all day sending the milk back and forth through the separator.

> It sounded strong as ever, like it could make the milk fly, like it didn't give a whoop whether that milk had been separated once or a hundred times. "There it goes again," Ab says. "Don't forget that other gallon tomorrow."[1]

A tall tale with an extra dimension--the tragic element.

The same technique is used in the horror scenes. Some of the scenes are so horrible that if they were not relieved by, or conjoined with, humor they would become utterly unbearable. Cowley says of the novel: "Huckleberry Finn living in the House of Usher."[2]

Probably the best example of the conjoining of horror and humor is to be found in the idiot episode, his love affair with a cow. Faulkner relieves the tragedy of this affair by his stylistic treatment of it. Of course, as many theoreticians of humor have written, there is an element of the comic in the grotesque. And this is certainly true all through The Hamlet. For instance, there is something "horribly" funny in the idiot receiving love overtures from the cow in the form of its defecating on him. But whereas humor is inherent in the grotesque, Faulkner, in his handling

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[1] Ibid., p. 53.

[2] Malcolm Cowley, "William Faulkner's Human Comedy," N. Y. T. Book Rev., Octo. 29, 1944, p. 4.

of the horrible or grotesque, manages to bring out the humor in the scene without focusing the reader's attention on the humor. In other words, in the idiot scene the predominant tone is that of grotesquerie, with humor the under-rider. To quote Howe:

> That Ike Snopes' affair with Houston's cow should be celebrated in a style both the extremity and parody of romantic prose, that this prose should nonetheless convey the moral superiority of poor Ike over the iceblooded Flem, is very fine, even brilliant; we realize that the section is meant as an ironic fantasia, the high romantic lyricism blended to a subject matter poor and pathetic.[1]

This is what Campbell and Foster in their book call surrealistic humor or, and they quote Kenneth Burke, "Perspective by incongruity."[2] His style emphasizes the equal status of the idiot and the cow, thus achieving a two-fold purpose: showing that man can descend to the state of animals (tragedy) and that animals can rise to the level of human beings (humor). This humanizing of the cow by making her a responsible partner in the love affair is artistically and humorously touched up by Houston's expletive in driving the cow away from the idiot, "Git on home, you damn whore!"[3]

Mink Snopes is one of the most deadly characters in the whole array of Faulkner's degenerate characters. There is certainly nothing humorous in his characterization. But there is the humor of the grotesque in his actions. Such is

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[1] Howe, op. cit., p. 182.

[2] Campbell and Foster, op. cit., pp. 95-98.

[3] The Hamlet, p. 200.

the case in the incident of the murder of Houston. The murder is so seemingly pointless. Mink killed Houston because the latter had won a three dollar court decision against him. Yet when one probes into the background of Mink's life, the murder takes on deeper meaning.

> He emerged from the bottom and looked up the slope of his meagre and sorry corn and saw it--the paintless two-room cabin with an open hallway between and a lean-to kitchen, which was not his, on which he paid rent but not taxes, paying almost as much in rent in one year as the house had cost to build; not old, yet the roof of which already leaked and the weather stripping had already begun to rot away from the wall planks and which was just like the one he had been born in which had not belonged to his father either, and just like the one he would die in if he died indoors--which he probably would even if in his clothes, repudiated without warning at some instant between bed and table or perhaps the door itself, by his unflagging furious heart-muscles--and it was just like the more than six others he had lived in since his marriage and like the twice that many more he knew he would live in before he did die and although he paid rent on this one he was unalterably convinced that his cousin owned it and he knew that this was as near as he would ever come to owning the roof over his head.[1]

He marries a whore and begets two children with whom he has no time to establish a rapport. Their very marriage was symbolic of their miserable lot in life: "the Justice of the Peace. . .removed his chew of tobacco and, holding it damp in his hand, called in two passing men and pronounced them man and wife."[2]

His killing of Houston is Mink's final and desperate act of defiance in the face of a world which has hammered out

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[1] Ibid., pp. 251-252. [2] Ibid., p. 273.

of him all of his humanity. The murder incident is the most horrible scene in the book. But the horror is carried to such extremes that the reader laughs in spite of himself. "Exaggeration is always comic when prolonged, and especially when systematic."[1] This principle of humor is a primary ingredient in much of Faulkner's humor. The persistency of Mink's cousin, I. O. Snopes, in trying to find out where the body is hid lends comic relief to the scene. I. O. simply cannot believe that Mink neglected to go through Houston's pockets before burying him. When the realization is finally borne in on him he insists that Mink tell him where the body is hidden so that they can share the profits. When Mink refuses to do so I. O. is convinced that Mink means to keep the money himself. The extremes that I. O. goes to to see that this doesn't happen are simply incredible. Mink, of course, has no interest in Houston's money. Although a murderer he comes off much better in the reader's eyes than the weasle, I. O. Snopes.

The horror of the body falling apart when Mink was trying to dispose of it is grotesquely humorous. And when Mink was captured and placed in jail what are his reactions to his atrocity and to his future plight? "Are they going to feed them niggers before they do a white man? he thought, smelling the coffee and the ham."[2] Certainly this is an

[1]Bergson, op. cit., p. 125. [2]The Hamlet, p. 296.

outrageous ending to an outrageous crime.

Both the pathetic and the grotesque are combined with humor in the last scene in the book. We find Henry Armstid, completely deranged, digging for non-existent treasure. Humorous, yes. But the plight of Henry Armstid symbolizes the spiritual downfall of the community during the reign of the Snopeses. (Even more significant is the fact that Ratliff is destroyed--the most completely decent and normal man in the book.) Flem watches for a moment, dispassionately spits over his shoulder, and drives off. The victimization has been complete; there is no longer any reason for Flem to remain in Frenchman's Bend. The symbol for the destruction of a society is effectively completed in the same scene by the villagers who are idling against the fence watching the furious labor of Henry Armstid. There is little social intercourse, for they half realize what has happened to them.

Although humor is resident in both the pathetic and the grotesque in this novel, it is perhaps mostly evident when coupled with common sense. Ratliff is the perfect embodiment of this type of humor. He, along with Will Varner, Bookwright, and Tull, has a dry, easy-going sense of humor. But beneath their humor lies shrewdness and perspicacity. For these characters humor becomes a vehicle for their common sense. It is a way of looking at life, of achieving a certain aesthetic distance. It makes what they see more

bearable. (I don't mean to suggest that they don't see it accurately.) Faulkner characterizes Ratliff (one of his very finest creations): "He spoke in a pleasant, lazy, equable voice which you did not discern at once to be even more shrewd than humorous."[1] To quote Irving Howe in his discussion of Faulkner's often uncertain relationship to his protagonists, "but in The Hamlet Ratliff certainly needs no help, he speaks well enough for himself, and Faulkner's distance from him is exactly right, permitting both affection and irony."[2] And Will Varner's attitude toward life: not

> What must I do but What do you think you would like for me to do if you was able to make me do it. He was a farmer, a usurer, a veterinarian; Judge Benbow of Jefferson once said of him that a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box.[3]

Varner undoubtedly indulges in as much skulduggery as Flem, but there is a world of difference between the two. Varner is inside the bounds of humanity. He may cheat and steal, but never to the point of devastation. He wants his margin of profit but he would leave his victims a few crumbs. He would not attack the helpless and infirm. And he feels a strong attachment to the community. But the most important difference resides in the fact that Varner has a sense of the comic, whereas Flem is humorless. Varner is emotional, whereas Flem is completely unemotional. Varner has a soul, Flem none. Indeed, Ratliff has a dream in which he witnesses a

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[1] Ibid., p. 14. [2] Howe, op. cit., p. 185.

[3] The Hamlet, p. 5.

struggle between the devil and Flem Snopes. When Flem goes down to the nether regions to collect his soul it cannot be found--there is nothing but a dark stain in the box where the soul had been deposited. The Prince offers him all of the world, indeed all of heaven. Flem refuses, he wants hell. He sends Satan in a terrified crawl across the burning floor.

Flem indulged in shrewd dealing with the sole purpose of aggrandizement, whereas Varner and Ratliff enjoyed it as much for the artistry involved as for the rewards accruing from it. "He [Ratliff] was looking forward to his visit [to Frenchman's Bend] . . .for the pleasure of the shrewd dealing which far transcended mere gross profit."[1]

Conversation has an important function in this novel. "Reading The Hamlet is like listening to the gossip of a country store, with its cruelty, its extravagance, its tall stories, and its deadly comment upon human nature--but a gossip translated, heightened, and made into art."[2] Ratliff's observations on his fellow men are invariably pertinent and humorous. Through his disillusioned comments the reader is made aware of the defeated virtues of civilization. For instance, on his first viewing of the idiot:

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[1] Ibid., p. 77.

[2] Stephen Vincent Benet, "Flem Snopes and His Kin," SRL, XXI (April 6, 1940), 7.

> Ratliff watched the creature as it went on--the thick thighs about to burst from the overalls, the moving head turned backward over its shoulder, watching the dragging block.
>
> "And yet they tell us we was all made in His image," Ratliff said.[1]

As in most of his novels, sex is an important element in The Hamlet. Eula Varner is the perfect embodiment of a primitive earth goddess. She cares nothing for the movement of the world's affairs. She is laziness incarnate.

> She seemed to be not a living integer of her contemporary scene, but rather to exist in a teeming vacuum in which her days followed one another as though behind sound-proof glass, where she seemed to listen in sullen bemusement, with a weary wisdom heired of all mammalian maturity, to the enlarging of her own organs.[2]

Eula didn't walk until she was six years old, and then only when it was absolutely necessary, because "it was. . .as though, even in infancy, she already knew there was nowhere she wanted to go, nothing new or novel at the end of progression, one place like another anywhere and everywhere."[3] Her parents reared her in the light of a solitary goal. "All we want anyway is to keep her out of trouble until she gets old enough to sleep with a man without getting me and him both arrested."[4]

Eula took her sex in the same unwondering manner with which she regarded all other aspects of her existence. "If you could arrange to have a man standing every hundred feet along the road, she would walk all the way home! Soon as she

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[1] The Hamlet, p. 93. [2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] Ibid., p. 108. [4] Ibid., p. 111.

passes anything in long pants she begins to give off something. You can smell it! You can smell it ten feet away."[1]

She was the despair of her brother who guarded her chastity as closely as a monk his crucifix. He took her to and from school on his horse.

> The roan horse bearing the seething and angry man and the girl of whom, even at nine and ten and eleven, there was too much--too much of leg, too much of breast, too much of buttock; too much of mammalian female meat which, in conjunction with the tawdry oil-cloth receptacle that was obviously a grammar-grade book-satchel, was a travesty and paradox on the whole idea of education. . .He had a vision of himself transporting not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses.[2]

He allowed her to ride English saddle

> until he happened to look aside and so behind him and saw the incredible length of outrageously curved dangling leg and the bare section of thigh between dress and stocking-top looking as gigantically and profoundly naked as the dome of an observatory. And his rage was only intensified by the knowledge that she had not deliberately exposed it.[3]

(Many of Faulkner's metaphors and images are so unusual and striking that they often evoke from the reader a humorous response.)

Eula at an early age, despite her brother's zealous guardianship, got pregnant while in an unmarried state. When the news is disclosed the brother nearly went out of his head with rage. On that afternoon he had so violent a scene with

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[1] Ibid., p. 112. [2] Ibid., p. 113.

[3] Ibid., p. 114.

Eula in her bedroom that he woke up his mother. She said to her husband, "Eula's got a baby. Go up there and knock that fool [the brother] in the head."[1] But the brother was not to be subdued. "'Hold him till I get a stick of stove wood,' she gasped. 'I'll fix him. I'll fix both of them. Turning up pregnant and yelling and cursing here in the house when I am trying to take a nap!'"[2] The father's reaction to all this? "Hell and damnation, all this hullabaloo and uproar because one confounded running bitch finally foxed herself. What did you expect--that she would spend the rest of her life just running water through it?"[3]

Eula becomes for Faulkner a symbol of the laziness, slothfulness, and ignorance of the South. But as with most of Faulkner's symbols there is no one-to-one relationship between symbol and that which it stands for. By no stretch of the definition, then, can Faulkner be called an allegorical writer. In the case of Eula, for instance, there is a definite ambivalence as to her symbolic function. In addition to the above, she also represents nature; a nature which serenely watches its inhabitants toss and turn. There is an endurance about Eula, a certain bovine assurance, which stands above the antics of the human race. Therefore, although she becomes Flem's wife, she remains impervious to

[1] Ibid., p. 161. [2] Ibid., p. 163.

[3] Ibid., pp. 164-165.

the advance of amoral modernism. She refers to him as "that man," and when she says Mr. Snopes it's just as if she were saying "Mr. Dog." The impotent Flem Snopes cannot leave his impression on the earth goddess. However, it is poetically just that in Faulkner's twisted world the two should be married. When she appears at the window one evening in response to a call from the villagers for Will Varner:

> She did not lean out, she merely stood there, full in the moon, apparently blank-eyed or certainly not looking downward at them--the heavy gold hair, the mask not tragic and perhaps not even doomed: just damned, the strong faint lift of breasts beneath marblelike fall of the garment; to those below what Brunhilde, what Rhinemaiden on what spurious river-rock of paper-mache, what Helen returned to what topless and shoddy Argos, waiting for no one.[1]

The only sense in which Eula is damned is a negative one: she is unable to mate with her counterpart. In the modern world the meeting of like with like is never effected. Or if it is, as in the case of Charlotte and Harry, it is short-lived.

The figure of doom who is seen in so many of Faulkner's novels makes his appearance in The Hamlet--Houston. He left for the West and took up with a whore with whom he lived a happy life for many years. But always there was a force pulling him back to Mississippi. Finally his resistance is overcome and he returns to marry the girl who had patiently awaited his return all of these years. Their life together is idyllically happy until his wife is killed by his horse,

[1] Ibid., pp. 349-350.

six months after they were married. Houston never recovers, spending the remainder of his short life in sardonic bitterness--"cursing again in that furious exasperation which was not rage but savage contempt and pity for all blind flesh capable of hope and grief."[1] Always there is his nagging awareness that subconsciously he does not really want to escape his destiny. And yet Houston is a strong man; he resists with all of his conscious power his inevitable fate. He is tireless and unflagging in wresting a living from the land. After his wife dies he shouts defiance to God:

> "I dont understand it," he would say. "I dont know why. I wont ever know why. But You cant beat me. I am strong as You are. You cant beat me."
> He was still alive when he left the saddle. He had heard the shot, then an instant later he knew he must have felt the blow before he heard it.[2]

As soon as Faulkner tells of Houston's cry of defiance he moves to the scene in which Houston is killed by Mink. This contrapuntal polarity serves, stylistically, as an ironic commentary on man's futile resistance to his doom. Houston, like so many of Faulkner's characters, is a figure of doom. He may shout defiance to God, but he can do nothing to avert his tragic fate.

A similar cry of despair is uttered by Ratliff, the force of which is governed partially by the fact that he seldom loses his ironic composure. He tells Bookwright how he tried to stop Flem's exploitation of the idiot.

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[1] Ibid., p. 215. [2] Ibid., pp. 248-249.

> "Oh," Bookwright said. "Hah," he said, with no mirth. "I reckon you gave Henry Armstid back his five dollars too." Then Ratliff looked away. His face changed--something fleeting, quizzical, but not smiling, his eyes did not smile; it was gone.
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> "I could have," he said. "But I didn't. I might have if I could just been sho he would buy something this time that would sho enough kill him like Mrs. Littlejohn said. Besides, I wasn't protecting a Snopes from Snopeses; I wasn't even protecting a people from a Snopes. I was protecting something that wasn't even a people, that wasn't nothing but something that dont want nothing but to walk and feel the sun and wouldn't know how to hurt no man even if it would and wouldn't want to even if it could, just like I wouldn't stand by and see you steal a meatbone from a dog. I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that cant wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I wont. I wont, I tell you!"
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> "All right," Bookwright said. "Hook your drag up; it aint nothing but a hill. I said it's all right."[1]

Ratliff's mixed emotions concerning the people and community of Frenchman's Bend are similar to Faulkner's own toward the South, as expressed in "Mississippi": "Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don't love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults."[2]

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[1] The Hamlet, p. 367.

[2] William Faulkner, "Mississippi," Holiday, XV (April, 1954), 46.

CHAPTER XIII

GO DOWN, MOSES

Go Down, Moses (1942) represents a major break in the Faulkner canon. It is the first book in which goodness triumphs. There is a direct focus on the importance of the land as community property. One can regain a proper perspective only through a reidentification with the land. "This book marks a profound shift in his work. In place of the sense of doom, of tragic inevitabilities, or of an Old Testament harshness, one finds a sense of hopefulness, a promise of salvation."[1] But the sins of the South must still be expiated through suffering. The unifying theme is one of atonement.

Also, as first witnessed in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, so in Go Down, Moses the problem of mixed blood plays an important role in the myth. "'Old Carothers' doomed and fatal blood' has become associated with the Old South's two primary sins: Its claim to sovereignty over the land which it should have held in stewardship, and its

[1]William Van O'Connor, "The Wilderness Theme in Faulkner's 'The Bear,'" Accent, XIII (1953), p. 12.

injustice towards the Negro."[1]

The two evils of slavery and exploitation of the land, which are responsible for the curse laid on the South, are shown in this novel as they affect the two most important figures: Isaac McCaslin and Lucas Beauchamp. The novel is composed of seven related short stories (some are related closely, others remotely), three of which ("The Old People," "The Bear," "Delta Autumn") are devoted to Isaac and his relationship to the land, and two ("The Fire and the Hearth" and "Go Down, Moses") to Lucas, who has a mixture of white and Negro blood, and his family. "In 'The Bear' Faulkner attempts to bring the two subject matters and therefore the two themes together with the wilderness theme dominating."[2]

"Was" is the introductory story in which, incidentally, the ancestry of Lucas and Isaac is treated. "Pantaloon in Black" is a treatment of the injustice of the white man to the Negro.

Throughout the novel the accent is on nature as norm. Campbell and Foster write that Faulkner is less preoccupied with the subconscious and abnormal in this novel than with the primitivistic type of character.[3] It is a primitivism, they go on to say, which has become almost

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[1]Walton Litz, "Genealogy as Symbol in Go Down, Moses," Faulkner Studies, II (1952-1954), 49.

[2]O'Connor, The Tangled Fire, p. 126.

[3]Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 64.

sentimentalized. This statement implies a criticism which has been pretty generally leveled at Go Down, Moses. Escaping to and feeling an identification with the wilderness is, perhaps, a search for values that have been destroyed by the inroads of civilization. It is a reaffirmation of individualism. At the same time, however, it is an escape from social responsibility. "It is a kind of neurotic dream, an escape from rather than an attempt to solve the present injustice."[1]

I believe, however, that O'Connor and the critics who share his viewpoint stop too soon in their analysis of the novel. The trouble with the world is that the people have lost touch with the old values, with a moral code of behavior. Therefore, the individual must escape the world of mechanical modernism; he must turn to a source where truth, justice, bravery, integrity, and honor can be found. The logical questing place is the wilderness, the only section of the land which has been untouched by the machine. Then, once the old values have been reaffirmed, the individual must re-enter society and work to re-establish an ethical consciousness in his fellow man. This is what Ike tries to do in the novel and in his last novel, A Fable, it is just what the protagonist tries to do.

"Was" is a humorous tale of Uncle Buck McCaslin's desperate struggle to escape the clutches of Miss Sophonsiba.

[1] O'Connor, The Tangled Fire, p. 134.

In counterpoint is the attempt by Tomey's Turl, a Negro slave, to join forces with Tennie, a Negress belonging to Mr. Hubert, owner of a neighboring plantation. The author is sympathetic to the Negro in these stories, as always; especially when he is a victim of the white man's injustice. But it is not until his next novel (with the exception of Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury), Intruder in the Dust, that a Negro appears as a fully developed protagonist. In most of the novels the Negro is a loveable child who must be protected from his own follies. Or he is the faithful retainer. In his dedication he sets the tone:

> To Mammy
>
> Caroline Barr
>
> Mississippi
>
> [1840-1940]
>
> Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love[1]

Both the McCaslins and Mr. Hubert prefer a world without women. "Uncle Buddy didn't own a necktie at all; Uncle Buck said Uncle Buddy wouldn't take that chance even in a section like theirs, where ladies were so damn seldom thank God that a man could ride for days in a straight line without having to dodge a single one."[2] Mr. Hubert tries to

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[1]William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York, 1942), Dedication.

[2]Ibid., p. 7.

manuever Uncle Buck into a marriage with his sister, Sophonsiba. He almost succeeds when Buck, who was staying at Mr. Hubert's while trying to capture Tomey's Turl, mistakes Miss Sophonsiba's bed for his own. Mr. Hubert insists that he is trapped. The issue is finally decided in a fabulous poker game between Uncle Buddy, who comes to the rescue, and Mr. Hubert. At the outcome of the game Uncle Buck wins his freedom and Tomey's Turl wins Tennie.

In "The Fire and the Hearth" the reader learns that Lucas Beauchamp's hearth has been violated by his master, Zack Edmonds, who persuades Lucas' wife, Molly, to move in with him. The stain of old Zack's miscegenation and his treatment of the Negro as mere chattel, has been passed on from father to son. His son, Carothers Edmonds, can never escape the guilt laid on his house. Therefore, he is never quite at ease with Lucas, now an old man, who lives on his property. Also there is the problem of pure blood. As is frequently the case in Faulkner, mixed blood somehow reflects the curse which has been laid on the South. Roth Edmonds reflects as he looks at Lucas: "I am not only looking at a face older than mine and which has seen and winnowed more, but at a man most of whose blood was pure ten thousand years when my own anonymous beginnings became mixed enough to produce me."[1]

[1] Ibid., p. 71.

Throughout the novel there is a constant comparison between past and present. And always the old days come off the better. ". . .back in the old time when men black and white were men."[1]

Much of the action in "The Fire and the Hearth" centers around Lucas' attempt to find buried treasure on Edmonds' land by the use of a divining machine. Lucas, who is presented as a man of probity, who has a strong ethical consciousness and a strong attachment to the land, succombs to the temptation to disturb the earth in his feverish desire to find a buried treasure. (This parallels the fall of Ratliff, Bookwright, and Armstid in The Hamlet.) He loses sight of all other tasks and goals, no longer caring for his crops. His aged wife, Molly, wants to leave him. "Because God say, 'What's rendered to My earth, it belong to Me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware.' And I'm afraid. I got to go. I got to be free of him."[2]

Molly's fear of disturbing the earth is a fundamental concept of primitivism. In olden times mining was looked on askance because of the belief that if God had meant for man to have the treasures of the earth He would have made them accessible. The whole episode is symbolic of the exploitation of the land.

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[1] Ibid., p. 37.

[2] Ibid., p. 102.

Lucas is patient and firm in his belief that one day he will find the treasure. When he tells Roth Edmonds, with rather faulty logic, that the buried sum is twenty-two thousand dollars Roth points out to him his imbecilic reasoning. "But Lucas merely looked at him. It was not stubbornness but an infinite, almost Jehovah-like patience, as if he were contemplating the antics of a lunatic child."[1]

Roth Edmonds realizes that he can never reach Lucas. He is always aware of the irreparable breach between white and black. He thinks back to his own childhood when Molly was the only mother he ever knew. He remembers his intimate relationship with his foster-brother, Henry, Molly's boy by his own father. In early youth they were inseparable. Then he recalls that day when he first noticed the difference in their color, and how that night he refused to sleep with Henry. He tries to re-establish the close relationship he had with Molly and her son, but he never succeeds. When he goes to Molly's for supper she feeds him apart from her own family.

> "Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?" he cried.
> Henry paused, turning his head a little to speak in the voice slow and without heat: "I aint ashamed of nobody," he said peacefully. "Not even me."
> So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit.[2]

Something went out of his life that he could never replace.

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[1] Ibid., p. 80.

[2] Ibid., pp. 113-114.

In his later years Roth was to understand that Lucas beat his father over the possession of Molly. He cannot even take refuge in his heritage with the belief that, after all, the white man is superior to the Negro. And so he pays final tribute to Lucas:

> He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us and our kind, myriad, countless, faceless, even nameless now except himself who fathered himself, intact and complete, contemptuous, as old Carothers must have been, of all blood black white yellow or red, including his own.[1]

"Pantaloon in Black" is the only story which has no reference to the McCaslin-Edmonds-Beauchamp story. Its theme, however, makes it functional with the other six stories. It is one of Faulkner's most powerful treatments of the Negro, and one in which a Negro's thoughts and feelings speak for themselves. (Usually the Negro is portrayed through the point of view of a white person.)

Rider is a huge Negro who left his wild living, settled down and married, and was happy beyond his highest dreams. But shortly after their marriage his wife dies and Rider is unable to adjust to life without her. He tries in every way he can to escape his pain, but is unable to. Finally he kills a white man and is lynched by his victim's kinfolks.

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[1] Ibid., p. 118.

The story is a tour de force. Faulkner has managed brilliantly to catch the Negro's misery and heart-break. Neither drink, work, nor prayer helps. His aunt is continually trying to get him to get on his knees and to find peace with God. "Efn He God, Ah dont needs to tole Him. Efn He God, He awready know hit. Awright. Hyar ah is. Leff Him come down hyar and do me some good."[1] His final lines have never more movingly presented the Negro's cry against the world's injustice: "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit."[2]

Part of the story is told by a deputy sheriff to his wife. Faulkner achieves a brilliant contrapuntal effect in this juxtaposition of the two points of view. The white man is completely unable to understand what motivates Rider after the death of his wife--to him he is just another crazy nigger. The speaker exposes his own paucity of soul, which symbolizes the white man's general lack of understanding of the Negro.

> "Them damn niggers," he said. "I swear to godfrey, it's a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why? Because they aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes. Now you take this one today--"

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[1] Ibid., p. 150.

[2] Ibid., p. 159.

. . . . . .

"His wife dies on him. All right. But does he grieve? He's the biggest and busiest man at the funeral. Grabs a shovel before they even got the box into the grave they tell me, and starts throwing dirt onto her faster than a slip scraper could have done it."

. . . . . .

"So he comes to work, the first man on the job, when McAndrews and everybody else expected him to take the day off since even a nigger couldn't want no better excuse for a holiday than he had just buried a wife, when a white man would have took the day off out of pure respect no matter how he felt about his wife, when even a little child would have had sense enough to take a day off when he would still get paid for it too. But not him."[1]

He finishes telling to his wife the tragic events which lead up to Rider's lynching.

"And what do you think of that?"
"I think if you eat any supper in this house you'll do it in the next five minutes," his wife said from the dining room. "I'm going to clear this table then and I'm going to the picture show."[2]

The tragedy meant as little to the listener as it did to the teller. Symbolically, the white race is impervious to the suffering of the Negro race. Is it any wonder that in such a world no ethical code can be established?

In "The Old People" Ike the boy receives his baptism in the wilderness by Sam Fathers. "Sam stooped and dipped

[1] Ibid., pp. 154-156.

[2] Ibid., p. 159.

his hands in the hot smoking blood [of the deer Ike killed] and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face."[1] Ike has killed his first deer and been baptized in the "blood of the lamb." He is now ready to begin to assume his place in the world as a man. He has been initiated into the cult of the elect.

Sam Fathers is half Indian and half Negro. He functions as the high priest of the woodland. He, more than anyone else, feels an identification with the forest. Isaac McCaslin is to follow in his footsteps. Sam's and Ike's feeling for the forest is almost mystical. Withdrawn from civilization's hurried pace they feel God's presence in the forest. It is as if He were the immortal Umpire, watching over man and animal alike, seeing that each conducts himself according to the rules of the game He established. It is in the woods that the boy must learn the importance of personal honor: "And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame."[2] The bear represents a courage man needs.

"The Bear" should be more accurately classed as a novella than a short story. It is generally considered to be one of Faulkner's most important and one of his greatest stories.

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[1] Ibid., p. 164. [2] Ibid., p. 186.

For many years a huge bear, Old Ben, has been ravaging the countryside. Each year Major DeSpain forms a hunting party, composed among others of Sam Fathers and Boon Hogganbeck, to go in search of the bear. This has been going on for so long that it has become a ritual; a ritual which has bewitched young Ike ever since he was a young boy. His life has consisted of one long wait--until he is sixteen and can join the hunt. Many times the old Bear had been spotted but the hunters had never been able to secure a dog brave enough to hold the bear at bay until the hunters were able to get within firing range. But the bear plays by the Umpire's rules: "Who at times even seemed to deliberately put that freedom and liberty in jeopardy in order to savor them, to remind his old strong bones and flesh to keep supple and quick to defend and preserve them."[1] Freedom becomes most dear when it is threatened.

Isaac's first trip is somewhat symbolic of a religious quest. The Christian symbology which surrounds Ike is very apparent. He is entering the woods to receive his spiritual baptism. But he is not allowed to partake of the communion (a glimpse of the bear) until he has cast off the accoutrements of civilization--his gun and compass. (Until you have become as a child you may not enter the kingdom of

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[1] O'Connor, "The Wilderness Theme," p. 15. (O'Connor is quoting a passage from "The Bear.")

heaven.) Ike's feeling for the bear has mystical overtones. He intuitively understands that the bear is the protector of the wilderness, and that when the bear is killed the woods will be exposed to the ravages of the new world. For this reason both he and Sam are loath to kill the bear.

When Lion, a wild and courageous dog, is found, the bear's days are numbered. Finally, in the death struggle, Lion is killed and Boon Hogganbeck kills Old Ben with his knife. Shortly afterwards Sam Fathers dies.

The wilderness serves as more than atmosphere, it actually seems to take on sentience. And always there is the awareness that the wilderness is shrinking, is giving way before the inroads of civilization. Even the bear was "too big for the very country which was its constricting scope."[1] Because of the disappearing wilderness Major DeSpain gives up his annual hunting trips. With the death of Lion, Old Ben, and Sam Fathers, and the ever narrowing boundaries of the wilderness, he realizes that there is no escape from civilization and its attendant evils. And yet the wilderness is not paradise. The primitivism in "The Bear" is not of that variety. There is danger for a time that Ike will be misled in his conception of the wilderness. On one of his first hunting trips a deer appears before him and Sam almost magically. Sam raises his arm and addresses

[1] Go Down, Moses, p. 193.

the deer as "Chief" and "Grandfather." Many years later Ike almost steps on a well-concealed snake. Unconsciously he repeats the gesture and words of Sam Fathers. Symbolically, then, Ike has recognized the duality of nature--its goodness and its destructiveness. Both the deer and the snake are part of God's plan. And both inhabited the wilderness long before the encroachment of man-made civilization. The important thing is to be true to one's nature. The Darwinian law of survival, which is the law of nature, may seem ruthless and cruel to man, who protects himself with laws and institutions; but these same laws and institutions have caused man to forsake his natural impulses, to deny his kinship with the animal--to view himself as something special in God's creation. Until man can reidentify himself with nature, until he can get back to the basic things in life, he will be unable to find God. This is what Ike learns in the wilderness.

Sam Fathers, guide and mentor of young Ike, initiates him into the mysteries of the wilderness. When he makes his first journey alone Sam tells him that he must leave without his gun. Once in the heart of the forest he realizes that he must dispense with his watch and compass. "He was still tainted."[1] Shortly afterwards he sees the bear. The experience is almost mystical; the bear did not

[1] Ibid., p. 208.

> emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins.[1]

Ike has proven his manhood by his willingness to face the bear unarmed. He need have no worry, for, momentarily at least, they were united in kinship (both are protectors of the wilderness). It is this kinship which makes Ike and Sam reluctant to kill the bear. They realize the symbolic implications of such an act. Killing the bear would be destroying, or at least weakening, a principle of courage and individualism. The boy tells Sam that the bear must not be killed until he is ready to die and then it must be done by one of them. It must not be killed by one of the inhabitants of the world "out there."

Sam Father's feeling of isolation from civilization is based not only on his identification with the wilderness but also on his mixed blood. Not for many years does the boy understand the look he saw in Sam's face the morning the colt was found with his throat ripped out.

> And he was glad, he told himself. He was old. He had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever meet again.

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[1] Ibid., p. 209.

> And even if he were to, he could not have touched it, spoken to it, because for seventy years now he had had to be a negro. It was almost over now and he was glad.[1]

What the boy is referring to is Sam's awareness that the destructive principle has been found which will expedite the bear's death. Although the others think it is a wolf that has killed the colt Sam intuitively realizes that the end is near. The killer turns out to be a huge dog, whom they name Lion. It is Lion who is instrumental in Old Ben's death. Sam knows that when the bear is killed he too will soon die. It is as if he and Old Ben were united in spirit; one could not live without the other. Ike realizes that Sam could see beyond the death of the bear, and what he saw made him prefer the grave. "Sam's eyes were probably open again on that profound look which saw further than them or the hut, further than the death of a bear and the dying of a dog."[2]

Sam completes his withdrawal from civilization by receiving permission from Major DeSpain to live alone in the bottom lands. His only contact with the outside world is during the annual hunt. He spends the rest of his life in seclusion and repudiation.

Only Sam, Ben, Ike, and Lion are taintless. All of them reflect the purity of the wilderness. Boon is a somewhat corrupted member of the initiates. Although he too has

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[1] Ibid., p. 245.

[2] Ibid., p. 215.

a strain of Indian blood he has been weakened by the white man's whiskey. He shares little of Sam's and Ike's mystical attachment to the wilderness and the bear, but he does have an instinctive protectiveness for the forest. And in the final scene, when he is frantically defending "his" tree from all intruders, he is desperately trying to hold on to that last patch of wilderness. The bear has been replaced by squirrels--appropriate to the shrinking boundaries of the forest. This final scene is truly tragic in its conception.

Although Lion, who has the strength, endurance, and courage of old Ben, is trained by Sam, it is to Boon that he finally turns. He recognizes in Boon a kindred spirit. Both are part of nature, both obey its laws, and both are dedicated to the hunt. They share none of Ike's and Sam's reluctance to kill the bear. I believe that Lion and Ben must be seen as opponent parts of a dialectic. Lion, obeying his nature, is an agent of destruction. And in participating in the death of Ben, he is helping to destroy his own "nature." Indeed, all who are on the hunt, are seeking to destroy that which they wish to protect. But only Sam and Ike realize this--and they bow to the inevitable fate. From the dialectic of preservation and destruction emerges a synthesis--a new world, a new growth. Faulkner's conception of the synthesis is a spiritual reawakening. It has not yet come.

In the long section four Ike muses over his ancestry and what the land has meant to them and to him.

> I can't repudiate it [the land]. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing.[1]

And so Ike gives up his inheritance. In doing so he loses the love of his wife, and is forced to live a celibate life. In this way Ike hopes to begin the long expiation of the sin of his forefathers, and of the whole South. It is an expiation that must be carried on for many generations if the curse is ever to be lifted. He feels that the whites have forfeited their right to the land and that before they can outlive the curse the Negro will have his chance to reap the benefits the land has to offer. From an old book of ledgers Ike learns of the evils of incest and miscegenation that are part of his heritage. Old Carothers McCaslin begot a child by his own Negro daughter. It is this guilt, the mixing of white and black blood, that Ike attempts to expiate through self-denial. The theme of atonement runs throughout "The Bear." And yet Ike is less than a Christ figure because he sees evil not only in the way in which the two races were mixed, but in the mixture itself. He reports his uncle's

[1] Ibid., pp. 256-257.

words to a Negro descendant of the McCaslin line, who has repudiated the white man's superiority:

> "Dont you see?" he cried. "Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse. Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land; maybe for that reason their descendants alone can--not resist it, not combat it--maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples' turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Dont you see?"[1]

This passage indicates Ike's attitude toward the Negro problem as well as his understanding of the curse. Always there is an ambivalence in his attitude toward the racial problem. He is unable to bring to bear on it the clear, lucid understanding that he has of the twin curse, exploitation of the land. Through the terse, cryptic, and amusing genealogical records of his ancestry he learns of the constant mixing of white and black blood. Always, he finds himself paying desperate tribute to the Negro:

> Because they will endure. They are better than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion--not laziness: evasion of what white men had set them to, not for their aggrandisement or even comfort but his own.[2]

Ike freely, almost eagerly, places the blame for the Negro's pitiful condition on the shoulders of the white man. And yet Isaac fails in the final analysis. As the reader learns in the next story, Ike is not ready to accept the one and only solution to the problem.

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[1] Ibid., p. 278. [2] Ibid., p. 294.

Not only does Go Down, Moses indicate a strong shift in Faulkner's world view, in the partial triumph of optimism, but it also indicates a shift in his attitude toward God. Up to this point God has been viewed as some sort cosmic Joker or malignant fate. He has been at least partially responsible for the mess men have gotten themselves into. But in "Delta Autumn" a startling change takes place--man alone is responsible for his actions.

> He put them both here: man, and the game he would follow and kill, foreknowing it. I believe He said, "So be it." I reckon he even foreknew the end. But He said, "I will give him his chance. I will give him warning and foreknowledge too, along with the desire to follow and the power to slay. The woods and fields he ravages and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment.[1]

Ike, an old man, reflects on man's injustice to man and his injustice to the animal. He believes that the wanton killing of the inhabitants of the wilderness is symptomatic of man's destructive tendency. The only killing that God sanctions is in defense of does and fawns. Ike is uneasy about his own part in the killing of God's creatures. "I slew you, my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death."[2] That man is capable of doing good, that he is master of his soul, is a principle that Ike has lived by, and that he will die by. He vehemently disagrees with his nephew Roth Edmonds, who

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[1] Ibid., p. 349. [2] Ibid., p. 351.

asserts that man behaves only when he is under the eye of officialdom.

And so Isaac McCaslin comes down to the tag end of his days, a figure of righteousness and wisdom. But he cannot pass the final test. And it is on this point that the critics lash out at Go Down, Moses. When Ike learns that Roth has had an affair with a young woman (part Negress) who has given birth to his child, he is unable to sanction a marriage of the two even though he realizes the great love they hold for each other, and sees in the girl a great purity and strength of character; he is unable to face a mixture of the races. "Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: 'You're a nigger!'"[1] He tells her that she must marry in her own race. Her simple and yet eloquent reply reaches closer to the heart than all of Ike's wisdom and strength of character. "'Old man,' she said, 'have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about?'"[2]

In their partial condemnation of the novel the critics have not paid enough attention to the girl's reply. There is a sincerity that cuts like a knife through Ike's desperate declamation. And the very desperation of his cry indicates that he realizes he is on tenuous ground. Finally,

[1] Ibid., p. 361. [2] Ibid., p. 363.

however, the reader is forced to realize that the great prophet, the man who had demonstrated undeviating wisdom and integrity all of his life, fell down in his final hours.

> But Ike's silent exclamation that it will take one thousand or two thousand years before such a marriage could take place makes it quite clear that the theme of the wisdom to be derived from the wilderness, even in its great prophet Ike, is merely juxtaposed against the theme of the injustice to the Negro. It merely acknowledges, it does not materially modify the injustice.[1]

For Faulkner the wilderness is an escape from rather than an attempt to solve the present injustice.[2] Ike's quandary is too obviously the author's; the great wisdom propounded has a hollow note to it.

Faulkner's last passage puts the final death stroke to the wisdom which has been generated in the preceding pages:

> This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows mantall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usuary and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth. Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares. . .No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution; he thought: The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.[3]

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[1] O'Connor, "The Wilderness Theme," p. 19.

[2] Ibid., p. 20.

[3] Go Down, Moses, p. 364.

Somehow, in Ike's weakening mind, injustice and intermarriage work in conjunction with one another. As Lewis suggests in his book, Faulkner, along with the rest of the thinking South, seems to be caught on the horns of a dilemma: whether to create a mulatto America or to lynch the Negroes out of hand.[1] There is no alternative.

The injustice to the Negro is treated symbolically in the final story, "Go Down, Moses." Molly's and Lucas' son, who disappeared into the anonymous myriads of back-alley city life years ago, is located by a census-taker on the eve of his execution. Aunt Molly, who hears about it, insists that the body be sent home for burial. The townspeople rally around and raise the money for the boy's burial. A solemn group meets the coffin at the station and bury him with pomp and circumstance. The story of his degenerate life is kept out of the newspaper. There is something noble and warm in the way the townspeople band together to pay homage to the aged Molly. And yet Aunt Molly insists that her Benjamin has been sold into the land of Egypt.

On the symbolic level, then, the white race is starting on the long road of atonement. And Aunt Molly is, of course, right; her son was sold to the Pharaoh. And until the white man can erase the last shred of prejudice the atonement will be a mockery. The Negro will continue to be sold into Egypt.

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[1]Lewis, op. cit., p. 50.

CHAPTER XIV

INTRUDER IN THE DUST

The tone of optimism is continued in Intruder in the Dust (1948). The emphasis, however, has changed. Whereas in the previous novel man's hope lay in his relationship to the land (with the concomitant implication that only thus can men live as brothers), in this novel, although the land is still important, the focus is on man's relationship to man--a further step on the humanistic road.

Even though good triumphs, it is because a few individuals fight for truth and injustice; society remains primarily evil. It is significant that the purveyors of justice are two children and an old woman. They save Gavin Stevens from becoming another Horace Benbow. "Undoubtedly it is these children, reminders of a hope not yet entirely destroyed, who save Faulkner's world from being altogether cursed."[1] "In the action of the boy, or such as he and Miss Habersham, will the South's crucifixion be prevented."[2]

Vinson Gowrie is found murdered, with Lucas Beauchamp

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[1]Rabi, op. cit., p. 138.

[2]Andrew Lytle, "Regeneration for the Man," Two Decades of Criticism, p. 259.

standing over him holding a smoking gun. Through a miraculous chain of circumstances Lucas is not taken out and hanged and burned immediately; but it is only a matter of time. Two boys, Charles Mallison and Aleck Sander (Negro), and an old spinster, Miss Habersham, convinced of Lucas' innocence, set out to prove it by digging up the body and proving that Lucas' gun hadn't killed him. In an earlier novel they might have proven Lucas' innocence but not before he had been lynched; in this novel their timely interference prevents the lynching--much to the disappointment of the town. Heretofore, the innocent protagonist has been cut down. In Faulkner's changing world view, as presented in Intruder in the Dust, the innocent is allowed to triumph. The happy ending in itself is but a minor indication of a more optimistic philosophy. Of more significance is the fact that the people who tried to promote justice (they are found in all of Faulkner's novels) were successful.

The story is built around the relationship between Charley Mallison and Lucas Beauchamp. It is the emancipation of one boy from the burden of guilt caused by the curse laid on the South for its sin of slavery. The implication is that each Southerner must come to terms with the curse. He must make his own expiation; it cannot be done for him.

Chick first becomes indebted to Lucas when, as a young boy he and Aleck are rabbit hunting near Lucas' house. Chick falls into an ice-cold stream and is fished out by

Lucas, who then takes him to his house to dry his clothes and to feed him. As he is leaving, Chick offers Lucas some money in payment for his services, which Lucas contemptuously refuses; whereupon the boy, enraged, throws the money on the floor, which Lucas orders Aleck to pick up. On his way home Chick throws the money into the stream. The trouble with Lucas is that he refuses to act as a Negro is supposed to act. He refuses to fall into the role of second class citizen. The whole town resents the slight: "We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted."[1]

The role that each race should act has been long established. It was first established before the Civil War and the Southern white was determined that no mere emancipation proclamation was going to change things. It has been noted many times previously that Faulkner's feeling toward the past is ambivalent: seeing in the old South both its glory and its evil. The attempt by the new South to keep the Negro in a subordinate role is a continuation of a past evil. This novel is often criticized because Gavin Stevens, Faulkner's most enlightened spokesman, seems to accept the status of the Negro as citizen, second class. Such critics feel that Stevens is speaking for Faulkner. They do not, I

[1]William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York, 1948), p. 18.

believe, attach enough importance to the growth of Charles Mallison.

Although Gavin continually makes sardonic jabs at his townspeople for their part in suppressing the Negro, he never takes positive action in attempting to rectify the evil. Therefore, his comment on Mr. Lilley's statement that he will be ready to help out when the lynching starts, has a hollow ring to it:

> "I expect they know already they can depend on you, Mr. Lilley," his uncle said. . ."You see?" his uncle said. "He has nothing against what he calls niggers. If you ask him he will probably tell you he likes them even better than some white folks he knows and he will believe it. . .All he requires is that they act like niggers. Which is exactly what Lucas is doing: blew his top and murdered a white man--which Mr. Lilley is probably convinced all Negroes want to do--and now the white people will take him out and burn him, all regular and in order and themselves acting exactly as he is convinced Lucas would wish them to act: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks acting like white folks and no real hard feelings on either side. . .once the fury is over; in fact Mr. Lilley would probably be one of the first to contribute cash money toward Lucas' funeral and the support of his widow and children if he had them. Which proves again how no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors."[1]

This penetrating analysis of the white-Negro relationship is negated by Stevens' future actions: by his refusal to act in Lucas' behalf until the evidence of his innocence is incontrovertible; and his constant reference to the aggregate Negro as Sambo. Of the former, Olga W. Vickery points out

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[1] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

that Gavin is given to moralistic platitudes but is incapable of action. He is in many ways similar to Horace Benbow in Sanctuary. "Gavin avoids the disintegration of will which Benbow suffered as a result of discovering the scope and intensity of evil resident in mankind, but he does so by employing language as a rhetorical buttress, a buttress which threatens to imprison him even while it protects."[1] And of the latter, Irene Edmonds says:

> But Gavin Stevens unwillingly negates his professed humanitarianism and social emancipation. He refers to the aggregate Negro as Sambo, and thus unconsciously reflects a mode of thinking which still relegates Negro to the comically pathetic status of Sambo, the caricature and the stereotype. Such a condition could not insure that someday, as he hoped,
>
> "Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man's children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it."
>
> With almost the same breath that he voiced the above lofty sentiments Stevens suggested to Lucas:
>
> . . ."Has it ever occurred to you that if you said mister (the symbol of superiority of white over black in the South) to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?"
> "So I'm to commence now," Lucas said. "I can start off by saying mister to the folks that drags me off here and builds a fire under me."
>
> Faulkner has Gavin Stevens, adhering to type, make no attempt to reconcile the word with the thought.[2]

[1] Olga W. Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, p. 2.

[2] Irene C. Edmonds, "Faulkner and the Black Shadow," Southern Renascence, pp. 200-201.

It is this attitude on the part of Southern intellectuals that makes the North somewhat skeptical over their passionate pleas to be left alone, that they will take care of the racial situation in their own way--that it cannot be legislated. It is only too obvious that it is Faulkner speaking when he has Gavin say: "I only say that the injustice is ours, the South's. We must expiate and abolish it ourselves, alone and without help nor even (with thanks) advice."[1]

But the way of Gavin Stevens is not the way of his nephew, Charles Mallison. Chick's struggle with his heritage (racial discrimination) is a hard and bitter one, but he finally wins and is able to cast off his shackles.

Chick tries to acquit himself of the debt Lucas refused to acknowledge, by saving his money and sending Lucas' wife, Molly, a dress; only to return home one day to find a gallon bucket of homemade molasses waiting for him--a gift from Lucas, brought by a white hand.

> They were right back where they had started; it was all to do over again; it was even worse this time because this time Lucas had commanded a white hand to pick up his money and give it back to him.[2]

Chick makes his first long stride toward emancipation when he meets Lucas on the street one day and Lucas looks right through him. He later learns that his wife had just died, ". . .thinking with a kind of amazement: He was

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[1] Intruder in the Dust, p. 204. [2] Ibid., p. 23.

grieving. You dont have to not be a nigger in order to grieve."[1] This is a startling discovery that was not made by the whites in "Pantaloon in Black."

Lucas couldn't have picked a worse time, place, and person for his "murder." Vinson Gowrie was the son of a poor white family who ran an area of the county, Beat Four, without benefit of law. A place where "strange white men didn't wander far from the highway after dark and no Negro at any time--where as a local wit said once the only stranger ever to enter with impunity was God and He only by daylight and on Sunday."[2] Lucas is always picking the worst time and place to do the worst possible thing--according to the whites. It is as if Lucas were deliberately trying them, daring them to add one more stain to their guilt-ridden souls.

> Where are you trying to go, lady?
> I'm trying to get to Jefferson.
> Jefferson's behind you, lady.
> I know. I had to detour around an arrogant insufferable old nigger who got the whole country upset trying to pretend he murdered a white man.[3]

In attempting to place one more burden on the sin-laden souls of the white populace he almost loses his life, but he emerges victor--he achieves his goal. "Lucas Beauchamp once the slave of any white man within range of whose notice he happened to come, now tyrant over the whole county's white conscience."[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 25. [2] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[3] Ibid., p. 189. [4] Ibid., p. 199.

> [Lucas] wants to be innocently lynched, to add his own blood to the South's dishonor, as his last act of contempt for his oppressors. He is not successful because of the intense need of several white people to prevent his martyrdom, and not only in Lucas' private interest, but in their own interest as white men who already have more shame than they can bear. Lucas, or the mass Negro, has at last conquered the South by giving the white man an unendurable burden of guilt.[1]

Chick's feeling of indebtedness to Lucas symbolizes the white man's sense of guilt in his dealings with the Negro. When Lucas, who recognizes that his only hope lies in the young boy, tells him to go out to Beat Four and dig up the body of Vinson Gowrie, Chick is incredulous. He wrestles for hours with his torment, wishing that he could mount his horse and ride for miles, not coming back until the whole thing was over. "'Me go out there and dig up that grave?' He wasn't even thinking anymore <u>So this is what that plate of meat and greens is going to cost me</u>."[2] It is true that Chick pays heavily for that plate of greens, but in the payment he finds his soul, in the development of an ethical consciousness.

Chick approaches his Negro playmate, Aleck Sander, for help; after explaining the situation to him Aleck's reaction is as he expected. He explains to him that Gavin did not believe Lucas and refused to go off on any such fool errand. "'Me? Go out there and dig that dead white man up?

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[1]Elizabeth Hardwick, "Faulkner and the South Today: Two Contrasting Views of <u>Intruder in the Dust</u>," <u>Two Decades of Criticism</u>, p. 246.

[2]<u>Intruder</u>, p. 68.

Is Mr. Gavin already in the office or do I just sit there until he comes?'"[1] But Aleck goes along to complete the symbol: white and black working together may erase the stain from the South. They enact what Gavin can only talk about:

> We--he and us--should confederate: swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive. Then we would prevail; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened by a mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of a failure of national character which they hide from one another behind a loud lipservice to a flag.[2]

(The structure of the novel is often violated by Gavin's ex cathedra pronouncements.) Greed and jingoism are only two of the evils resident in the country; another, and perhaps more serious one, is racial discrimination.

Chick and Aleck by themselves would have been unable to carry out the mission; but with Miss Eunice Habersham and her truck the expedition was possible. Also her presence added an air of mature consideration to the impulsive actions of the boys. And the saving of Lucas takes on more significance.

Gavin's sardonic statement that women can take any set of facts providing they don't have to face them only accents his own inability to act. When he had the facts he

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[1] Ibid., p. 86. [2] Ibid., p. 156.

acted. But he would not move until he had the facts; certainly he will not take the word of an old Negro who is just trying to save his skin. Because if the facts are wrong, as they undoubtedly would be, what would he say to Mr. Gowrie?

> I'd just as soon go out there and shoot another one of his sons as to tell Nub Gowrie I wanted to dig his boy's body up out of the ground it had been consecrated and prayed into. And if I went that far, I'd heap rather tell him I just wanted to exhume it to dig the gold out of its teeth than to tell him the reason was to save a nigger from being lynched.[1]

Gavin Stevens refuses to take action because there is only one chance in a thousand that Lucas is telling the truth. The boys and Miss Habersham take the incredible risk because of that one chance. Gavin's failure is complete when he does not develop a sense of shame after he discovers that a man was almost lynched because of his refusal to pursue the justice he is always talking about.

It is often true that Gavin's cynical and pontifical comments about the nature of civilization can be turned in on himself.

> Not all white people can endure slavery and apparently no man can stand freedom (which incidentally--the premise that man really wants peace and freedom--is the trouble with our relations with Europe right now, whose people not only dont know what peace is but--except for Anglo Saxons--actively fear and distrust personal liberty; we are without really any hope that our atom bomb will be enough to defend an idea as obsolete as Noah's Ark.)[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

[2] Ibid., p. 149.

When Gavin pleads with the North to leave them alone, that they will strive to bring about the day when Lucas Beauchamp (Sambo) can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to gas and rope as a white man, the reader is apt to be an unsympathetic audience. Just what goes on in Chick's mind at the end of the novel when Gavin tells him he must never tolerate injustice, outrage, dishonor and shame? Chick does not learn from the empty rhetoric of his uncle, but by his own inner struggle with a prejudice he inherited generations ago. "For the story is not about violence at all. It is about a sixteen-year-old boy's education in good and evil and his effort to preserve his spiritual integrity."[1]

Chick's growth is slow and painful. He is constantly startled by seeing humanity in the most unusual places. He is as surprised to find grief in old man Gowrie as he was to find it in Lucas.

> Why, he's grieving: thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being: once in an old nigger who had just happened to outlive his old nigger wife and now in a violent foulmouthed godless old man who had happened to lose one of the six lazy idle violent more or less lawless a good deal more than just more or less worthless sons, only one of whom had ever benefited his community and kind and that only by the last desperate resort of getting murdered out of it.[2]

Chick's growth is made doubly difficult because he is facing the whole town. He is fighting a system that has been

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[1]Lytle, op. cit., p. 253. [2]Intruder, p. 161.

his heritage. When the town, which had been patiently assembled all day waiting for the Beat Four gang to come in and start the proceedings, learns that Lucas is innocent they run for their cars and wagons and get out of town as fast as they can. Chick is so shocked and horrified that his breath comes in short gasps. He is too young and unsophisticated to take refuge in the ever ready cynicism of his uncle. He has prepared no defenses. When Gavin remarks glibly that people can stand injuring another, but they cannot stand to be wrong, Chick is unable to view the scene on an intellectual basis; he can only repeat, Yes, but they ran--they ran away. Chick grows up, but he pays a hard price. In Faulkner's world the Chick Mallisons will lead a lonely life.

Always in the background of the lonely struggle of the boy is the homogeneity of the mob--united in their fear and hatred of the Negro. The mob is not only composed of the pool room bums and the Snopeses, but of the merchants and the members of the Kiwanis--the respected townspeople. And indeed of the Gavin Stevenses, at least by their refusal to militate against mob rule. Certainly if the mob had lynched Lucas before proof of his innocence was turned up, Stevens would not have demanded prison sentences for them. Chick would have.

The only thing that saved Lucas was that he "committed" his crime on Saturday and the mob did not have time to marshal their forces by Sunday. And because of the

deep religious feeling in the community they didn't want to lynch him on Sunday. They were ready by nine that evening, but "they didn't want to have to hurry, bolt through the business in order to finish it by midnight and not violate the Sabbath."[1]

The town officers try to do their duty in a quiet, efficient way. The sheriff, who appears in so many of Faulkner's stories, is a particularly sympathetic character. And although they often indulge in a certain cruel humor at Lucas' expense the reader knows that they are on the side of law and order. And yet there is the counter awareness that once the mob started, the law would be ineffectual in stopping them.

When the sheriff is seen departing with two convicts and two shovels one of the mob calls out to him: "Dont you know the Grand Jury'll get you, wasting money this way? Aint you heard about that new lynch law the Yankees passed? The folks that lynches the nigger is supposed to dig the grave?"[2] The evil temper of the mob is realized when they don't laugh at their own jokes.

And always there is the Negro--his patience and endurability; who plays the role of Sambo when it is demanded of him, and hides from view in times of distress.

> They were still there, they had not fled, you just didn't see them--a sense a feeling of their constant presence and nearness: black men and women and

[1] Ibid., p. 34. [2] Ibid., p. 139.

> children breathing and waiting inside their barred and shuttered houses, not crouching cringing shrinking, not in anger and not quite in fear: just waiting, biding since theirs was an armament which the white man could not match nor--if he but knew it--even cope with: patience.[1]

Their wait will be a long one from every indication--especially if they have to wait for the Gavin Stevenses. The Chick Mallisons and Lucas Beauchamps are all too rare in Yoknapatawpha county. But at least they have made an appearance.

> The condition of the Negro in the South may be improving slowly, but the escape of Lucas, even with the aid of his few friends, from the mob surrounding the rather fragile and insufficiently guarded jail is almost a miracle; and there is no evidence that this mob who disperse so shamefacedly at the end of the book have learned any lesson from their nearly tragic error.[2]

In Knight's Gambit (1949) justice triumphs with a flourish. Gavin Stevens emerges in positive action. The good are victorious, and nearly everyone is good. Not only is this a poor novel (so called by virtue of the fact that Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison figure in each story) but it is unimportant in the formulation of the myth except as a marker indicating the direction Faulkner is taking. According to Campbell and Foster his last works (Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Notes on a Horsethief) indicate a lessening, but not an abrogation, of the pessimism; there are more good characters and they receive some sort of stoical satisfaction out of life.[3] When Faulkner concentrates on

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[1] Ibid., p. 96.

[2] Campbell and Foster, op. cit., p. 168.

[3] Ibid., p. 138.

goodness he seems to lose his power as a writer. Many of his good characters are well developed, but when goodness triumphs as a positive force his artistry fades into the shade. Why is this? Perhaps it is because Faulkner is not really convinced that goodness does, or ever will, flourish. Or perhaps it is because, like most writers, he has a greater artistic affinity for evil than good.

The detective story is an unfortunate genre for Faulkner's complicated and highly stylized rhetoric. A style which at its best is capable of bringing out the finest nuances in character and thematic revelation, is only top-heavy when used in connection with a who-dun-it. The best that can be said for Knight's Gambit is that it is insignificant in the Faulkner canon.

Gavin Stevens is an amatuer sleuth who solves most of his crimes over the chess board. Chick Mallison, home on vacation from college, is the recipient of his uncle's brilliant deductions. But Gavin Stevens, Southern apologist, who was so conspicious in Intruder in the Dust, is also very much in evidence in this novel. It would not be unfair to say that the sleuthing is carried on between his observations on man, land, and justice. In the words of Albert Gerard:

> Now, to borrow the words of one of the characters in "Tomorrow," "There's two sides to the law: punishment and reward." So far, Faulkner's main interest has been in punishment; but with the character of Stevens, new aspects of justice are introduced:

reward, hope, salvation.[1]

The individual stories are not worth discussing. Only the title story is of passing interest. In this story Faulkner expresses his sadness at the old giving way to the new:

> And now there was nothing left of the old man who had sat on the front gallery with his weak toddy and Ovid and Horace and Catullus for almost fifty years, except his home-made hickory rocking chair and the fingerprints on the calf bindings of his books and the silver goblet he drank from, and the old setter bitch which had dozed at his feet.
>
> His, Charles's, uncle said that the impact of the money had been stronger even than the ghost of the old stoic, the sedentary and provincial cosmopolite.[2]

There is no anger in this story at the passing of the old as there has been in previous stories. Even more than in The Unvanquished, Faulkner is caught up in the romance of the old South, to the point of sentimentality. He nostalgically clings to the hope that the old values and the old beauties will perhaps endure, although outwardly they seem to have been replaced.

> So one morning he and his uncle were crossing the Square, thinking (he anyway) of anything but that, when he looked up and saw her. And he was right. She looked exactly as he had known she would, and then and even before they stopped, he could smell it too: the scent of old sachet, lavender and thyme and such, which, you would have thought, the first touch of the world's glitter would have

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[1]Albert Gerard, "Justice in Yoknapatawpha County: Some Symbolic Motifs in Faulkner's Later Writings," Faulkner Studies, pp. 54-55.

[2]William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit ("A Signet Book"; New York, 1950), p. 115.

obliterated, until in the next second you realised it--the scent, the odor, the breath, the whisper--was the strong and the enduring, and it was the inconsistent changing glitter which flashed and passed.[1]

[1] Ibid., p. 124.

CHAPTER XV

REQUIEM FOR A NUN

With the publication of Requiem for a Nun (1951) Faulkner returns to the theme implicit in most of his work, and which becomes the dominant theme in his later writings: only through suffering can man's sins, personal and racial, be expiated. In this novel there is some hope for man's salvation (in contrast to Temple Drake in Sanctuary, for instance). But the struggle for salvation in the present book is a long and hard one. Only through suffering and a trust in God may man redeem himself. Nancy achieves her peace whereas Temple and Gowan are left struggling for theirs at the end of the novel. Gavin Stevens acts as always, but more effectively in this novel, as the catalyst.

One must pay for his individual, ethical choice if it goes against the community standards (represented by the courthouse in the intersections). Nancy must pay for her crime.

Temple Drake reappears married to Gowan Stevens, who has wed her out of a sense of responsibility. He has long suffered with the knowledge that she not only spent several weeks in the whore house, but actually enjoyed it.

Temple, ostensibly as a gesture of altruism, but actually for companionship, hires Nancy Mannigoe, "nigger, dopefied, murderer, whore," as servant and nursemaid. The feeling of ennui that Temple experienced at the end of Sanctuary has not been lessened by wifehood and motherhood. When the younger brother of Red (her lover in Sanctuary) comes to blackmail her with the revealing love letters she wrote to Red, the call of her past is too strong for her to resist and she decides to run away with him. Nancy, whose repentance is complete, does everything in her power to stop her; and when everything fails she kills Temple's baby.

Gavin suspects that there is more to the murder than appears on the surface. By persuading Temple that if she will tell her story to the governor she may lessen Nancy's sentence to life imprisonment, he gets Temple to confess her sins, thereby achieving for her a catharsis through suffering, but no stay of execution for Nancy.

Nancy, who moves from the depths of degradation to a sublime contentment in the arms of Jesus, emerges as the strongest character in the book. In fact, despite the enormity of her crime, she is one of the very few of Faulkner's characters who is saved. She is, however, better understood as symbol than as human being, because of the slim motivation for her murder. The reader is unable to accept the causal relationship; there is too great a disproportion between cause and effect. And it is on this point that the novel

fails in its presentational function. Symbolically it holds up well.

The novel is composed of a play whose scenes are interlaced with sections dealing with the growth of Jefferson. The focal point of the inter-sections is the history of the construction of the courthouse to the present. The two are related only symbolically. The growth of the courthouse parallels the growth of man's soul. The one is communal while the other is individual. In the inter-sections many characters appear and disappear. Some of them have made an appearance in earlier stories. In these short vignettes man is pictured as he suffers and struggles to build a community. In Sanctuary and in the first part of Requiem for a Nun Temple is lost because she can find no place for herself in the community. Her past experiences place her outside communal standards--they have no common frame of reference by which she can find her identity in the community of man. Until she can find this identity she cannot understand the value of suffering. But in the final analysis, although society can punish the body, only the individual and God are responsible for the soul. If in the striving for salvation one is to violate community standards he must be willing to pay. This not only protects the community but makes the struggle for salvation more meaningful. The play is an enactment of the idea in Go Down, Moses: only through suffering can man learn.

It opens with Nancy receiving the death penalty. When asked if she has any last statement she replies, "Yes, Lord." The reaction from the crowd is one of incredulous anger: who is this murderer that can stand so secure in her relationship with God? Nancy never shows the slightest interest in the court proceedings. She has already pronounced herself guilty ("Guilty, Lord") and is ready to die. The real trial occurred in her soul, with God presiding as judge. And in this much more important trial she was adjudged not guilty.

Nancy has come a long way from the day she stopped a white man on the street and demanded her two dollars; receiving instead, kicks, blows, and curses. Her salvation was probably initiated by her love for Temple's children. This love gradually dissolved the bands of hatred which encased her soul. Her decision to kill the object of her love was based on her belief that the soul was more important than the body. By killing the baby she hoped to save the souls of Temple and her other child.

And yet there are moments when Nancy faces the unknown with something less than confidence. When she learns that the governor has refused to postpone her execution she tells Temple that she knew it all along, and that she was only wasting her time in trying to get the sentence changed. But nevertheless she had hoped that Temple would return from California to plead in her behalf. When Temple asks why she

hadn't sent for her, Nancy replies:

> Because that would have been hoping: the hardest thing of all to break, get rid of, let go of, the last thing of all poor sinning man will turn aloose. Maybe it's because that's all he's got. Leastways, he holds onto it. Even with salvation laying right in his hand, and all he's got to do is, choose between it; even with salvation already in his hand and all he needs is just to shut his fingers, old sin is still too strong for him, and sometimes before he even knows it, he has throwed salvation away just grabbling back at hoping.[1]

But such wavering is only momentary; by the end of the play her peace of mind is firmly established. In her final moments she is unable to articulate an understanding of her salvation, taking refuge in a stoical reiteration of, "I believes."

In contrast to the serenity of Nancy's soul is the turbulence of Temple's. Her difficulty has been frequently encountered among other Faulkner characters: the difficulty of coming to terms with the past. Both attracted and repelled by her past she is unable to make any sort of rational adjustment. She tries either to forget it completely or to return to it completely. Only when she realizes that she must pay for her past does the process of atonement get under way. Only then does she understand the need for suffering. This is the penalty God has imposed on the human race.

> When He said "Suffer little children to come unto Me" He meant exactly that: He meant suffer; that the adults, the fathers, the old in and capable of sin,

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[1] William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York, 1950), p. 272.

must be ready and willing--nay, eager--to suffer at any time, that the little children shall come unto Him unanguished, unterrified, undefiled.[1]

Not only is Temple unable to face the past, she is unable to face the future, which is a meaningless succession of tomorrows. One cannot face the future unless one comes to terms with the past. The present, after all, is only a momentary transition between past and future. The torment is further enhanced for Temple because of her inability to find the religious assurance that Nancy possesses. "To save my soul--if I have a soul. If there is a God to save it--a God who wants it--"[2] Salvation is relatively easy if one can believe.

Although the theme of expiation through suffering has optimistic implications, the general mood in the book is one of pessimism; but it is different from the pessimism of the early novels. In the early stories no chance for salvation was given, whereas now there is--although the road to salvation is extremely difficult to follow.

TEMPLE
(walking)

Anyone to save it [her soul] . Anyone who wants it. If there is none, I'm sunk. We all are. Doomed. Damned.

STEVENS
(walking)

Of course we are. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?[3]

[1]Ibid., p. 163. [2]Ibid., p. 212. [3]Ibid., p. 286.

Although Temple holds the center of the stage her husband's presence is often felt. (Actually he is listening secretly to his wife's confession to the governor.) The struggle that Temple is experiencing is one that Gowan too must experience. He must come to terms with his past sins if he is to achieve salvation through suffering.

Gavin Stevens prods both parties into making the right decisions. He is interested not only in their salvation but, as always, in justice.

> We're not concerned with death. That's nothing: any handful of petty documents can cope with that. That's all finished now; we can forget it. What we are trying to deal with now is injustice. Only truth can cope with that. Or love.[1]

Whereas in past appearances he has been content to talk about the furtherance of justice (except in the unimportant Knight's Gambit), in Requiem for a Nun he has become a positive integer in the pursuit of justice.

John R. Marvin sums up the central problem thusly:

> The play shows this historical process [expiation through suffering] being acted out in contemporary life. Temple's sin is an example of the universal sin and therefore, in the initial scenes of the drama, she strives to deny responsibility for her past and fails to see how her past is related to the tragedy. In Act I, Scene II, she is obviously more involved in revenge than bereavement because, by believing in the integrity and righteousness of her revenge, she hopes to save herself from self-recognition--which would place on her shoulders a burden of guilt.
>
> Gavin's prodding however, finally provokes the dialectic of Act I, Scene II, in which Temple is torn between the desire to preserve herself from

[1] Ibid., p. 88.

recognition of her past sins (and the fact that they contributed to the destruction of her own child) and her desire for the purgation of confession.[1]

[1]John R. Marvin, "Ideas and Queries," Faulkner Studies, p. 6.

CHAPTER XVI

A FABLE

In his most recent novel, A Fable (1954), Faulkner by no means presents the goodness in man triumphant. The struggle still goes on, with goodness still losing out to evil. But at least the struggle persists.

Although this work is outside the Yoknapatawpha myth, there are many similar themes and symbols--particularly those envolving around Christianity. Man's salvation lies at hand but, of course, once again he rejects it. As has been observed in previous novels, it is in the little man that hope lies--not in the ruling classes. Faulkner "exploits to the full--and perhaps a little beyond the full--the cosmic irony of man's periodic rejection of that power which, if ever accepted, would be the means to redemption."[1]

The modern and ironic version of the Christian myth attempts too mechanical an allegory. Although there is the hope that man will prevail (Faulkner's world view can be broken into three periods: despair, endurance, ascendancy), the novel is a bitter treatment of the second rejection of Christ.

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[1]Carlos Baker, "Cry Enough!" Nation, CLXXIX (August 7, 1954), 117.

> He has turned to the Gospels as the source of his affirmation, not because he has suddenly discovered traditional Christianity but because he rightly sees in the Gospels the greatest tribute to Man ever conceived: they tell how God became man and man became God for a brief moment, and it therefore presumably lies in man's power to become "God" again. Even today.[1]

A Fable is a dramatic presentation of Faulkner's agonized cry: how long will man reject the teachings of Christ?

During World War I a corporal and twelve of his men cause a French regiment to mutiny, to refuse to go into an attack. The spirit of the mutiny spreads rapidly through the ranks of all the troops. The top officers of all the armies call an emergency meeting to discuss how best to cope with the insurrection. During a peace demonstration of the allied and enemy troops artillery opens up and destroys the demonstrators. The corporal and the division commander (of the regiment which mutinied) are executed to balance the ledger and war is resumed.

Through a series of mischances the corporal ends up in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and is worshipped by high and low, from near and far, in the cause of war.

The story consists of a series of polarities, of which the most important is the one that exists between the corporal and the old marshal (supreme commander of the allied forces) who is the corporal's father. The corporal represents

[1]Norman Prodhoretz, "William Faulkner and the Problem of War: His Fable of Faith," Commentary, XVIII (September, 1954), 230.

peace and hope (spirit), the marshal, war and disillusion (world). The marshal emerges as a quasi-God who has wearied of His creation and deserts His son, Christ.

The main criticism levied against the novel is that there is a lack of psychological motivation for the characters' actions and reactions; and that there is no character development. I believe that these critics miss the intent of the novel. Faulkner is trying something different from the ordinary conception of the novel. He is not particularly interested in making his characters live as people, but as symbols. This is what Lytle misses (who has done the most comprehensive analysis of the novel to date) when, referring to the famous scene between the corporal and the old marshal, he says, "He is no Son of Man. He is begot of the sound of the author's voice upon an idea. This makes the great scene above the city between father and son miscarry, for there is no son but an abstraction tempted."[1] Faulkner is using the novel form in which to work out in dramatic terms through archetypal symbology the rejection of Christianity. Actually, I believe that there are even broader implications. He is working within the Christian framework because it is a tradition that is familiar to the Western world. But he is dealing with universal truths: the conflict between good and evil, and the conflict between two opposing philosophies--the inherent worth of the individual versus the rule of the

[1]Andrew Nelson Lytle, "The Son of Man: He Will Prevail," Sewanee Review, LXIII (Winter, 1955), 126.

elected few. The novel is very reminiscent of the medieval morality plays, where the intent was not to present well-rounded characters, but abstractions. Unless the reader is willing to approach A Fable on these terms he is bound to give it an unsatisfactory reading.

The story opens in France with a mob gathered outside the prison where the regiment which mutinied is being held. Rumor has it that the whole regiment is to be executed. Needless to say, the corporal is roundly cursed by all. A scene is enacted which adumbrates the symbolic message of the rest of the novel. A nameless woman in the crowd, who is starving, at first refuses the morsel of bread offered her by a nameless sergeant, but later, forced by her hunger, grabs the bread and wolfs it down. Thus on the symbolic level there is the need for spiritual salvation and the offer of it. Forced by a great need the people at first accept the gift but when their initial hunger is assuaged, reject it. The corporal, along with the sergeant who offered the bread, sink back into the crowd, back into anonymity; later to be resurrected and made over into something opposed to Christianity: ". . .doctors and lawyers and educators and churchmen who after nineteen centuries have rescued the son of heaven from oblivion and translated him from mere meek heir to earth to chairman of its board of trade."[1] The

[1]William Faulkner, A Fable (New York, 1954), p. 260.

corporal ends up in a tomb erected as a monument to war. And so the man who tried to stop war and earned the hatred of the people, is taken over by the war principle and paid everlasting tribute by the people.

Before the reader is allowed a glimpse of the corporal a wall of hatred and fear is built up around him.

> But when they reached the city, they found no placid lake of grieving resignation. Rather, it was a cauldron of rage and consternation. Because now they learned that the regiment had not mutinied by mutual concord and design, either planned or spontaneous, but instead had been led, cajoled, betrayed into revolt by a single squad of twelve soldiers and their corporal.[1]

Always a deliberate air of mystery is built up around the corporal's antecedents. During one scene in the marshal's chambers it is reported by three men that the corporal had died at three different times and at three different places. Neither the old marshal nor the corporal receive this news with any show of discomposure; information which belies the father-son relationship they acknowledge. This confusion heightens the symbolic nature of the corporal. But at the same time there must be human qualities about him--just as there were about Christ. The corporal as man comes across best to the reader during the scene, paralleling the Last Supper, where the corporal and his men are having a meal together in the prison. For a moment the reader is allowed a glimpse of the men who caused the war to stop for

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[1] Ibid., p. 126.

three days. There is nothing awe-inspiring about the scene. Indeed, the conversation is of a most earthy nature. None of these men is saint-like. By making the men real Faulkner is saying that man himself has the potential power to make of hell a heaven. Salvation is within the grasp of all men if they will only reach out and take it. It is here at hand. We do not need to wait for another coming. But the supernatural air which clings to the corporal symbolizes man's need for spiritual belief. This is pointed up by the British colonel who refuses the testimony of his own eyes (he saw the corporal die). The corporal has been reported killed three different times. Each witness (the colonel is one) is quizzed by the old general about his seemingly impossible assertion that he saw the corporal die--the corporal is in the room during the session.

> "You wont say either way: that he is or is not that man?"
> "I'm sorry, sir," the colonel said. "I've got to believe in something."
> "Even if only death?"[1]

The corporal is a functional symbol because everything he does has symbolic overtones. Even the people who come into contact with him realize this. For example, there is the passage in which his half-sister tells the old general of his marriage to a Marseilles whore. (In his youth the marshal made love to a country woman who already had two girls by her

[1] Ibid., p. 277.

husband. The corporal was born to this woman, who died shortly afterwards. The boy was brought up by his two half-sisters.) His love for the whore reclaimed her from the pit. "Who are we to challenge him and her, if what this proves is what love can do: save a woman."[1] This message, of course, can be found in much of Faulkner's work. Indeed, it was one of the fundamental tenets in his Nobel Prize speech.

The action of the story falls between the opposing philosophies of father and son. The son represents hope, love, and peace; the father, hatred, fear, cynicism, and war. In the same scene in which the corporal's marriage to the whore is viewed in its symbolic significance the sister learns that the corporal must die.

> "So he must die." They looked at each other. "Your own son."
> "Then will he not merely inherit from me at thirty-three what I had already bequeathed to him at birth?"[2]

Appropriately, the few times that the corporal becomes life-like are in the scenes when he is being most un-Christ-like. The best example of this is at the Last Supper. He does little to stop the rather ribald horseplay of the disciples. Indeed, he often joins in. The badinage centers around the realization that they have been given such a fine meal because they are being fattened for the killing.

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[1] Ibid., p. 300. [2] Ibid., p. 301.

"They wouldn't dare execute us until we have finished eating this cooking. Our whole nation would rise at that insult to what we consider the first of the arts. How's this for an idea? We stagger this, eat one at a time, one man to each hour, thirteen hours; we'll be alive at. . .almost noon tomorrow--"

"--when they'll serve us another meal," another said, "and we'll stagger that one into dinner and then stagger dinner on through tomorrow night--"

"--and in the end eat ourselves into old age when we cant eat any more--"

"Let them shoot us then. Who cares?" the third said. "No. That bastard sergeant will be in here with his firing squad right after the coffee. You watch."

"Not that quick," the first said. "You have forgot what we consider the first of the virtues too. Thrift. They will wait until we have digested this and defecated it."

"What will they want with that?" the fourth said.

"Fertilizer," the first said. "Imagine that corner, that garden-plot manured with the concentrate of this meal--"

"The manure of traitors," the fourth said.[1]

The meal is slow in getting under way because nobody knows a grace to deliver.

When a priest goes to comfort the corporal before his execution the corporal remarks most irreverently, "You've forgotten your gear."[2] Although the priest is an emissary from the old general he is not completely at home in the old man's cynical philosophy, nor can he identify himself with the corporal's philosophy of love. Caught on the horns of an impossible dilemma he takes the only logical course--he commits suicide.

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[1] Ibid., p. 336.

[2] Ibid., p. 367.

After the execution the corporal's body is turned over to Marthe and Marya (his half-sisters) who desire to take it home. As the humble wagon traverses the countryside the people, who have somehow gotten wind of the transfer, pay tribute to the corporal. These are the same people who earlier hungered for his death. And they are the same people who later pay homage to the war memorial. The possibility for salvation rests in man's soul, but he persists in keeping it imprisoned.

It was important to Marthe that her half-brother be buried at home because she has a half-conscious understanding that the land is somehow tied up with salvation.

> He had been her brother but she had been his mother too, who knew now that she would have no children of her own and who raised him from infancy; France, England, America too by now probably, were full of women who had given the lives of their sons to defend their countries and preserve justice and right; who was she to demand uniqueness for grieving? He was right: it was the farm, the land which was immune even to the blast and sear of war. It would take work of course, it might even take years of work, but the four of them were capable of work. More: their palliation and their luck was the work they faced, since work is the only anesthetic to which grief is vulnerable. More still: restoring the land would not only palliate the grief, the minuscule integer of the farm would affirm that he had not died for nothing and that it was not for an outrage that they grieved, but for simple grief: the only alternative to which was nothing, and between grief and nothing only the coward takes nothing.[1]

The story of how the corpse of the corporal ends up in the consecrated tomb is highly ironical. A group of

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[1]Ibid., p. 399.

soldiers is detailed to go into an underground fortress where bodies have been accumulating for years and to remove one which has no identification. The ordeal is so harrowing that the soldiers stay drunk all of the time. Drink has become such an obsession with them that they finally sell the body they secured to an old woman who thought it was her son, for a few bottles of wine. Fortunately, they run into a farmer who has had a corpse blown onto his land by a recent shelling (it is the corporal), and they buy it for a German wrist-watch. All of this gives a rather bizarre background to the pomp and ceremony which accompanies the burial of the unknown soldier. Both the securing and the buying of the body offer an ironic comment on the disposing of the corporal's teachings.

Always in counterpoint to the Christian aura in which the corporal moves is the cynical disillusion of the supreme commander: "the slight gray man with a face wise, intelligent, and unbelieving, who no longer believed in anything but his disillusion and his intelligence and his limitless power."[1] Always there is the dialectic of rule (or guidance) through love, and rule through hate and fear. But the old marshal tempers his rule by fear with overtures of the olive branch. It is this ability to practice both principles that gives the commander his unique power. By way of comparison, Division Commander Gragnon knows only one

[1] Ibid., p. 13.

principle of rule: "A commander must be so hated, or at least feared by his troops that, immunized by that fury, they will attempt any odds, any time, any where."[1] Rather than deviate from this principle when it fails (he insists that the whole regiment be executed) he gives up his life. The philosophy of the ruling class is based on one unshakeable tenet: man is our enemy. Once that is understood he can be manipulated accordingly. If the corporal would understand this fundamental premise he could have the world. Because he will not, he must die. Man can be held down because he refuses to insist on his share of life. The ruling class is eternal because they know how to hang on to what they have. When their hold is threatened they band together to fight off the danger. When the insubordination became infectious the divisions were clearly drawn--the elite against the mass. The ruling classes of both the allies and the enemy formed ranks to destroy the real enemy, the common man. The problem of winning the war dissolved before the much more serious threat. War is very important in keeping the status quo. In times of peace the common man has too much time in which to wonder about his position in the total picture. And so man is offered a substitute for justice--fatherland. From birth to death he is continually hammered with patriotic slogans. Thus in times of emergency the

[1] Ibid., p. 26.

real conflict is clouded and a substitute thrown in. Without periodic wars the real issues might be placed into clear focus; this is why man must never get the idea that he can stop a war. The ruling classes all over the world will combine to see that this doesn't happen. As long as the concept of fatherland is kept alive there is no danger that wars will be discontinued. It is with this knowledge foremost in mind that the general wields his titanic power.

The marshal believes that there is only one thing the people want, and that is to suffer. Perhaps if they suffer enough in this world there will be compensation for them in the next. It is this insight that prompts the marshal, as a young man to deviate from the course everyone expected him to follow. Descended from the most powerful family in France he could have had any career at any rank he chose. Instead he accepted the command of an insignificant outpost far removed from civilization. "How far they penetrate the desert determines the degree of initiation. Only for the Generalissimo and the Quartermaster [the old marshal's right-hand man] is reserved the furthest reaches and the highest measure of sacrifice."[1] The generalissimo went into the desert to understand suffering and thus learn how best to control mankind; the quartermaster suffered so as to know how best to serve mankind. (The quartermaster,

[1]Lytle, "The Son of Man," p. 119.

who was second only to the marshal in military school, idolizes his superior and follows him blindly for many years. Each time he is presented with a further piece of evidence of the marshal's inhumanity he rationalizes by telling himself that the marshal feels he must steel himself for the final task of freeing mankind. Finally the quartermaster's disillusion is complete, but by that time he has become so identified with the old man that he cannot make the break. Only with the marshal's death does the quartermaster's humanity emerge as a positive force.)

It is in this remote outpost that the future marshal first demonstrates his lack of humanity: he sacrifices a worthless criminal's life in order to avoid a minor war.

> And yet this criminal is a man, and the taint of his blood is on his commander. The Quartermaster by choice relieves him, believing the crime is no crime, or that at least he will expiate it, still believing him the chosen savior. The Generalissimo now flees to the mountains, that other retreat, so remote and so above the world that one in its fastnesses scarcely knows of the world beyond and below. Here he enters a monastery (comparable to the Essenes?) surrendering any semblance of rank, denying any need of the body. And yet he is in his body, and it will not be denied. He commits adultery with a married woman, gets her with child, abandons the woman and the child in her womb and returns to the inheritance he has tried to refuse. He repeats the very crime the soldier he sacrificed committed, for the woman he abandons dies. The Generalissimo's initiation is now complete. He knows the limits of man's possibilities: that he cannot escape his nature.[1]

With this knowledge he returns to the world and uses his great understanding of the limits of man for the cynical purpose of

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[1] Ibid., p. 122.

controlling him. Lytle, I believe, errs on this point: the generalissimo never intended to forsake his inheritance; he was only preparing himself to assume its responsibilities. He returns to hold within his grasp the answer to man's hope and fear.

The crux of the novel occurs in the scene on a promontory overlooking Paris where father and son struggle for each other's soul (paralleling Satan's offer of world dominion to Christ). The central theme of the argument is based on whether or not man is worth saving. The marshal insists that he is not, but he believes that man will endure despite what he or his son does. The old man bases his contention on the fact that he understands the limits of man's nature. The corporal refuses to accept these limits. By a very subtle shift in his line of reasoning the marshal makes the corporal out to be the real villain because he refuses to understand man's inherent limitations. The corporal, in asking too much of man will destroy him.

> Because I believe in man within his capacities and limitations. I not only believe he is capable of enduring and will endure, but that he must endure, at least until he himself invents evolves produces a better tool than he to substitute for himself.[1]

He offers his son not only his freedom but the whole earth. (The old man at one time is suggestive of God, at another, of Satan. Are God and Satan one?) Always the corporal returns to his one fundamental stand: "There are still

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[1] A Fable, p. 347.

ten." If he accepted his life on his father's terms he would be untrue to his ten disciples (one turned out to be a traitor, the other renounced his allegiance to the corporal). It is this irrefutable fact that the marshal cannot remove. Does the marshal try to convert his son because he fears him, because he represents that in man over which he has no control? The corporal thinks so.

> "Don't be afraid," the corporal said. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing worth it."
> . . ."Afraid? No no, it's not I but you who are afraid of man; not I but you who believe that nothing but a death can save him. I know better. I know that he has that in him which will enable him to outlast even his wars; that in him more durable than all his vices."[1]

They will do more, they will prevail, he says when he takes his final leave of his son.

Paralleling the father-son duality is the runner-horse thief relationship. The runner was at one time an officer, who, when he requested to be relieved of his commission and placed in the ranks was regarded as little less than mad. He finally achieves his aim by going A. W. O. L. and taking up with a whore. His motive for becoming one of the rank-and-file is based on his hatred for man; not for man <u>per se</u> but for the fact that man will do nothing to further his salvation. Therefore, he does not want to be in a position where he must lead men who will not lead themselves. He too, however, becomes completely involved in the corporal's

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[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 352.

mission of peace. Indeed, he joins the crusade. "But his mission is a little different. He must deal not with hope but man's cynicism. He will have to force man to save himself."[1]

His life ironically parallels the corporal's. He does not take up with a whore out of love, but for personal gain. And yet the results are the same. Both women are reclaimed from their sinful ways, and both are deserted. He leads man out of a feeling of hatred, not out of love. Yet both are leaders; both attempt to end the war; both lead their followers to destruction.

It takes the runner some time before he can believe that the corporal is actually inspiring man to shake off the shackles of the war lords: "It's not that I don't believe it, he said. It's because it can't be true. We can't be saved now; even He doesn't want us any more now."[2] But when he realizes the extent of the movement he uses his position as runner to spread the word.

Faulkner has somewhat gratuitously inserted Notes on a Horse Thief into the novel. The story is about a foul-mouthed groom and an old Negro preacher who steal an extremely expensive race horse from the debris of a train wreck. Although the horse has only three legs they tour the off-beat hamlets racing him against the best the local inhabitants can

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[1]Lytle, "The Son of Man," p. 116.

[2]A Fable, p. 69.

produce. When the authorities are about to capture them the groom shoots the horse rather than turn him over for stud. The country folk rally round, supplying the groom with money and food, and releasing the Negro from jail--an unusual occupation for a mob.

All of this is done in the name of freedom:

> the affirmation of a creed, a belief, the declaration of an undying faith, the postulation of an invincible way of life: the loud strong voice of America itself out of the westward roar of the tremendous and battered yet indomitably virgin continent, where nothing save the vast unmoral sky limited what a man could try to do, nor even the sky limit his success and the adulation of his fellow man.[1]

The old preacher is constantly defending man from the scornful ejaculations of the groom, who feels that man has abrogated his right to that freedom which he was preserving for the horse.

The English groom ends up in the army, and sets up a business which is symbolic of the buying of souls. He gives the men money each month in exchange for being made beneficiary of their insurance policies. If they do not die they do not need to repay him. He is gambling that enough of them will be killed to net him a neat profit. This cynical perversion of the war to private ends parallels the old general's jockeying of divisions and generals to assure for himself the baton of marshal. But the groom is finally brought into the community of man, whereas the marshal never is.

[1] Ibid., pp. 167-168.

After the imprisonment of the mutinous regiment the runner, intrigued with the possibility of man's deliverance, urges the troops to advance across no-man's land without their weapons, convinced that the enemy will follow suit. While the groom is on sentry duty the runner tries to convince him of the soundness of the plan, knowing of the tremendous influence he has over the men. The only reward he receives for his efforts is a kick in the teeth. When the big moment arrives the runner forces him to join them at the point of a gun. The runner's expectations are rewarded; the Germans come surging weaponless out of their trenches, arms outstretched. But the runner had forgotten the ruthlessness of the class he once belonged to: allied and enemy artillery open up on the peace demonstration:

> "No!" he [the groom] cried. "No! Not to us!" not even realising that he had said "we" and not "I" for the first time in his life probably, certainly for the first time in four years, not even realizing that in the next moment he had said "I" again, shouting to the old Negro as he whirled about: "What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you to let me alone?" Only it was not the old Negro, it was the runner, standing facing him as the first ranging burst of shells bracketed in. He never heard them, nor the waiting rumble of the two barrages either, nor saw nor heard little more of anything in that last second except the runner's voice crying out of the soundless rush of flame which enveloped half his body neatly from heel through navel through chin:
> "They cant kill us! They cant! Not dare not: they cant!"[1]

The runner and the groom join forces in their affirmation

[1] Ibid., pp. 321-322.

of mankind; the one out of hatred, the other out of cynicism. "The Sentry, dying, cries We instead of I. This is his final test, the dying of selfhood which becomes a resurrection into the brotherhood of man."[1] The runner is not killed; he lives to see the utter ruination of that moment when man took his destiny into his own hands.

In the final scene in which the old marshal is laid to rest and is mourned by the whole world, the runner, or what is left of him, throws his medal on the tomb in a gesture of repudiation for everything the old man stood for. He is nearly torn apart by the enraged crowd. As he lies in the gutter the old Quartermaster bends over him crying. Despite hatred or love, hope or loss of hope, man will prevail.

[1]Lytle, "The Son of Man," p. 124.

CONCLUSION

The shifting pattern of Faulkner's world view should now, in the light of this discussion, be clearly discernible. In the early novels man is doomed and damned; in the middle period he will endure; and only in the novels of the final period is he presented with the possibility of prevailing. Not until his later works is the reader able to find that affirmation of man that Faulkner posited so forcefully in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize:

> I feel that this award was not made to me as a man but to my work--a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profits, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.
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> Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.
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> He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed--love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which

> nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.
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> Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.[1]

The first two novels, Soldiers' Pay and Mosquitoes, are studies in futility. Soldiers' Pay suggests the genre of the fiction of the lost generation. The returning veterans, like the heroes in the fiction of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, are lost in a post-war society which has for them no positive values. And because without these values the world, and their own existence, are meaningless, they are driven to pessimism and despair. In Mosquitoes, Faulkner employs the slice of life technique and analyzes a dozen characters for a few days as they try in various ways to escape the ennui which the shallowness of their lives has produced. Each

[1]Coughlin, op. cit., pp. 135-137.

character is doomed to a meaningless and vapid existence.

Faulkner's first major novel is The Sound and the Fury. Even the title indicates the pessimistic world view that the novel presents: life is sound and fury signifying nothing. Man has lost the dignity of his potential rationality, and his existence is reduced to a state of insignificance. In this novel, however, occasional glimpses of a world which once had meaning and significance are evident; but this world has long since died away. The next few novels supply the reasons for the degeneration of this nobler world. The curse which envelops the South springs from the twin evils of slavery and the exploitation of the land. But because the South functions within the myth as a symbol for Faulkner's larger world view, the curse assumes universal proportions. Modern man has lost the human values of "courage and honor and hope and pride and sacrifice." In the age of the machine, man has become a mere automaton, without mind and heart. Love and compassion have been replaced by sensuality and greed. In The Sound and the Fury, only Benjy and Dilsey retain the former values, and ironically they are unable to perpetuate them. Benjy is a gelded idiot who lives in the past; to Dilsey, the Negro mammy, has fallen the burden of holding together the disintegrating Compson family. Both survive, but each is ironically defeated. Quentin, because he cannot identify himself with the past nor accept the future, kills himself.

In Sartoris, old Bayard and Jenny represent the old order. They have not severed their ties with the past; they have a strong feeling of family homogeneity and identification with the land. But they too, together with the new generation, are doomed, for they have inherited the sins of their grandfathers. In one way or another they are all destroyed. Not until the next novel, As I Lay Dying, is any hope held out for mankind. And indeed there is very little in this book. With the advent of the Bundren family, Faulkner introduces a class of which he is particularly fond, the poor white Southern farmer. (Although the MacCallum family played an important, though minor, part in Sartoris. The strength of the MacCallum family as a unit appeared in marked contrast to the disintegrating Sartoris household.) The optimism that finally emerges in his work is based to a large degree on this lower economic class. But there is little of the optimistic in this novel. The Bundren family disintegrates because of the absence of love, which is a cohesive force in the preservation of the family unit. Symbolically, the Bundren family represents a world without love. But a new note is injected into Faulkner's world view--endurance. He said of the Negroes in the introduction to The Sound and the Fury that they endured. This quality of endurance assumes greater prominence in his next few novels. Endurance is a quality which is found primarily among the Negroes and the poor whites. Not until his last period does

Faulkner offer mankind any hope beyond mere endurance.

In Sanctuary, modernism and the machine receive a most bitter indictment. The central character, Popeye, represents amoral modernism. He is completely devoid of an ethical consciousness. The humanitarians with whom he comes in contact are so weakened and vitiated by feelings of guilt that they are easy prey to his corrupting influence. Horace Benbow, for instance, is utterly defeated in his attempt to promote justice. But amoral modernism not only destroys the humanistic world, it contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Although Snopesism may for a time reign supreme, a force which is not based on love and the spiritual is doomed to extinction, and in this novel Popeye forfeits his life on the gallows.

The central characters in Light in August are destroyed because they can find no love in their lives, and because they are unable to identify themselves with that part of their heritage which has ethical and cultural values. A new theme, which has been only hinted at in previous novels, is introduced in Light in August--miscegenation. The tragedy of Joe Christmas is partially explained by his mixed blood. An outcast, he is unable to identify himself with the human community, either white or black.

The endurance which was faintly noticeable in As I Lay Dying assumes major proportions in the Byron-Lena section of this novel. They find what Christmas, Joanna, and Hightower

cannot: love and communal acceptance. They express love for others rather than love for self. They do not fight life, and contrary to their moral opposites, they endure.

The action of Pylon lies outside the Yoknapatawpha region and returns to the world of extreme pessimism. The central characters try desperately to escape the ennui of life, but in their escape from boredom they also isolate themselves from humanity. They have no roots nor ties. The Hemingway code is quite evident in this novel, for these people do not want to be alone, they cannot face the quiet of the early hours. They live only by their physical and sensual instincts. Theirs is a search, but at the same time a retreat. They are lost souls searching for a meaning to life. Their search ends always in absolute and unremitting futility.

The themes of the search and isolation are continued in Faulkner's next novel, Absalom, Absalom!. This novel relates the story of a poor white who attempts to rise above his social caste. Sutpen's great design parallels the rise and fall of the South. Sutpen allows nothing, not even the basic ethical considerations, to prevent him from achieving his goal: to create the House of Sutpen, to establish a line, to join the ranks of the planter-aristocrats. The design is magnificent in scope, the dedication and unflagging will are heroic, but because he has abjured his humanity he is doomed to failure. So the South, in creating an order

of magnificance and beauty, concomitant with the curse, denied its humanity and furthered its own destruction.

Faulkner's attitude toward the past is always ambivalent: On the one hand he presents the conventional fictional picture of the South, and he portrays the beauty and the culture of a romantic past through which move glamorous and genteel belles and dashing, gallant men. He sees the Civil War as a heroic struggle to preserve the heritage which was a part of this romantic tradition. But always lurking insidiously beneath this gloss and veneer of opulence and splendor are slavery and the exploitation of the land, the blight and the curse of the land. Both attitudes are pursued in The Unvanquished. Faulkner's sympathy with the tradition of the romantic South is more noticeable in this novel than in any other. But concomitant with the romantic portrayal is the theme of decline and degeneration. Colonel John Sartoris, a gallant and colorful figure during the Civil War, returns home to perpetuate the spirit of slavery. Inured to killing, he grows calloused in his treatment of his fellow man, and fulfilling the ancient prophecy dies as he has lived--by the sword. Bayard, his son, refuses to carry on his father's violence, and thereby loses the love and respect of his family and class. He saves his soul but he must expiate the sins of his class by a life of loneliness and isolation.

The two stories in The Wild Palms serve as transitional stories between the novels of pessimism and the novels of

optimism. In the title story, the young lovers are defeated by a society which demands that man live according to certain rigid moral rules. If man, in his search for meaning, love, and happiness, violates the dictates of society, he is destroyed. Ironically, however, if he follows the rules, his life will be empty and meaningless. There is no room in contemporary society for love and happiness; only for uniformity and conformity. The convict in "Old Man" manages to come to terms with life. He is first subjected to the cruel jokes of a capricious and malignant fate, and then when his defeat seems imminent he is just as capriciously allowed a measure of repose. He is allowed this temporary respite because he has asked no little from life. Actually, he desires to escape from life by isolating himself in prison. The convict is permitted to endure but not to prevail.

In The Hamlet, Faulkner evinces a more benevolent attitude toward the inhabitants of the wasteland than in any of his previous novels. The poor farmers and shopkeepers are drawn in most sympathetic proportions, but this benevolent view does not preclude their ultimate defeat. The Hamlet treats the rise of Sropesism: The Snopeses are a rootless, unethical tribe, interested only in aggrandizement and completely ruthless in their pursuit of the dollar. Although the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend are defeated by this group of transients, they do not go down to utter damnation; they retain their soul, and they have the promise of enduring.

Not until his next novel, Go Down, Moses, does Faulkner suggest that man will do more than endure.

Ike McCaslin finds his spiritual growth in the wilderness. It is here that he learns of the old values which cemented the community of man. But the wilderness is shrinking, giving way before the inroads of civilization. And with its disappearance the permanent values lie outside the reach of man. (Most critics have referred to Go Down, Moses as a novel demonstrating Faulkner's primitivism. Certainly there are many elements of primitivism in the novel, but it must be remebered that Faulkner's primitivism differs from the orthodox conception in that his protagonist must re-enter civilization to impart the wisdom he has learned in the wilderness.)

Ike learns of the mixed blood that has played such a prominent and disastrous role in his heritage, and he voluntarily renounces his inheritance and endures the life of a celibate in order to expiate the sins of his forefathers. The introduction of the theme of atonement is a significant development in the direction of the moral regeneration of mankind in Faulkner's work.

But Ike McCaslin is unable to conquer his racial prejudices. This is reserved for Chick Mallison in Intruder in the Dust. This is the story of a sixteen year old boy's desperate struggle to overcome his heritage and achieve spiritual salvation. His struggle is a lonely one, and once he reaches his goal he has nothing to look forward to but

loneliness. He has risen above his class and region, and yet, like Faulkner, he retains a strong sense of identification with them. Chick, more than any other Faulkner character, rises above the morass of racial bigotry that has kept the South a land of darkness. He has learned the true meaning of brotherhood.

Many of the novels revive characters and themes from previous novels. In Sanctuary, Temple Drake is last seen in Europe, in the last stages of moral degeneration. She reappears in Requiem for a Nun. The difference in the world views of the two novels is plainly evident in a comparative study of Temple. In the first novel, she had no chance for salvation. In the later novel, she learns that through suffering and belief, salvation is possible. At the end of Requiem for a Nun, Temple Drake is moving toward a spiritual rebirth.

In Faulkner's early novels, man's destiny is controlled by a force variously referred to as the Cosmic Joker, Dark Diceman, Omnipotent Jester, Player, and Wanton Fate. Man is a mere pawn. He has absolutely no control over the course of his life. As Faulkner's world view becomes more optimistic, his view of fatality and cosmic interference is gradually replaced by freedom of the will. The characters seldom exercise this freedom, but their potential is evident. This is most forcefully presented in his final novel, A Fable. In this novel, which treats the second incarnation of Christ, man is given the opportunity to fulfill himself through

spiritual affirmation. The irony, however, persists; for rather than avail himself of this opportunity, he lends moral support to the second crucifixion. Yet this irony is mitigated by the fact that the crucifixion is an ambiguous symbol, superficially pessimistic, but within the context of the Christian myth, completely optimistic. Christ dies that man may be saved. Even the old marshal, who cynically exploits man's weaknesses, declares to his son that man will eventually prevail. Perhaps in Faulkner's next novel this prognostication will be realized.

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