

JUSTICE AND RETRIBUTION IN
THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Bernice Brucker Carter

June, 1967

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's concern with morality has been reflected in all of his works. In exploring the moral conditions of man's life, he frequently considered justice, injustice, and retribution.

The parallel plots of The Wild Palms occur in a world in which justice and morality are independent or separated. The world of the Snopes trilogy (The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion) is heavily affected by retribution.

Novels considered later in the thesis show justice or injustice occurring less randomly. Sanctuary is a story of injustice caused by the immorality of individuals as well as by the institutions of society. It is balanced by Requiem for a Nun, which stresses two aspects of morality: the continuity of society's aspirations and the responsibility of individuals. Intruder in the Dust is similar in theme to Requiem for a Nun; it indicates that society's morality is based on the morality of individuals. Therefore, justice occurs when men of good will seek it for their neighbors. Go Down, Moses extols a morality which harmonizes with nature, but the novel concludes that changing conditions require man to add humanitarianism to the sylvan virtues. The Unvanquished presents the renunciation of revenge as a desirable humanitarian goal. Absalom, Absalom! is a novel in which injustice begets injustice. As in The Unvanquished and in Go Down, Moses, children struggle to escape from the results of their fathers' sins.

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner enjoyed telling a story; yet intertwined in most of his writings is more than a story. He presents a conflict between good and evil, or between right and wrong, as he and as his fictional creations see and feel this conflict. He tells his stories by means of his characters. In a series of question periods at the University of Virginia in 1957-8, Faulkner stated "I was just trying to write about people, which to me are the important thing....I don't know anything about ideas, don't have much confidence in them."¹ Explaining why he read the Old Testament more often than the New Testament, he said "To me the New Testament is full of ideas and I don't know much about ideas. The Old Testament is full of people, perfectly ordinary normal heroes and blackguards just like everybody else nowadays."²

Faulkner's people are moved by their own concepts of right and wrong more than by any other single force. Their actions are frequently calculated to obtain justice, as they see it, for themselves; and their cause is so graphically presented that the reader understands their thinking even when their vision is distorted. One feels the same sympathy for Faulkner's characters as does Faulkner himself. Even the unsympathetic characters elicit some sympathy.

¹Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, ed., Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 10.

²Faulkner in the University, p. 167.

By analyzing the successes and failures of Faulkner's people in their pursuit of justice, this thesis will attempt to define the right that Faulkner believes in, and the wrong that he hates. He admires compassion and bravery, or "the will to risk public opprobrium, to stand up and say, This is rotten, this stinks, I won't have it."³ Cruelty he abhors. In his writings cruelty and injustice are almost synonymous. He describes an incident in The Sound and the Fury--Jason Compson's allowing his sister only a brief glimpse of her baby--as "an instance of man's injustice to man."⁴ If cruelty and injustice are the same, it is not illogical to feel, as Faulkner does, that compassion and justice should be synonymous. However, Faulkner sees a dichotomy between compassion and the formalized justice which is administered by man and man's society. Time and time again his stories show compassion bypassed by law or thwarted by man's stupidity or greed. His wrongdoers usually meet with retribution, but their legal punishment, when it occurs, is generally irrelevant. For Faulkner believes in individuals, not in institutions or in groups; and the procedural justice which society uses is basically neither emotional nor individualized.

In order to avoid too lengthy a paper, I have considered in this thesis only the novels which have the strongest bearing on the themes of justice and retribution. Faulkner's short stories and several of his best novels are mentioned briefly or not at all.

³Faulkner in the University, p. 148.

⁴Faulkner in the University, p. 148.

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WILD PALMS AND OLD MAN

Wild Palms and Old Man were originally published together, with alternating chapters, under the title The Wild Palms. The separate casts of characters are small, and each plot is easily summarized; thus, in these stories some of Faulkner's beliefs stand out clearly. Although justice and retribution are not the primary themes, each of these stories offers some insight into such concepts. Wild Palms dramatizes the futility of man-made justice. Old Man looks at the corruptibility of the penal system. The main focus of interest is on a man who overcomes the Mississippi River at its wildest, saving two lives besides his own, but who does not see that the corruption of society is also his enemy, taking ten years from his life.

At the start, The Wild Palms contrasts a fighter, the convict, with a drifter, Harry Wilbourne. Both Harry Wilbourne of Wild Palms and the tall convict of Old Man feel that they are caught in situations they did not make. The convict is arrested in a train robbery. His day-to-day life on the prison farm is interrupted by the flooding of the Mississippi River. After being removed from the prison farm, the convict is caught in the flood, fights it successfully, and eventually returns to prison life.

Following a similar pattern, Harry Wilbourne of Wild Palms is torn from his cloistered intern's routine when his roommate takes him to a party. Charlotte Rittenmeyer, who feels no affinity for her husband, introduces herself. Looking into Charlotte's eyes,¹

¹W. R. Moses, "The Unity of The Wild Palms," Modern Fiction Studies, II (1956), 125-131, makes a comparison of Charlotte's yellow eyes to the flood.

Harry "seemed to be drowning, volition and will, in the yellow stare."² Although he would have finished his internship in four more months, he abandons the hospital to run away with Charlotte.

The difference in the situations of the two men lies in the fact that the convict literally has no choice in leaving his routine and joining his fate with a woman's. He and his prison mates are turned out of bed at gun point and taken from the area in chains. With another convict he is ordered into a boat to rescue a man on a cotton house and a woman on a cypress snag. He becomes separated from the other convict and fails to find the stranded man, but he does accidentally find the woman, who is pregnant. Acting from a sense of obligation, he protects and supports the woman through eight difficult weeks. During this period he delivers her baby. His fight for her and the baby's survival in a strange world of backward flowing streams, snakes, and endless paddling is also a fight for his own survival.

The only vacillation in his attempts to return the woman and himself to the authorities comes during the brief period when he is able to earn money and enjoy freedom as the partner to a Cajan alligator hunter. Here for the first and perhaps the only time, he feels the length of his imprisonment. "I had forgotten how good it is to work."³ But again he is forced to leave. Authorities find destroying a levee necessary; they order all persons from the area.

²William Faulkner, The Wild Palms (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 39.

³The Wild Palms, p. 264.

The convict returns to the skiff, changes to his striped jail suit, and paddles until he finds a landing spot and a deputy sheriff whom he tells, "Yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse."⁴ The possibility of escape does not tempt him; although he hardly realizes it, he has come to prefer the safety of prison to the outside world.

In contrast to the convict, Harry Wilbourne chooses to live with Charlotte, but then takes a passive role which allows her to make their decisions. Sitting out the days on a park bench after losing his laboratory job, Harry presents a picture similar to Dreiser's George Hurstwood. Whatever hope Harry is able to maintain is invested in his faith in Charlotte: "he seemed to see their joint life as a fragile globe, a bubble, which she kept balanced and intact above disaster like a trained seal does its ball....'God wont let her starve,' he thought."⁵

If at the outset of the stories the convict is more willing than Harry to confront life actively, their positions are reversed at the end. The convict, who before the flood had felt outrage at his loss of freedom, returns to prison willingly after disposing of the woman who was his responsibility; he accepts without question an additional ten years to his sentence. Harry, imprisoned after Charlotte's death, rejects the two escapes which Charlotte's husband offers him--first, the chance to jump bail, and then the cyanide

⁴The Wild Palms, p. 278.

⁵The Wild Palms, pp. 92-3.

pill. He feels that Charlotte's memory will continue only if he keeps his identity.

Nor are these the only parallels and contrasts between the stories. For as Faulkner explained, he wrote Old Man as counterpoint to Wild Palms.⁶ However, the two parts are independent, and to examine them individually for Faulkner's observations on the workings of justice will prove fruitful.

Old Man opens with a description of its protagonist, the tall convict. He is young, about twenty-five, and his eyes show outrage at his imprisonment. For as he sees it, he has been victimized by the writers of pulp detective stories. He feels that these writers have used the mails to defraud him of liberty, honor, and potential success. They presented their stories as true, and he had accepted them in the same spirit. He built his plans around his reading, and bought his equipment with the money he earned by selling subscriptions to the same magazines. With his capture he learned that the stories must be false.

After the flood the convict tells his story to the other prisoners. His battle is over when he reconstructs it, but his listeners (and the reader) catch a feeling of immediacy. However, once he is again in prison where he can look back on his adventures, the convict no longer seems young; when the warden sends for him, he arrives

⁶ Jean Stein, "Interview with William Faulkner," The Paris Review, XII (Spring 1956), 43.

"saturnine and grave in his new bed ticking, his jowls blue and close under the sunburn."⁷ Gravity is usually characteristic of an older, settled person; jowls in a thin man also carry a suggestion of age.

When he was nineteen, the convict had been sentenced to fifteen years for an attempted train robbery. He had never thought of his term as a span of years, for with his imprisonment he lost his sense of time. He thought of his sentence simply as a loss of liberty and honor--a loss which would have been as important to him if it had been for five years or for twenty.

However, after escaping the flood, the convict loses his sense of outrage at imprisonment. He no longer feels that he is a victim of injustice; indeed, he welcomes the calm safety of prison. Therefore, he is able to accept casually the extra ten years which are added to his sentence. He no longer seethes with an unexpressed anger at the pen names that he had previously blamed for his plight; instead, he remembers the girl friend he had wanted to please when he was free, and he sums up his sentiments in one resigned exclamation, "Women--!"⁸

Even though the convict has successfully carried out his mission of returning the woman and the boat, as well as saving himself from drowning, he has been partially defeated. His contentment with the security of prison, even in the face of his lengthened term, is a sign of his defeat. He has changed from a young man to a middle-aged

⁷The Wild Palms, p. 331.

⁸The Wild Palms, p. 339.

man, and as part of that change he has lost his sense of injustice.

Faulkner believes that justice tempered by compassion is a positive virtue; therefore, it is connected with hope. In Wild Palms, Charlotte, foreseeing her death (in a scene envisaged by Harry) asks her husband not to take legal action against Harry.⁹ She makes her request in the name of justice; then not sure that she has chosen the right word, she changes it to hope. The unnamed convict of Old Man achieves peace, but he no longer hopes; he has grown old.¹⁰

To an extent, injustice follows him from the beginning. His initial bitterness against the pulp writers is not completely misplaced. For it is his innocence which enables him to read their stories, tie a black handkerchief over his face and board a train to rob it of gold. This innocence is the combined result of his youth, his hill country upbringing, and a congenital lack of shrewdness. For instance, when he is picked up by a refugee boat, he does not ask where the boat is going, because he feels that to ask information of a stranger is tantamount to asking a favor. Faulkner is skillful in developing sympathy for this not-too-bright character; the convict's pride and courage are redeeming qualities which commend him to most readers, and they are sorry to see him victimized.

The same innocence which brought the convict to jail also leads to his return. He rescues the woman because he is told to do so; weeks later, after life and death experiences, he still expects the

⁹The Wild Palms, p. 226.

¹⁰The Old Man of the title is the Mississippi River. Faulkner in the University, p. 177.

law's representatives to remember his original orders.

As Faulkner shows, a tale of extreme naiveté is good entertainment. The effectiveness of this technique is illustrated by the reaction of the warden's deputy as he retells how the convict returned. "He even brought that damn boat back.... 'Here's your boat and here's the woman but I never found no bastard on no cotton-house.'...Them convicts. A mule's got twice as much sense."¹¹

It is worth noting that Peter Swiggart in The Art of Faulkner's Novels regards the convict's stupidity as a deliberate effort to ignore the complexities of real life. "The humor of Old Man stems from the disparity between the convict's deep involvement in life and his desperate wish to remain uninvolved."¹²

Although the convict's desire to remain uninvolved is evident from the moment he is hailed by the woman, his innocence is not merely a defense he developed in prison. It is an important part of his personality; this trait, as shown in incidents such as his reluctance to ask where the refugee boat is going, arouses both exasperation and sympathy. Faulkner opens the story with the convict's reminiscing over his betrayed faith in the pulps, thus revealing his innocence at once. As his story closes, the convict reminisces over another instance of betrayed faith, faith in a girl. The reader realizes that the girl, whom the convict had courted before his arrest, had been using him to bolster her own ego and to add to her

¹¹The Wild Palms, p. 326.

¹²Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962, p. 57.

collection of dime store jewelry; although she is not subtle, she is more subtle than he.

The deputy and the convict's listening cell mates form a chorus, reiterating the reader's reactions to the returnee's unimaginative steadfastness. "So you come back," says the plump convict. "Well, well."¹³ Although one may disparage the convict for his return, his dedication to duty is a pleasant contrast to the calculating, worldly attitude of his plump, grublike friend.

The convict's imprisonment begins with a sort of injustice; at least, it has the emotional content of injustice for the convict and thus for the reader. Later when he tries to surrender, he is shot at; and his actual return is marked by a deliberate theft of his freedom for the convenience of the state's representatives. The warden and the governor's messenger, in order to avoid an investigation as to why the convict had been reported dead, list him as an attempted escapee. They add ten years to his sentence and arrange a more highly paid sinecure for the deputy who had reported him drowned. As this plan is worked out, the scene in the warden's office does not impress one with the justice of the proceedings. The governor's messenger who does most of the talking is a sleek, satisfied man, "there being that about him which indicated a character which never had and never would want anything it did not, or was not about to, possess."¹⁴ He says that his plan comes from the governor himself.

¹³The Wild Palms, p. 337.

¹⁴The Wild Palms, p. 325.

The warden's primary concern is with the political repercussions which might come from removal of the bungling deputy, who has worked to elect the winning state administration three times in a row, "and he's kin to all the folks in Pittman County."¹⁵ Like many of Faulkner's jailers, the deputy owes his job partly to family connections. However, his new job is a better one; it includes a car. The warden sends for the convict, tells him about the extra ten years and gives him a cigar, while the governor's man arranges the papers so that the convict's reported death and subsequent reappearance both seem to be explained.

Faulkner shows injustice at its worst as characterized by an almost deliberate cruelty toward the victim. The duping of the convict is an example. Wild Palms contains another example of dishonesty and injustice: a mine owner keeps his mine in operation, even though he is not able to meet the payroll, so that he can continue to sell stock in his mining company. Most of his workers leave the mine without payment before Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer arrive; but a small group of Polish dynamiters remain, doing all the work, in the belief that they will be paid. Because they do not understand English, Charlotte must use her artist's ability to show them their situation. In cartoon style she draws a closed pay window, with miners on one side, and on the other side the owner, "sitting behind a table heaped with glittering coins which the man was

¹⁵The Wild Palms, p. 329.

shovelling into a sack with a huge hand on which glittered a diamond the size of a ping-pong ball."¹⁶ Partly because the drawings preclude understatement and partly because a group rather than an individual is victimized, this incident does not have as great an emotional impact as other of Faulkner's scenes of injustice--for example, the last few pages of The Hamlet. But the elements are the same.

Wild Palms is a story which by conventional moral standards could not be expected to end happily. After falling in love at their first meeting, Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer run away to live in adultery on stolen money. (Harry had found a wallet, kept the \$1,278 it contained, and destroyed the identification.) Harry leaves his career; Charlotte leaves her husband and two small daughters. Charlotte dies as the result of an abortion, which she has begged Harry to perform because she wants none of the normal encumbrances or responsibilities of living to intrude on their permanent honeymoon.

As a man who had almost completed a two-year internship in a New Orleans hospital, Harry has ample knowledge to perform an abortion. During their stay at the Utah mine, where Harry is the physician hired to meet a legal requirement, he actually does perform an abortion on the wife of the mine superintendent. Harry indicates by his hesitancy in performing this first abortion that he has some moral objections to the procedure, but Charlotte does not let him state these objections.

¹⁶The Wild Palms, p. 201.

When Charlotte becomes pregnant, Harry again hesitates to resort to abortion. This time his hesitancy is due to his fear of failing. At the last moment he gives in to Charlotte's pleading, but his love for her causes his hands to shake; as he had feared, she becomes ill and dies.

At least two critics, Joseph Moldenhauer and Peter Swiggart, assign a deeper meaning to Harry's failure.¹⁷ They see Harry as a puritan ridden by guilt, who knows that he and Charlotte must be punished for their love. Swiggart points out that "Harry Wilbourne first appears to the reader in juxtaposition with a puritan doctor representing the destiny that Harry only by chance escapes."¹⁸ The doctor not only represents the morally conscientious but unattractive person that Harry might have become; he is also the man who turns Harry over to the police for punishment. This perhaps lends strength to the opinion that Harry was himself seeking defeat and punishment. However, the self-punishment thesis becomes less important to the story if one examines Harry's thoughts after Charlotte's death.

Offered a cyanide pill by Charlotte's husband, Harry grinds the pill into the ground while he tries to discover a meaning for his own life. If he dies, he realizes, the memory of Charlotte will cease to be. "Between grief and nothing I will take grief,"¹⁹ he thinks.

¹⁷Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Unity of Theme and Structure in The Wild Palms," William Faulkner, Three Decades of Criticism (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960), pp. 305-322.

¹⁸The Art of Faulkner's Novels, p. 52.

¹⁹The Wild Palms, p. 324.

Two facts emerge from his decision. First, he has not accepted defeat, or "nothing." Second, he does not think in terms of divine retribution, nor does he accept his or Charlotte's fate as retribution; this simply does not occur to his consciousness, and Faulkner gives no reason to believe that Harry unconsciously feels he is being punished.

Perhaps Charlotte's and Harry's sins are not important enough to be considered by a cosmic judge. Faulkner presents their illicit love sympathetically; Charlotte's husband is perhaps a well-meaning person, but he is too concerned with the appearance he makes in the world to be really likable. Charlotte calls him "Rat," a nickname he pretends to like. Ironically, it is the husband who after Charlotte's death wonders "But why me? Why? What have I done?"²⁰

If non-legal retribution seems unimportant to Harry Wilbourne, legal justice is both important and futilely unimportant. As a man who has committed a crime, Harry is tried for manslaughter and sentenced to fifty years in the penitentiary. But the legal procedures are empty form, perhaps affording satisfaction to a vengeful crowd of courtroom spectators, but of no actual meaning either to society, to Harry, or to the other man who loved Charlotte--her husband.

"Justice" first comes to Harry in the person of the professionally competent but unproductive doctor who is landlord and neighbor of the beach cabin in which Charlotte is dying. As the doctor reviews his life, he knows it has been sterile; he has not added to his father's practice, he has had no children, and he is half blind to life. His

²⁰
The Wild Palms, p. 319.

blindness is emphasized even to himself by his unmedical innocence in regard to Charlotte's bleeding. Slowly realizing what Harry is trying to tell him, the doctor thinks to himself,

'Am I to live forever behind a barricade of
perennial innocence like a chicken in a pen?'
...he heard his voice ask the question he did
not want to ask and get the answer he did not
want to hear: 'You say she is bleeding. Where
is she bleeding?'²¹

The doctor demands to know who the abortionist is; when he hears, he runs to call the police and to get a pistol. "I will not be interfered with!" says this agent of justice. "This woman is dying and this man must suffer for it."²² The doctor, with his religious righteousness, his useless overstatement, and his lack of perception is a devastating summary of justice as Faulkner sees it.

²¹The Wild Palms, p. 17.

²²The Wild Palms, p. 290.

THE SNOPE TRILOGY

Retribution, sometimes called poetic justice, is always evident in Faulkner's world. It is so important that the three volumes of Faulkner's Snopes trilogy, published in their complete form during a twenty-eight year period, are connected by the theme of retribution more than by any other one theme. This connection is noticeable even though it is accompanied by differences in tone between The Hamlet (1931), The Town (1957), and The Mansion (1959). The hamlet is Frenchman's Bend, in rural Mississippi; the emphasis is on the actions of its characters. In The Town the narrative follows Flem Snopes into near-by Jefferson; the story is told by three principals in the anti-Snopes drama, and the reader is made aware of their thoughts, which reflect the thinking of the entire town. In The Mansion, which is told from varying viewpoints, introspection and daydreams become even more important to the story; some of the action of The Hamlet is retold as it is understood by the participants. Within the trilogy there is a steady progression from action to the thought which leads to action.

Thus, each of the novels has its own emphasis; and within each volume Faulkner, as in all of his works, does not limit himself to a single theme. However, the reader becomes a sympathetic partisan of the alliance of V. K. Ratliff and his friends against Flem Snopes and his relatives, even while recognizing that the forces of retribution are at work against both the inhumane Snopes side and the humanitarian but human Ratliff side. The Hamlet is composed largely

of incidents in which the participants, except for Flem Snopes, bring trouble upon themselves through a combination of greed and stupidity. Flem alone is unscathed; he succeeds by taking advantage of the weaknesses of his victims, while keeping his own weaknesses as secret as possible.

The Town opens with the story of the brass-filled water tower, the symbol of Flem's well-deserved first setback. There are other hints of defeats which threaten Flem from time to time. He rises further, but with the revelation of his impotence and the glimpses of his home life, one begins to realize that his life is empty. The Mansion emphasizes, by contrasting his pretentious house with his few needs, his empty life. More importantly, The Mansion is the story of Mink Snopes, who aided by Flem's nominal daughter Linda, brings retribution to Flem. The three books do vary, but poetic justice and man's desire for retribution cannot be removed from any one of the volumes without destroying it.

The Hamlet--A Beginning

As The Hamlet closes, Flem Snopes stops to stare for a moment at Henry Armstid madly digging for treasure. Because throughout The Hamlet Flem succeeds at his plotting, the reader is tempted to feel that Frenchman's Bend is a world dominated by the devil. The devil which dominates Frenchman's Bend, however, is within the victims almost as noticeably as he is embodied by Flem. In reality, justice in its broadest sense is within sight of the non-Snopes

inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend, but they keep it out of reach by their own cupidity and single-minded dull-wittedness. Henry Armstid, who cripples himself by trying to get possession of a wild pony and then becomes obsessed by his search for treasure, is the most extreme example. As The Hamlet closes, he is insanely digging toward death.

There are other episodes, sometimes semi-humorous, in which characters in The Hamlet allow themselves to be cheated. Jody Varner, son of the village's chief landlord and businessman, sets the pattern. Hearing that Flem's father, Ab Snopes, is suspected of arson, Jody sees a chance to cheat the Snopes family of a summer's work. He plans to let the family work his vacant tenant farm during the summer, then to frighten them off by blackmail at harvest time. However, once he is faced by Flem's quiet, ominous presence, Jody is himself blackmailed into hiring Flem as a store clerk.

In this first episode the reader sees Flem in actual negotiations, whereas in later dealings an observer such as Ratliff sees or hears of the results. Flem in action is impassive;¹ his quiescence is a powerful foil to Jody's panicky effort to buy Flem's cooperation. Flem has an ally in Jody's own imagination; for even before they meet, as Jody listens to a retelling of the arson story,

¹ Harry Modean Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner, a Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951) p. 104. Campbell and Foster point out that the name Flem is pronounced the same as phlegm, with its disgusting connotations, and also brings the adjective phlegmatic to mind.

he begins to see that blackmail can work two ways.

With Flem's first appearance, Faulkner hints at the man's lack of humanity. As Jody Varner approaches the farmhouse, Flem's disembodied face appears suddenly at a window; then, as Jody "shouted 'Hello!'" it "vanished again."² Jody leaves the farmhouse to see beside the road "the same cloth cap, the same rhythmically chewing jaw materialised apparently out of nothing."³ As he rides away after hiring Flem, Jody realizes that Flem had arranged the meeting at a spot which could not be seen by Ab Snopes at the tenant house. Evidently Flem is underhanded as well as ominous.

This is the man who starts managing the Varners' store, then their cotton gin, and through usury, trading, and marriage to the Varners' daughter becomes the richest man in the village.

Flem Snopes differs from many of Faulkner's villains in his lack of emotions. This lack makes it impossible for the reader to identify or to sympathize with him. His only apparent motive in The Hamlet is profit. In a statement only a little longer than his usual monosyllables, Flem tells Jody Varner "Aint no benefit in farming. I figure on getting out of it soon as I can."⁴ From the glimpse Faulkner gives of the tenant farmhouse it is evident that there "aint no benefit in farming"--at least not in the tenant farming of the Snopeses. But Flem states this without bitterness,

²William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1931), p. 19.

³The Hamlet, p. 22.

⁴The Hamlet, p. 23.

whereas his more emotional relatives think of poverty not only as a fact, but as an injustice against themselves. Flem's father Ab Snopes indicates that he feels unfairly victimized by poverty when he negotiates his sharecropping arrangement with Jody Varner. Jody tells him he can get "Furnish out of the store here. No cash." Ab answers "I see. Furnish in six bit dollars."⁵ Ab takes the tenant farm because he must, but later he tells Jody "The house aint fitten for hogs. But I reckon I can make out with it."⁶

Ironically, the incident in which Ab Snopes begins his series of barn burnings is a typical Faulknerian dispute in which each party feels deliberately insulted and injured by the other. This part of Ab's history is told in Faulkner's short story "Barn Burning" and retold in The Hamlet by V. K. Ratliff, the sewing machine agent. The plot of "Barn Burning" is similar to the beginning of Thomas Sutpen's story in Absalom, Absalom! In each case, one who lives in poverty is insulted when the arrogant landlord or his servant tells him to use the back door. The incident is made more galling to the victim by his knowledge that the landlord has everything, including power, that a man might want, while he, the victim, has nothing. Pride forces the victim to take action. In Absalom, Absalom! the boy Thomas Sutpen sets out to be as wealthy as the landlord; but Ab Snopes has had time to learn that he will never lift himself from poverty. As Ratliff explains, he has become "soured."⁷

⁵The Hamlet, p. 9.

⁶The Hamlet, p. 21.

⁷The Hamlet, p. 27.

Consequently, he lacks Sutpen's imaginative ambition. Ab retaliates against his landlord with an act of destruction. Apparently this is not his last barn burning; "fire seems to follow him around like dogs follows some folks."⁸

There is a similarity between Ab's resentment and the bitterness of his relative Mink Snopes in Mink's quarrel with Jack Houston over a cow. The dispute is told in detail in The Mansion, but in The Hamlet one sees the result--Mink's murder of Houston. As Mink shoots Houston, he realizes that he is not accomplishing his purpose.

What he would have liked to do would be to leave a printed placard on the breast itself: This is what happens to the men who impound Mink Snopes' cattle, with his name signed to it. But he could not, and here again, for the third time since he had pulled the trigger, was that conspiracy to frustrate and outrage his rights as a man and his feelings as a sentient creature.⁹

When his cousin Lump Snopes refuses to believe that Mink did not take money from the dead man, Mink is reminded one more time that his act of revenge is not understood as such. Here again, as in so many of Faulkner's works, man's attempt to obtain retribution degenerates into meaninglessness or worse.

Mink in The Hamlet sees his own life as a series of affronts and injustices. His retaliatory plans are thwarted consistently, until he succeeds in his last act of revenge in The Mansion. After his arrest for Houston's murder, Mink nurses the unfulfilled hope

⁸The Hamlet, p. 13.

⁹The Hamlet, p. 222.

that his cousin Flem will return from a prolonged honeymoon and help him win freedom. Because Flem fails to help him, Mink transfers all of his resentment to Flem, the richest and most powerful member of his family; this resentment comes to fruition in his shooting of Flem as the trilogy ends.

Faulkner is at his best in this sympathetic portrayal of not very bright characters; Mink Snopes, like the convict in Old Man, is one of these excellent portrayals. As the trilogy progresses, Faulkner presents Mink from different angles. Warren Beck points out that in The Hamlet

...Mink's elemental fury was singled out; Ratliff, in The Town, pronounced Mink 'out-and-out mean.' (T, 79) ...in The Mansion Mink's side of it is looked into, and in his more meagre pride and sorry efforts he is found pitiable too yet not without a certain dignity.¹⁰

Beck adds that Mink has a conscience. "He will not steal (M, 274) nor will he take advantage of another's mistake in making change (M, 261)."¹¹

Mink's crimes, from murder to his convenient "losing" of his cow, are the crimes of a man trying to "get even."

The changes in Mink from the early "out-and-out mean" man who strikes his wife and terrorizes his children to the less unpleasant old man in The Mansion represent, besides the differences in emphasis, a certain limited mellowing in Mink himself.

¹⁰ Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 26.

¹¹ Man in Motion, p. 78.

Mink's mellowing parallels a change in Faulkner's attitude. His early novels, such as The Sound and the Fury, abound in pessimism and bitterness. The "good" characters, and those who try to be good, become more important in his later works. According to Albert Gerard, "Intruder in the Dust, Knight's Gambit, and Requiem for a Nun unfold tales of salvation, not of doom or decay."¹² In an introductory note to The Mansion, Faulkner states that "the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago."¹³ It is not surprising that in the span of the three volumes of Snopes shifts occur which result in a happier view of human nature.

Mink becomes slightly more sympathetic. Gavin Stevens is introduced in The Town as ridiculously ineffectual; in his first attempted conflict with Flem Snopes concerning the brass in the town water tower, Stevens is not even sure of what he wants to accomplish. He takes a more and more active role in The Mansion, and becomes less of a bungler. Eula Varner's laziness is stressed in The Hamlet; this is forgotten in The Town, which mentions her beauty frequently. Ratliff's intervention in The Hamlet is limited; he interrupts his role as observer only on his own behalf, with one exception--he intervenes in Snopes family affairs to help "something that wasn't

¹²"Justice in Yoknapatawpha County; Some Symbolic Motifs in Faulkner's Later Writing," Faulkner Studies, II, no. 4 (Winter 1953), 49.

¹³William Faulkner, The Mansion (New York: Random House, 1959).

even a people,"¹⁴ only to find that his action leaves the idiot Ike Snopes quite unhappy. But in The Mansion, a chapter is devoted to the political rise and fall of Clarence Egglestone Snopes; Clarence Snopes' fall, a victory for those he had betrayed, "the literate and liberal innocents who believed that decency and right and personal liberty would prevail simply because they were decent and right,"¹⁵ is engineered by the wily Ratliff. As years pass, the people in Snopes change somewhat, and usually they change for the better.

Even though Mink mellows slightly during his thirty-eight years in the state penitentiary, he remains determined to revenge himself on Flem. His accomplishment of this goal provides one of the major portions of The Mansion.

Mink's murder of Flem, as contrasted to his earlier murder of Houston, apparently does bring Mink peace. There are indications, however, that this peace is simply the gradual relaxation of a man whose life is coming to a close, rather than a sudden relaxation after a violent act. For even as Mink approaches Jefferson, where he can find and kill Flem, his thoughts are on his own death. He is careful not to sleep on the ground, where the earth will "draw you back down into it."¹⁶

Although Flem's death brings some satisfaction to Mink, and some hope to Flem's debtors, it is obvious that Snopesism will

¹⁴The Hamlet, p. 326.

¹⁵The Mansion, p. 302.

¹⁶The Mansion, p. 402.

continue. During Flem's funeral Gavin Stevens glances around and recognizes three Snopes faces. Their resemblance to each other causes him to think

...in something like that second of simple panic when you are violently wakened They're like wolves come to look at the trap where another bigger wolf, the boss wolf, the head wolf, what Ratliff would call the bull wolf, died; if maybe there was not a shred or scrap of hide still snared in it.¹⁷

With these thoughts, Stevens echoes Ratliff, who many years before commented in a parody of I. O. Snopes,

'Snopes can come and Snopes can go, but Will Varner looks like he is fixing to snopes forever. Or Varner will Snopes forever--take your pick. What is it the fellow says? Off with the old and on with the new; the old job at the old stand, maybe a new fellow doing the jobbing but it's the same old stern getting reamed out?'¹⁸

However, between Mink's first pledge to get Flem and his actual pulling of the trigger, there are thirty-eight years. During this time Flem remains the foremost practitioner of Snopesism; his successes are described most graphically in The Hamlet.

When Flem returns to Frenchman's Bend from his long honeymoon, he apparently is connected with a scheme to sell the villagers some untamable horses. Except for a chance remark by Lump Snopes,¹⁹ there is no explanation of Flem's connection with the enterprise, but circumstantial evidence leads the villagers to assume that he has initiated the auction. It is questionable whether the buyers

¹⁷The Mansion, p. 421.

¹⁸The Hamlet, p. 164.

¹⁹The Hamlet, p. 315.

can claim to be cheated, because they had an ample chance to see the horses at their wildest before the bidding starts. However, because of their wildness the horses are cheap. The bidding is started by Eck Snopes in return for a free horse and by Henry Armstid, who cannot afford even the five dollars he pays. After all of the horses are auctioned, Flem hustles the auctioneer out of town; the buyers are left to catch their horses if they can. The horses all escape, causing confusion and damage over the countryside.

Somehow Henry Armstid is the only serious casualty; he suffers a broken leg. Before the auctioneer leaves, he is moved by the distress of Mrs. Armstid over the five dollars which Henry has wasted on the horse. The auctioneer publicly gives the money to Flem, promising Mrs. Armstid that Flem will return the money to her later. As everyone had feared, Flem claims that he gave the five dollars back to the departing auctioneer.

The auction leads to a courtroom scene in which justice is completely frustrated. Although there is a slapstick quality to the proceedings, there is also a basic seriousness reflected in the fear which overcomes the Justice of the Peace as he looks at the spectators and realizes that he must sit in judgment of evil. However, he must pass judgment in the absence of the defendant, for Flem refuses to acknowledge ownership of the horses, and on that basis refuses to accept his summons to appear in court.

In the face of Flem's absence and his own dread, the judge makes his first retreat. He brushes aside the bailiff's offer to "fetch Snopes here anyway" and asks "Does anybody here know for

sho who them horses belonged to?"²⁰

The first witness is Mrs. Armstid, who hopes for the return of her five dollars. But the judge allows Lump Snopes to swear that "I saw Flem Snopes give back to that Texas man whatever money Henry Armstid or anybody else thinks Henry Armstid or anybody else paid Flem for any of them horses. Does that suit you?"²¹ The legal form is correct, and Mrs Armstid's suit is denied.

Mrs. Vernon Tull, seeking reparation for injuries her husband received when a wild horse ran into their wagon, defeats herself by talking too much. Her brief suit is almost over; her opponent Eck Snopes, who is stupid, but one of the few good-hearted Snopeses, admits that the horse was his and asks how much he must pay. Mrs. Tull continues ranting until she reveals to the suddenly alert judge that the horse, being the first, was given, not sold to Eck. Legally, therefore, it was not Eck's horse, and he was not liable.

The Justice of the Peace leans back in his seat for the first time. The law is followed, and his day is finished. The reader is left with the feeling that justice would have been better served if Mrs. Armstid had been more aggressive, if Mrs. Tull had been calmer and more perceptive, or if the judge had been less concerned with legal technicalities and more concerned with what he calls "pure justice and decency."²²

²⁰The Hamlet, p. 330.

²¹The Hamlet, p. 333.

²²The Hamlet, p. 330.

It is typical of The Hamlet that Flem's neighbors fail in their attempts to obtain retribution. Even V. K. Ratliff is thwarted when he tries to get the better of Flem in a trade involving the Old Frenchman's place. Because of this trade, Flem is able to leave Frenchman's Bend and move on to Jefferson.

Not only is Flem the only character in The Hamlet to avoid defeat; he is the only character who shows no feeling. Faulkner allows the reader to glimpse the inner world of each of the others, including that of the amoral Lump Snopes as he argues with Mink, but until one reads The Town, one sees Flem only as a body. Ratliff stumbles upon the truth in a reverie:²³ Flem has no soul, so he is invincible.

The Town and The Mansion

The Town presents Flem Snopes through the eyes of three of his townsmen. Although his general movement is upward, he is not invariably successful. Interestingly, his wife Eula becomes more human; in The Hamlet, where she is a symbol of sex and regeneration, she often seems as emotionless as Flem. But in The Town she exemplifies the human waste that results from Snopesism. Eula's need to love and to be loved leads her to an extra-marital affair and to eventual suicide.

The Town is a wordy book, containing lengthy stretches of

²³The Hamlet, p. 171.

philosophizing by the observers, V. K. Ratliff, Gavin Stevens, and Stevens' nephew, Charles Mallison. The portrayal of Eula Varner, the symbol, in The Hamlet is strangely more convincing than the less stylized picture of Eula Varner as Flem Snopes' wife in The Town.

As presented in The Mansion, Eula's daughter Linda Snopes Kohl is also a difficult personality to accept. She is presented from the outside. This method of portrayal works well enough for Flem, who is a simple character and not intended to be sympathetic; but for Linda, who is both a sympathetic and a complicated character, it is inadequate. She knows that there is no feeling between Flem and her mother, yet after Eula's death and her own tragic experiences in the Spanish civil war, Linda returns not once but twice to Jefferson and to Flem's mansion.

Her first return, immediately after she has been widowed and deafened by the war in Spain, presumably is motivated by her emotional reliance on Gavin Stevens. She lives her own life, however, trying to make herself useful by plans for educating Jefferson's Negro school-children. Her beneficence is barely tolerated by recipients and onlookers. Stevens worries about Linda's membership card in the Communist Party; she has insisted on showing him the card as a symbol of her ideals. During the second World War, Linda leaves Jefferson to work in a shipyard.

After the war Linda returns to Jefferson for the second time, to find it so prosperous that there is no room even for token benevolence. It is then that V. K. Ratliff begins to worry about what

Linda might do, because "She has done run out of injustice."²⁴

She has not quite run of injustice, however, as she is living in the same house as Flem Snopes. She enlists Gavin Stevens' help in an effort to release Mink. He realizes that Mink wants to kill Flem, but because of his long time love for Linda, Stevens tries to convince himself that her motives this time are as altruistic as those which had previously led her to fight with the Loyalists in Spain. Stevens even sets up a plan whereby Mink will be paid to stay out of Mississippi. The plan fails; Mink does not understand it, and would refuse it if he did understand. Mink kills Flem against all odds; his last attempt at revenge is his only success.

The Mansion presents Flem when he has become really wealthy. He appears neither happier nor less satisfied than previously; he is the same impassive Flem. But he has more leisure. He spends his spare time just sitting in one bedroom of his big house--the only room besides the dining room that he uses. Nailed to the ornate fireplace in this room is the one improvement that Flem actually needs--an unpainted piece of wood on which he props his feet. One is reminded of Will Varner in The Hamlet, explaining why he sits in the barrel chair on the decaying front porch of the Old Frenchman's place: "I'm trying to find out what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this just to eat and sleep in."²⁵ Flem, who takes over Will Varner's barrel chair, and who later pretends to need a mansion, never has the capacity to enjoy life as his predecessor does. Nevertheless, Flem's will to live

²⁴The Mansion, p. 361.

²⁵The Hamlet, p. 6.

is evident; in The Town he contrives to have Mink's sentence lengthened.

When Mink is finally released and Gavin Stevens and Ratliff realize that he is actually returning to Jefferson, they vainly try to intercept him. Although they fail to prevent the murder, the fact that they try to save Flem's life leads one to feel that if Flem is worth saving, perhaps he has a soul after all. But his life arouses no envy.

Poetic justice comes to everyone in the Snopes trilogy, with the possible exception of Linda, whose suffering took place before her crime; but in the Snopes novels, as in The Wild Palms, Faulkner shows a dichotomy between equitability and the justice of the law. The courtroom scene in which Mrs. Tull and Mrs. Armstid lose their suits parallels in its futility the arrest and trial of Harry Wilbourne. And Gavin Stevens indicates that courtroom procedure is not always honest when he says he belongs "to that avocation whose acolytes have been absolved in advance for holding justice above truth."²⁶

Gavin Stevens' reaction to the proposal of an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation implies that both truth and the government's emotionless offering of a reward for services can be immoral. The agent, who has achieved a colorless neutrality in appearance and speech, wants Stevens to persuade Linda to name Communists she has known. "I see," Stevens says. "You offer a swap. You will trade her immunity for names. Your bureau will

²⁶The Mansion, p. 363.

whitewash her from an enemy into a simple stool pigeon."²⁷ Stevens barely remains within the bounds of courtesy in dismissing the FBI man. Faulkner's morality includes pity and hope; he is not an admirer of our legal system, inasmuch as it is not based primarily on these emotions.

²⁷The Mansion, p. 236.

SANCTUARY AND REQUIEM FOR A NUN

Sanctuary reflects two sides of man's connection with his tradition of civilization. The action of the first 130 pages is focused on man's ability to exist outside of his protective circle of civilization. This primitive existence is contrasted to life in Jefferson, where man has the protection of tradition, of laws, and of courts; where organized religion is an influence; and where the old families take pride in their forebears. But Jefferson's civilization is so corrupt that it cannot give man the benefit of his heritage. In both environments, within and outside of society, man's condition is inadequate to control his worst impulses or to satisfy any but the shallowest of emotional needs.

In effect, Faulkner says that man has polluted his society so badly that there is no institutional succor or man-made justice. The hope he offers is in individuals--the strength of Ruby Lamar and the humanitarianism of Horace Benbow. The story is completed by the personal integrity which Faulkner advocates in Requiem for a Nun.

Life outside of the circle of civilization is shown at the Old Frenchman's place and, paradoxically, at the University. The boys from town who stand outside the brightly lit gymnasium on Saturday nights to watch Temple Drake dance are as untouched by learning as she. Later, when Temple recalls her college life she can only remember the pre-game crowds or, even more vividly, the sex talk of the girls in her dormitory. The University is seen from the outside,

as a physical location where Temple lives for a while; but there is no hint of its function as an intellectual force.

The Old Frenchman's place is a location of a more foreboding sort. It is introduced in immediate juxtaposition with Popeye, his black smell and his fear.¹ It is used by Lee Goodwin to avoid the law in a moonshining operation. As a hideout, it is obviously excluded from respectable society; but even aside from the illegalities it houses, it is the lodging place of evil, embodied in Popeye.

Although the house is old, there is no sign or thought of the former inhabitants; its few traces of tradition have been brought in, presumably by Goodwin's mistress, Ruby Lamar. She sets the makeshift table with plates and cutlery which she takes from a packing box. At night she puts on a pink crepe nightgown trimmed with lace, but it has been washed too often to give the effect of finery. She speaks almost without regret of the clothes--the trappings of man's progress--which she has given away before coming to the Old Frenchman's place. When Tommy, who has lived in the house for fifteen years, is murdered, the coroner cannot discover his last name.

The Old Frenchman's place is the same house, yet different in feeling, from Will Varner's quiet retreat in The Hamlet, where he sits and wonders how it felt to be the man "that would need all this just to eat and sleep in."² In Sanctuary the place is used for eating

¹William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 7. Originally published in London by Chatto and Windus, 1931.

²The Hamlet, p. 6.

and sleeping, but its temporary inhabitants do not speculate about those who used it before them.

There is one exception to their attitude that the present is all important. Horace Benbow, recognizably different because he comes to the house with a book, later thinks that he may have seen a reminder of the former residents in Pap, the deaf and blind old man:

'I never knew who he was, who he was kin to. Maybe not to anybody. Maybe that old Frenchman that built the house a hundred years ago didn't want him either and just left him there when he died or moved away.'³

Pap sits isolated from the life around him; his senses tell him nothing except the feel of food in his mouth and the sun's warmth on his body. Like him, the Old Frenchman's place has few links with the world.

Even though the place remains separated from the community and in addition serves as a stopping place for evil, it does present some positive elements. Ruby is devoted to Lee Goodwin and to their sickly baby; Goodwin is first seen leading the old man to the dinner table. The feeble-minded Tommy is generous with his liquor and protective toward Temple. In the moonshiner's hideout Faulkner shows a primitive, ominous world in which man's better impulses give some reason for hope.

In an enlightening study on the parallel structures of Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun, Philip Graham says that:

³Sanctuary, p. 105.

The sensuous details carry a strongly earthy connotation: the cooking and drinking, the bestial masculinity, the animal-like fighting of males over a female, the atmosphere of stealth, Ruby's fierce allegiance to Lee, and her protective instinct for her young. These are physical conditions that man knew long before he formed society.⁴

Graham sees the scenes in Memphis as expressive of social sin, and Jefferson, where truth is contradicted and Lee Goodwin is convicted of the murder which Popeye committed, as a scene of "an all-encompassing universal Evil, the opposite of Truth."⁵ However, the social sins of Memphis, which are largely connected with lechery and over-indulgence, are far surpassed by the social sins of Jefferson. In Jefferson, society as such is cruel and unjust; the very institutions which are supposed to protect the innocent are turned into instruments of falsehood. Lee Goodwin, in jail for a murder he did not commit, is afraid to tell the truth, even to his lawyer. Unimpressed when Horace Benbow tells him "You've got the law, justice, civilization," Goodwin answers "Sure, if I spend the rest of my life squatting in that corner yonder."⁶ (He is speaking of the one corner of his cell which is inaccessible to Popeye's bullets.)

The principal link between the relatively benign sin of Memphis and the more terrible corruption of Jefferson is Clarence Snopes,

⁴"Patterns in Faulkner's Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun," Tennessee Studies in Literature, VIII (1963), 39-40.

⁵"Patterns in Faulkner's Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun," p. 42.

⁶Sanctuary, p. 127.

the state senator who travels between the two communities with one eye open for votes and the other eye searching for profit. It is through his activities that Temple Drake is brought from the Memphis whorehouse to the Jefferson courtroom, where she contributes to the overthrow of justice.

Not only does civilization fail to protect Goodwin; it actively persecutes him and promotes his lynching. This is accomplished partially by the actions of two representatives of tradition and law, Narcissa Benbow and the prosecuting district attorney, Eustace Graham.

Eustace Graham, a cold-hearted, dishonest enforcer of law, is in the same class as the governor's agent in Old Man. Success is his main concern; he wants credit for numerous convictions to help him win election to Congress. Skillfully Eustace Graham nurtures Jefferson's feelings against Goodwin, his common-law marriage and his connection with liquor, until a fair trial is impossible.

Horace Benbow and his sister Narcissa are the opposite faces of mankind's link with his heritage. Horace is sensitive and kindly. As might be expected from his name, he appreciates nature and poetry. In his capacity as a lawyer he takes an almost impossible case in defending a moonshiner against a murder charge; he takes the case even though the accused man has no money and is afraid to cooperate in his own defense.

Narcissa is conscienceless, but she is acutely concerned with appearances. To her limited mind there can be only one reason for Horace to defend Lee Goodwin; her brother has, she is sure, been

lured into the case by a prostitute. And in order to salvage the remains of her family's reputation, Narcissa betrays her brother so as to shorten Goodwin's trial. People will stop talking, she reasons, only after Goodwin is hanged and forgotten.

In the conflict between Horace and Narcissa, Horace loses. There is an air of weakness about him; Ruby Lamar thinks that "He better get onto where he's going, where his women folks can take care of him."⁷ Some of his weakness is the failing "of a man given to much talk and not much else."⁸ Horace is willing to retreat in order to keep peace with Narcissa. Upon his sister's demand he removes Ruby from his parents' old home. Faulkner leaves the reader uncertain as to whether this move is justifiable as a legal precaution. Narcissa's in-law, Miss Jenny, implies that Ruby's presence in the house might be construed as connivance; Horace agrees by saying, "Sometimes I have wondered why I haven't got rich at the law. Maybe I will, when I get old enough to attend the same law school you did."⁹

Thus, Horace sometimes runs from a fight; but he is even more severely handicapped by a partial blindness to evil. Just as Narcissa cannot conceive of Horace's altruism, he does not realize that she might employ subterfuge. He sees her disappear near the

⁷Sanctuary, p. 13.

⁸Sanctuary, p. 13.

⁹Sanctuary, p. 114.

entrance to the district attorney's office, but he has no misgivings. His procedure at the trial is based on his own moral standards; he feels that the truth will be sufficient. When the district attorney emphasizes to the jury that Goodwin and Ruby Lamar are not legally married, Horace becomes euphoric because the prosecution is reduced to impugning the character of a defense witness, Ruby. This tactic, he feels, is a sign of the prosecution's weakness; because the common-law marriage is not germane to the murder charge, Horace is sure that the prosecution's stressing it will be resented by the jury. The more realistic Goodwin is enraged by Horace's naiveté.

Horace's faith in civilization and justice leaves him unprepared for the courtroom appearance of falsehood in the person of Temple Drake. Her accusation of Goodwin is the main basis for Philip Graham's thesis that "familiar social forces seem to take on a vast significance as the enemies of truth."¹⁰

However, the universal Evil which culminates at the trial permeates all of Sanctuary, victimizing Temple, but in turn being compounded by her in the courtroom. As Horace fears when he runs from his wife and seeks "a hill to lie on for a while,"¹¹ there is no hiding place from evil.

Sanctuary opens with an inhuman kind of evil. Watching Horace as he stops to drink from a spring is Popeye, who has the look of rubber and tin. Before they part, both Popeye and Horace know fear,

¹⁰"Patterns in Faulkner's Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun," p. 41.

¹¹Sanctuary, p. 15.

but Popeye is frightened by the natural, an owl and the darkness of the forest; Horace is frightened by the artificial--the tin and rubber Popeye, and more particularly by his gun. "You could feel the pistol on him just like you knew he had a navel."¹² Actually one is surprised at the thought of Popeye's having a navel. Horace emphasizes Popeye's abnormality by mentally connecting the gangster's manufactured pistol with normal anatomy.

Popeye's birth and survival, even in a world of wrongs, seems both unnatural and unjust. His father, a professional strikebreaker, seduced the mother and abandoned her before Popeye was born. Popeye was reared by his sickly mother and his pyromaniac grandmother. He was delicate and retarded; he did not walk or talk until he was four years old. He soon became a sadist who cut up animals alive. He could not physically tolerate alcohol, and he was impotent. Like Flem Snopes, Popeye seems emotionless; his lack of warmth is made the more obvious by his frequent exclamation, "Jesus Christ." Faulkner sums up by saying, "Popeye might as well have been dead."¹³ In fact, he is such a miserable specimen that he is unconvincing as a gangland leader who has become prosperous enough to supply Temple with numerous gowns and perfumes.

Popeye's infancy is similar to the infancy of Ruby's baby, "that child that never has been more than half alive,"¹⁴ that she keeps in a box behind the stove. Both children are marked by the distorted

¹²Sanctuary, p. 105.

¹³Sanctuary, p. 300.

¹⁴Sanctuary, p. 113.

lives of their parents.

In all of Faulkner's works evil, injustice, cruelty and hopelessness are closely related. The inhuman evil which is part of Popeye's make-up and which is so prevalent in Sanctuary is the most frightening evil. Faulkner also shows a more human failing in man's dependence on the sensual--Pap and his food, Popeye and his cigarettes, Gowan Stevens and liquor, Temple Drake and sex. But enjoyment of the sensual is not completely bad; Tommy's sexual attraction to Temple causes him to take a protective attitude. "They ought to quit pesterin' her."¹⁵ Correspondingly, Horace Benbow's occasional cowardice (which he mentions once while he is drunk) is reflected by his abhorrence of the sensory impressions made by the heavy smell of flowers and by the dripping package of shrimp which he brings home for his wife every Friday. He does not relish the fights which he must face--the fight against evil or against his own attraction to his step-daughter or against his wife's domination.

Much of the cruelty of Sanctuary comes from the cold-hearted manipulation of one person by another. Gowan Stevens uses Temple Drake to bolster his ego; when he sees her name on a washroom wall, he realizes that she is also using him. He goes completely to pieces. He is still using her to bolster his ego in Requiem for a Nun; he is convinced that he is being magnanimous, and he wants recognition. His revolting drunkenness in Sanctuary precipitates her misadventures, and this drunkenness, when coupled with his pride in his University

¹⁵Sanctuary, p. 66.

of Virginia training--"Teach you how to drink, there,"¹⁶--is a bitter comment on a gentleman's values.

Temple, of course, uses all of her boy friends. She too may be bolstering her ego; for although she wants dates, she cares so little about whom the dates are with that she does not bother to remember which boy will call each evening. Temple, in turn, is used by Popeye, who cares for her only because she has the power to attract other men. He controls her easily by holding her by the nape of her neck or by an informal imprisonment in a house of prostitution.

Temple is matched by her more heartless, more successful counterpart, Little Belle, Horace Benbow's step-daughter. The more successful wrongdoers in Faulkner's novels are those who, like the soul-free Flem Snopes, have no conscience. Narcissa Benbow, Eustace Graham, and Clarence Snopes all engage in behind the scenes machinations with the purpose of falsely convicting Lee Goodwin. Even Horace Benbow uses questionable methods when he buys information from Clarence Snopes and uses this knowledge to obtain Temple as his surprise defense witness. However, Benbow is first sickened by Temple's story and then betrayed by her lying in court. As Benbow prophesies before he learns of Temple's presence at the scene of the murder, "there's a corruption about even looking upon evil, even by accident; you cannot haggle, traffic, with putrefaction--"¹⁷ But for those who are corrupted already, the looking and the haggling are profitable.

¹⁶Sanctuary, p. 32.

¹⁷Sanctuary, p. 125.

Evil corrupts not only the courtroom, but the church. The Baptist minister looks at the sin of sex, emphasizes it more than murder, and tries Lee Goodwin and Ruby Lamar from the pulpit.

It is judgment of this sort--accusing, vindictive, and authoritative--which Temple Drake fears. Yet Temple has an ambivalent feeling toward authority, whether that authority is represented by God or by her father, Judge Drake, or even by her older brothers. Although she fears its judgment, she wants its protection. The constant running which introduces her to the reader is simultaneously a flight and a search.

In Requiem for a Nun there is much discussion of Temple's reluctance to put her deepest feelings into words. But in spite of her timidity, she gradually allows herself to be led into self-revelation.

Gavin Stevens, her husband's uncle who leads her to that self-revelation, does not appear in Sanctuary. Temple is forced to depend on herself. Isolated at the Old Frenchman's place, she appeals to Gowan Stevens, to Popeye, to Tommy, and to Ruby Lamar to help her, but she does not consider escape on her own.

Temple expresses both her fear of rejection and her self-pity indirectly. As she looks at the "putty-colored face and bluish eyelids" of Ruby's baby, Temple (whom Ruby has been addressing as "Putty face") whispers "He's going to die, poor little baby."¹⁸ When Temple tries to pray, she "could not think of a single designation for the heavenly father, so she began to say 'My father's a

¹⁸Sanctuary, p. 60.

judge' over and over."¹⁹ The rejection she shies away from is acted out when she is interrupted by Lee Goodwin, who lifts her up by the scruff of the neck and asks "What are you doing in my house?"²⁰

Temple suffers consistently from her inability to speak coherently. Time after time she opens her mouth soundlessly. Yet Ruby Lamar, the former prostitute who sprinkles her language with profanity and dirt, is quite able to state the case for her own kind of virtue. Ruby cleverly reveals Temple's pretensions and inconsistencies by contrasting them with her own strength.

The climax of Temple's frustration comes as Popeye rapes her with a corn cob. As silence and sound become inverted in her mind, she thinks she is shouting at the deaf ears and blind eyes of Pap, "Something is happening to me! I told you it was!"²¹

At the end of the book Temple is firmly under the physical and mental control of her father. She reaches the sanctuary she sought, but she pays a double price for her peace. She tells a lie which takes Lee Goodwin's life, and she herself becomes emotionally dead.

Temple's journey back to emotional responsibility makes up the bulk of Requiem for a Nun. The story is written in the form of a play in which the characters recapitulate some of the incidents in Sanctuary. Temple is led by two teachers: Nancy Mannigoe, the Negro nursemaid who is the nun, and Nancy's lawyer, Gavin Stevens, the

¹⁹Sanctuary, p. 50.

²⁰Sanctuary, p. 50.

²¹Sanctuary, p. 99.

county attorney. Requiem for a Nun, written almost twenty years after Sanctuary, reflects a shift in Faulkner's feelings. The public attorney, the representative of government, is on the side of the underdog. Cruelty is less cruel; Nancy's crime, the killing of an infant placed in her care, is committed to prevent other crimes, "so good can come out of evil."²² Temple and her continuing sins are the cause of Nancy's sacrifice, which is a sacrifice of herself more than of the baby; she gladly accepts the death penalty.

Nancy and Gavin Stevens both are confident that good can come from the sacrifice. Thus, Stevens urges Temple to tell her story to the Governor of the state. The supposed reason for the confession is a plea for Nancy's life, but Stevens knows that there will be no pardon. He wants Temple to put her story into words for the sake of Truth, so that she "can sleep at night."²³

Nancy, who tries in every way she can to keep Temple from committing evil, until there seems to be no other way but murder, has one simple credo: "Believe."²⁴ Temple after her confession is not sure that she can believe, but she is eager to try.

The courtroom in Sanctuary is a scene of injustice; but the courtroom in which Nancy is tried is simply unimportant. The defendant and her lawyer are perhaps the only persons involved who recognize the secondary importance of her trial. For Nancy is sure that God

²²William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 208.

²³Requiem for a Nun, p. 90.

²⁴Requiem for a Nun, p. 283.

understands her purpose; because she has faith in a heaven, she is not concerned about hanging. After her trial in the intermediate tribunal of justice, the courtroom, the scene shifts to "the ultimate seat of judgment."²⁵ The judges here are the Governor, and for a while, Temple's husband Gowan Stevens. At this ultimate seat of judgment Temple testifies against herself. After her testimony, she realizes that suffering and uncertainty will continue. If there is any answer for Temple, it is in Nancy's acceptance of life as it is, with faith that "Maybe when folks are suffering, they will be too busy to get into devilment, wont have time to worry and meddle [sic] one another."²⁶

Requiem for a Nun is allegorical rather than dramatic. It is an attempted answer to the pessimism of Sanctuary. But Sanctuary is more convincing. Because the spiritual mentor of Requiem for a Nun is a Negro with a simple message of faith, the reader is aware that the characters are typecast, and that this is, after all, only a story. The effect of artificiality is reinforced by the numerous backward looks at Sanctuary.

Before each of the three acts of Requiem for a Nun there is a chapter on the mythical development of Mississippi; the first chapter, "The Courthouse," suggests that man's institutions are neither as corrupt nor as unimportant as they sometimes appear to be. For the builders of the courthouse worked

²⁵Requiem for a Nun, p. 112.

²⁶Requiem for a Nun, p. 277.

...as one because it was theirs, bigger than any because it was the sum of all and, being the sum of all, it must raise all of their hopes and aspirations level with its own aspirant and soaring cupola, so that, sweating and tireless and unflagging, they would look about at one another a little shyly, a little amazed, with something like humility too, as if they were realising, or were for a moment at least capable of believing that men, all men, including themselves, were a little better, purer maybe even, than they had thought, expected, or even needed to be.²⁷

The courthouse, the seat of justice, can live up to man's aspirations if man remembers the spirit in which it was built.

²⁷Requiem for a Nun, pp. 42-3.

INTRUDER IN THE DUST

As far as any reasonable person can foretell, the plight of Lucas Beauchamp in Intruder in the Dust can end only in his death. After surviving more than sixty years in Mississippi despite his refusal to act as his white neighbors expect a Negro to act, he is found, with a just-fired pistol in his pocket, a few feet away from the body of a white man. The murdered man, Vinson Gowrie, is a member of a large clan of rough men who have built a reputation for violence and family solidarity.

At first the only question in the minds of Jefferson's townspeople and the neighboring farmers is whether Lucas Beauchamp will die legally or at the hands of a lynch mob. In the popular mind the odds favor the lynching.

However, the Jefferson shown in Intruder in the Dust is radically different from the world of Sanctuary, Wild Palms, or The Hamlet. Beauchamp, who in spite of appearances is not guilty, obtains complete justice; his eventual exoneration comes about because of the differences between his Jefferson and the Jefferson which Faulkner shows in earlier novels. Lucas Beauchamp lives in a world where man's traditions of law and of moral responsibility are strong; these traditions protect the weak. Man's society is able to operate in a protective, compassionate manner because most men, as Faulkner shows them in his later works, are both conscientious and compassionate.

Thus Intruder in the Dust contrasts markedly with Sanctuary, which also deals with an innocent man accused of murder. Both

Requiem for a Nun (1952) and Intruder in the Dust (1948) differ from Faulkner's earlier works in that law enforcement officers are shown favorably. They are more concerned with justice and the spirit of the law than with convictions and the letter of the law. The constable who takes Beauchamp into custody immediately after the shooting thus effectively saves him from the immediate anger of the men lounging in Fraser's store. The sheriff who brings Beauchamp to the Jefferson jail is determined to keep him from the mob. And the frightened jailer says:

'I'm going to do the best I can; I taken an oath of office too....I got a wife and two children; what good am I going to be to them if I get myself killed....And how am I going to live with myself if I let a passel of nogood sonabitches take a prisoner away from me?'¹

Gavin Stevens, the idealistic county attorney who leads Temple Drake to self understanding in Requiem for a Nun, leads his young nephew Charles Mallison in Intruder in the Dust. He also helps to free Lucas Beauchamp from the unjust murder charge. He is a pleasant contrast to Eustace Graham, the prosecutor in Sanctuary, who seeks convictions to guarantee his political future.

The optimism of Intruder in the Dust is tempered only by defensiveness. Gavin Stevens asserts that the South is defending its privilege of setting the Negro free,² and as an indication that this can come about, Lucas Beauchamp is freed in the South that Faulkner believes in; he is freed largely through the efforts of

¹William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 54.

²Intruder in the Dust, p. 154.

two Southern whites, sixteen-year-old Charles Mallison and the elderly Miss Eunice Habersham, and of a Negro boy who follows them. If one accepts the potency of a calm, fair-minded South, Lucas' faith in ultimate justice seems well founded. Knowing that his was not the gun that shot Vinson Gowrie, Lucas is confident that if he can convey that knowledge to one person, the evidence will be sought and considered.

The result of Lucas' confidence is in contrast to the reward of Horace Benbow's similar faith in justice in Sanctuary. Horace, a foolish romantic, is betrayed; Lucas is vindicated. Horace cannot succeed in his defense of Lee Goodwin against a false charge because every person and every institution is working against him. The truth remains hidden. But Lucas is able to obtain help, first from Charles Mallison, from Miss Habersham, and from the son of the Mallisons' maid, and finally from his town's chief representatives of the law, the county attorney and the sheriff.

At the same time that Lucas Beauchamp's friends are working to find the true murderer, there is relatively little social pressure, either from the townspeople or from the farmers, against Lucas. True, Charles is awed by the potential lynch mob, which he sees as a collective Face, (Later he sees it as a retreating Head) but there is some question whether this crowd is really a lynch mob, or as Gavin Stevens describes them, "They were just watching him. [the sheriff] Watching him and Beat Four, to see what would happen."³

³Intruder in the Dust, p. 112.

No individual, except for a disembodied voice from the crowd,⁴ actually wishes out loud for Lucas Beauchamp's death. Charles and Gavin talk to a grocer outside his house; this man, whose name is Mr. Lilley, represents a sort of white consensus. He expects to help in the lynching, but he is not excited or eager; he is waiting for someone else to start. Although he is not bursting with hatred, he does have preconceived ideas as to how a Negro and a white man should act.

Charles, Miss Habersham, and Aleck Sander, the maid's son, find that Vinson Gowrie's body has been removed from its grave. The sheriff's subsequent investigation reveals that Vinson was actually killed by his brother Crawford, who had framed Lucas. Charles believes for a moment that Beat Four has been held back by the knowledge that Lucas is innocent; but he realizes that the Gowries have not known that Vinson was killed by one of them. Remembering Vinson's father when the body is recovered from quicksand, Charles knows that "whatever the furious old man might begin to think tomorrow he held nothing against Lucas then because there was no room for anything but his son."⁵ Not even the Gowries want retribution badly enough to seek it by violence on the Sunday which is the day of Vinson's funeral. And most of Jefferson, although convinced of Lucas' guilt, want him to come to trial in a proper manner.

The resultant inertia within the crowd forestalls a lynching.

⁴Intruder in the Dust, p. 44. After Lucas' hat falls off, the voice calls out, "Knock it off again, Hope. Take his head too this time."

⁵Intruder in the Dust, p. 219.

This situation is the antithesis of one which develops in Faulkner's short story of a lynching, "Dry September," published seventeen years earlier. "Dry September" is similar in spirit to Faulkner's early novels in that the few well-meaning people who try to promote justice are ineffectual and easily overpowered. McLendon, the leader in the lynching, takes the attitude that those who are not wholeheartedly with him are against him. In a barber shop

McClendon stood in the floor and cursed the others. Another rose and moved toward him. The remainder sat uncomfortable, not looking at one another, then one by one they rose and joined him.⁶

Later, the barber who tries to deter them is beaten and forced from their car.

There is no such attempted coercion in Intruder in the Dust. Nor is there the emotional sweep which leads to the killing of Joe Christmas in Light in August. The mob, or as Charles calls it in his mind, the Face, is kept from entering the jail by the tokens of law and order which the sheriff places in the doorway; these tokens include Charles' mother and Miss Eunice Habersham.

Both the sheriff, Hope Hampton, and Gavin Stevens assume at first that Lucas Beauchamp is guilty; in view of the circumstances surrounding the killing, as well as Lucas' silent neglect to say a word to them in his own defense, their assumption of his guilt is reasonable. Charles Mallison is the first person Lucas confides in, and even this confidence is incomplete. Because Charles is not yet

⁶William Faulkner, "Dry September," These 13 (New York: Cape and Smith, 1931), p. 266.

a man, he understands the logic behind the old man's silence. Lucas knows that his story would not be believed by a grown man. In fact, Gavin Stevens scoffs when Charles tries to tell him that Lucas' gun did not kill Gowrie. The adult males, Stevens and Hampton, do not question the circumstantial evidence until the children and Miss Habersham find that the body has been removed from its grave. Although he requests Stevens as his lawyer, pride keeps Lucas Beauchamp from attempting an explanation. Such an attempt would weaken the aloof dignity with which Faulkner invests him--a dignity which Beauchamp keeps even in jail, and which Charles mistakes at first for callousness.

In the course of his acquaintanceship with Lucas Beauchamp, Charles is forced, by Beauchamp's refusal to fit a pattern, to think about Southern patterns of black and white behavior. This evaluation is intertwined with his own feeling of indebtedness to Beauchamp. For when he was twelve, Charles had fallen into a freezing stream near Beauchamp's home; Beauchamp took charge of the boy, giving him warm shelter and a meal. Throughout his adolescence, Charles feels the need to remove himself from Lucas Beauchamp's debt, but his attempts to repay the favor are returned; Beauchamp makes it clear that he considers himself equal to anyone in Jefferson.

However, once he is jailed, Lucas must depend upon others. He is able to persuade Charles to listen to him because Charles is young and has a strong feeling of responsibility to others; for years he has been answering the telephone and running errands for his uncle in "an intimation of his willingness to carry some of his own

weight."⁷ Moreover, Charles feels his old obligation to Lucas.

Even while Lucas tells Charles how to proceed, Miss Eunice Habersham is talking to Gavin Stevens about Lucas' defense. Miss Habersham is a descendant of one of Jefferson's oldest white families. Her childhood had been spent with Lucas' recently deceased wife. The two girls had

...grown up together almost inextricably like sisters, like twins, sleeping in the same room, the white girl in the bed, the Negro girl on a cot at the foot of it almost until Molly and Lucas married, and Miss Habersham had stood up in the Negro church as godmother to Molly's first child.⁸

Acting from a feeling of noblesse oblige and her certainty that Lucas could not have committed a murder, Miss Habersham gives Charles Mallison the support he needs.

Charles feels that in helping to prove Lucas' innocence

...he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it.⁹

However, when the injustice of Lucas Beauchamp's imprisonment is actually brought to light, "the whole white foundation of the county" ultimately frees him. Thus there is a satisfactory conclusion to one of the three main themes of the novel, the relationships of Negroes and whites in the South as seen by Faulkner. Gavin Stevens, as Faulkner's spokesman, says:

⁷Intruder in the Dust, p. 21.

⁸Intruder in the Dust, p. 87.

⁹Intruder in the Dust, p. 138.

'Soon now this sort of thing wont even threaten anymore....Someday 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. But it wont be next Tuesday.'¹⁰

Lucas Beauchamp is, of necessity, set free by others; it should be mentioned that Faulkner does not accept any Negro who wants to set himself free. He reserves his deepest scorn for Negroes such as Caspey in Sartoris, and Loosh in The Unvanquished, who rebel against discrimination in their speech or actions. Even Lucas Beauchamp does not actually rebel against the segregated patterns of his community; he simply lives apart from the patterns.

Besides the commentary on Negro-white relationships, with specific statements by Gavin Stevens matched by the implications inherent in Lucas Beauchamp's arrest and exoneration, there are two other important themes in Intruder in the Dust. These are the race against time to win justice for Lucas Beauchamp, and Charles Mallison's growth toward self-acceptance and an understanding of his world. The possibility of violence makes it important for the amateur detectives and the sheriff to find the evidence quickly; their search provides suspense. The suspense is greater because morality is involved. They are on the side of truth and compassion. Gavin Stevens tells Charles, "Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame."¹¹

¹⁰Intruder in the Dust, pp. 154-5.

¹¹Intruder in the Dust, p. 206.

Charles recognizes his moral responsibility, but at first he is not altogether willing to meet it. On hearing of Lucas' arrest his first impulse is to run away until after Lucas is executed. He is kept from running by the same force which tempts him to run, his sense of involvement with Lucas. Instead of running, Charles watches when Lucas is brought to jail; his involvement becomes inescapable when Lucas says "You, young man. Tell your uncle I wants to see him."¹² A week after Vinson Gowrie's murder, when Jefferson has returned to normal, Charles has matured to such an extent that he no longer vacillates between guilt and figurative rejection of Lucas. He is able to joke with the old man about falling into the creek.

However, Charles Mallison is not unique in his acceptance of moral responsibility to others. His mother, his uncle, the sheriff, Aleck Sander, and Miss Habersham are all motivated by humanitarianism. Their humanitarianism is aided by the law. And Crawford Gowrie, whose stealing leads him to the murder of his brother, commits suicide in remorse, thus indicating that his crime held its own punishment.

Because the injustice which threatens Lucas Beauchamp can be reversed, it becomes less terrifying than the injustice in Faulkner's earlier works. Whereas Sanctuary expresses horror, Intruder in the Dust expresses confidence in man and his future.

¹²Intruder in the Dust, p. 45.

GO DOWN, MOSES

Go Down, Moses reflects Faulkner's conception of the ideal life. This kind of life is difficult to sustain in any society, as indicated by the physical and moral decline of the Indians represented in Requiem for a Nun by the mythical history of Queen Mohataha. She came to Jefferson attended by slave girls to "set her capital X on the paper which ratified the dispossession of her people forever."¹ However, after its settlement, Jefferson proves to be an equally difficult milieu for an ideal life, for like Mohataha, Jefferson's settlers are gradually corrupted by the twin injustices of slavery and land appropriation.

Go Down, Moses examines the question of justice in its broadest sense as a prerequisite to a harmonious life. This harmonious existence is one which Isaac McCaslin tries to achieve; his beliefs are the key to many of Faulkner's beliefs. Isaac McCaslin is deliberately thoughtful in trying to understand his class and regional heritage and his natural heritage. His natural heritage is the more influential in his life. The chapter "The Old People" and the chapters under the title "The Bear," which are told from Isaac's viewpoint as he matures, carry a mystical implication that in sylvan surroundings man can find himself in harmony with the universe. Speaking explicitly through Isaac, and indirectly as well, Faulkner indicates that violation of this harmony with nature results in cruelty and injustice.

Isaac's interpretation of his family's history is that there

¹Requiem for a Nun, p. 216.

has been a violation of nature. He feels that Jefferson's heritage has come from strong self-centered men who created a defective social system which continues as an albatross around the necks of their lesser descendants. Even though Jefferson's citizens believe in justice, their society is based on wrongs which were started by the Indians before the white men arrived. For the Indians, like the white men who followed them, assumed that the land was theirs to own or to sell. Speaking through Isaac McCaslin, Faulkner states that man was created

'...not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood.'²

However, Isaac McCaslin's code of honor, which leads him to renounce the land he would otherwise inherit, can not prevent the wrongs which he himself refuses to commit. His uncle pilfers Isaac's coins; the forest Isaac loves is destroyed; the land is "deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations,"³ and as ever, there is little communication or consideration between the two races of his grandfather's descendants. Even though Isaac McCaslin rejects his birthright, the land that his grandfather cleared, and even though his lack of false pride helps him to avoid the sins of his grandfather, there is a missing element in his life.

For although man tainted the land of Mississippi with his pride of ownership, this sin, in Faulkner's eyes, was not absolutely

²William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 257.

³Go Down, Moses, p. 364.

deleterious. For it did bring order to the land, and that ordering, based on sweat, did have some value. Isaac lacks this type of positive accomplishment, based on hope; he commits no wrong, yet his life remains unconstructive.

This missing element is one of the differences between Isaac McCaslin, "uncle to half a county and father to no one,"⁴ and his teacher, Sam Fathers. Sam is a woodsman and a hunter; when he consecrates the boy Ike to a hunter's life with a ceremonious smear of the blood of Ike's first deer, Sam insures his own incorporeal life "past the boy's seventy years and then eighty years."⁵ Sam lives with the knowledge that his life will not be erased by his death; Ike has no such hope. When he grows old, Ike feels that he is not a teacher, but a bystander watching the latest generation heedlessly repeating the mistakes of past generations.

The lives of the latest generation, exemplified by Ike's cousin Roth Edmonds in the chapter "Delta Autumn," are marred by thoughtlessness and injustice toward their fellow beings, animal and human. Coming to the forest as a tourist, Roth does not grasp the connection between the ethics of the hunt and the ethics of life.

Yet there is one difference between Roth Edmonds and his ancestor Carothers McCaslin. Roth, who like Carothers, fathers a part Negro child and leaves the child unacknowledged, is ashamed

⁴Go Down, Moses, p. 3.

⁵Go Down, Moses, p. 165.

of himself. Ike thinks "No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge."⁶ Shame is the retribution which the destroyers of the woods have brought upon themselves. The first settlers were proud and hopeful, but they could not transmit pride with the land.

It is significant that of the two books in which Lucas Beauchamp is important, this earlier one, Go Down, Moses (1942) deals more critically with man's moral shortcomings. Circumstances, not people, are the menace in Intruder in the Dust (1948), but Lucas Beauchamp is not produced by circumstances. His ancestry, traced in Go Down, Moses, is rooted in the sin which accompanied the appropriation of the land. This sin is the landowners' attitude toward their slaves, an attitude which young Isaac McCaslin uncovers as he reads the ledger books in his dead father's commissary. Isaac's grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, had gotten a son with his own daughter, one of his slaves. Carothers brought the son up in slavery, salving his own conscience somewhat by bequeathing to his slave child a thousand dollars payable on the child's twenty-first birthday, when, the white father knew, he himself would be dead and the sum would have to be paid by his white sons (one of whom was Isaac's father). Isaac thinks "I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger."⁷ Isaac's bitterness emphasizes the irony of the heritage which the

⁶Go Down, Moses, p. 364.

⁷Go Down, Moses, p. 269.

slaveowners left. They drove their slaves and themselves to build empires which would stand as monuments; the monuments were marred by their unpaid debts.

Carothers McCaslin's Negro son, known by his mother's and his own first name, Tomey's Turl (for Terrel) had three children, each of whom was bequeathed \$1000 by Carothers' white sons. The only one of the three to stay in Mississippi is Lucas Beauchamp. Isaac is ashamed of his grandfather, but Lucas is proud of his McCaslin descent; he feels that it makes him the equal of any man in the area. "I'm more than just a man," he tells his white landlord-cousin Zack Edmonds. "The same thing made my pappy that made your grandmaw."⁸

The situation involving Isaac's and Lucas' grandfather is similar to the situation in Absalom, Absalom! in which Thomas Sutpen refuses to say "My son" to Charles Bon. The callousness of Thomas Sutpen is shared by old Carothers McCaslin. Both patriarchs are ambitious, both lack imaginative sympathy, and neither attains his goal, although Sutpen's failure is more complete.

Go Down, Moses echoes another theme, that of betrayal by a tinge of Negro ancestry, from Absalom, Absalom! Isaac's teacher, old Sam Fathers, is the son of an Indian chief and a quadroon slave mother. There is in his eyes

...the knowledge that for a while that part of his blood had been the blood of slaves....not wilfully betrayed by his mother, but betrayed by her all the same, who had bequeathed him not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which had enslaved it....⁹

⁸Go Down, Moses, p. 47.

⁹Go Down, Moses, pp. 167-8.

Sam Fathers feels betrayed by his mother; in Sutpen's case the husband-father feels betrayed by the wife-mother's Negro ancestry, but his son feels betrayed by the white father. The two stories examine a similar situation from different viewpoints.

Lucas Beauchamp's pride in his McCaslin heritage plays an important part in "The Fire and the Hearth," one of the two sections of Go Down, Moses which are told largely from the viewpoint of Negroes. "The Fire and the Hearth" begins as the story of Lucas' search for buried treasure, but it goes back in time to show his outrage at a six-month episode which occurs because of his second-class status. By Lucas' reminiscing, the reader is taken back to the time when Lucas and Zack Edmonds are young.

Edmonds' wife dies in childbirth; her work at Edmonds' big house must be taken over by Lucas' wife Molly. Molly remains at Edmonds' house for six months, until Lucas demands her back. But Molly's return, with Edmonds' white baby sharing her breast with her and Lucas' son, merely intensifies Lucas' suspicions and hurt pride.

Lucas is frustrated by his difficulty in managing his situation on a man-to-man basis. "How to God can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife?"¹⁰ he thinks. He enters Edmonds' bedroom, they wrestle, and only a misfiring gun keeps Lucas from murdering Edmonds. There is no evidence that Zack Edmonds is guilty of anything other than a careless failure to consider Lucas' existence as a husband and father, but it is just this sort of care-

¹⁰ Go Down, Moses, p. 59.

lessness which Isaac McCaslin, as Faulkner's spokesman, believes is spoiling the land and the people who live on it.

Isaac's discovery, in "The Bear," of his grandfather's incest indicates to him that slavery distorted the normal emotions of the slaveowners; Zack Edmonds' inheritance of the land carries with it some of the emotional hardness of the slave era, and he "forgets" that a Negro would want his wife at home.

It is not accidental that the only Negro in Faulkner's novels who is simultaneously proud enough and strong enough to effectively resist racial injustice is Lucas Beauchamp. His resistance, except for this incident involving his wife, is passive, but passive or not, it arises within him largely because of his pride in his white ancestry.

The first part of "The Fire and the Hearth," in which he remembers his dispute with Edmonds over Molly, shows the "white" side of Lucas. He is full of contempt for George Wilkins, his daughter's shiftless boy friend who fits the standard Negro stereotype. More important is the fact that Lucas has made a demand of his white cousin-landlord, and has been successful in achieving the return of his wife. As he first negotiates with Zack Edmonds and then wrestles with him for possession of a gun, Lucas is conscious of their common descent from Carothers McCaslin. Lucas is proud that he himself is the man McCaslin while Zack has descended from the McCaslins through a grandmother.

The second part of "The Fire and the Hearth" shows the "Negro" side of Lucas. He puts his faith in a money-divining machine and

spends his nights hunting buried treasure. George Wilkins is now his son-in-law and his helper; Zack Edmonds' son, who has inherited the plantation, feels obliged to care for Molly and to help her bring Lucas to his senses. The "white" side of Lucas becomes dominant when he acts on the premise that he is being treated unjustly. On a literal level, his pride causes him to resent inequality; but on a more abstract level, Faulkner envisages injustice as a possibility arising only between potential equals, so that Lucas must be the equal of Edmonds in order to merit sympathy in their dispute.

After Molly returns to their cabin and the faulty pistol prevents his shooting of Edmonds, Lucas achieves peace by burying his memory of the episode. "I ruther never to know than to find out later I have been fooled,"¹¹ he thinks.

However, other characters in Go Down, Moses can not always manage their consciousness as well as Lucas does. The young protagonist of "Pantaloon in Black" is one who is plagued by the problem of death. Until his wife dies he questions neither his life nor his surroundings; after her death he sums up his tragedy with the words "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking."¹² His attempts to "quit thinking" by means of frantic work, alcohol, and indiscriminate violence are fruitless. He remains acutely aware of his own position as a victim of death's power; but his awareness is not understood by his relatives or by his acquaintances.

¹¹Go Down, Moses, p. 59.

¹²Go Down, Moses, p. 159.

The injustice which the reader's mind protests lies in the jailer's easy assumption that because the protagonist, Rider, is black, he has no feelings comprehensible to a white man. "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."¹³ But the story has begun from Rider's viewpoint; by thus showing the inadequacy of the jailer's view, it illustrates that partial evidence, which is the only evidence a closed mind will accept, is an unfair basis for pre-judgment. The irony of the title emphasizes this point; a tragic figure seems to the jailer to be a buffoon.

Rider cannot cope with death; in the chapter "Delta Autumn" Roth McCaslin cannot cope with the birth of his racially mixed son. Faulkner offers no complete solutions. However, Go Down, Moses ends, in a chapter by the same name, with the suggestion that life's crises can be met best by a combination of kindness and the following of accustomed patterns. Mollie Beauchamp's grandson, a habitual criminal who became "rich too fast"¹⁴ in Chicago, is electrocuted for killing a policeman. Gavin Stevens, who appears only in this last chapter, arranges a conventionally proper funeral and burial for Molly's sake. Afterwards Stevens reflects that "She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right."¹⁵ Because the details are right, they help to repudiate the wrongs which the grandson committed while he lived.

¹³Go Down, Moses, p. 154.

¹⁴Go Down, Moses, p. 370.

¹⁵Go Down, Moses, p. 383.

Faulkner implies that our heritage of ceremony and our tradition of small kindnesses in the presence of death are not insignificant. As an old man, Isaac McCaslin feels that he has no choice but to resign himself to man's increasingly obvious shortcomings, but at the last minute Faulkner, disassociating himself from Uncle Ike's growing pessimism, comes closer to the optimism of Gavin Stevens. Faulkner accedes to the fact that Isaac's spiritual forebear, Sam Fathers, is no longer a viable symbol of a satisfactory life; Gavin Stevens, whose primary attitude is a humanitarian concern for his fellow man, is Faulkner's substitute. Thus Faulkner stresses again the connection between humanitarianism and justice in its broadest sense.

THE UNVANQUISHED

The Unvanquished is, in part, William Faulkner's tribute to the mature courage which is needed to forego revenge. Bayard Sartoris attains this courage as his society emerges from a long period of crisis. This emergence is punctuated for Bayard by the violent death of a hero of his society, his father John Sartoris. As the son matures, he becomes capable of a more reflective heroism than the military daring which distinguished his father. The Civil War is a catalyst which provides a stage and a plot for the actors, but Faulkner is interested not so much in the war as in the action within the minds and hearts of his people.

In this novel, Faulkner speaks through Bayard Sartoris. Bayard thinks that "those who can, do, those who cannot and suffer because they can't, write about it."¹ Because he is neither a man during the war nor the first of his line, Bayard cannot do as much as his father, so in his mind he "writes" his own and his father's story.

As boys, Bayard and his Negro companion Ringo (named Marengo to commemorate a victory of Napoleon's) are eager to see and actually experience everything, even though they are acutely aware that they must gain many experiences second-hand through listening. However, they begin to feel that the stories they hear are as much a part of themselves as their own experiences. Bayard's cousin Drusilla, telling them about the Southerners' railroad, says the Northerners

¹William Faulkner, The Unvanquished (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 262.

"could tear the track up but they couldn't take back the fact that we had done it. They couldn't take that from us."² Although Bayard derives some satisfaction from having seen the railroad in operation, while Ringo had only heard about it, Ringo does not consider himself deprived: "But you didn't know it was fixing to happen when you seed the track. So nemmine that. I heard. And I reckon they ain't gonter git that away from me, neither."³

This feeling that a retold experience can be real pervades many of Faulkner's novels, perhaps most effectively in Absalom, Absalom! The mingling of the real and the mythical occurs in Intruder in the Dust when Charles Mallison feels that for every Southern boy there exists the moment when it is 1864. It is a type of metamorphosis which explains the special strength of tradition and loyalty to kin in Bayard Sartoris' life. His eventual rejection of revenge is a striking departure from tradition and superficially an apparent weakening of his loyalty to his father's memory.

Bayard Sartoris, like Quentin Compson and Charles Mallison, is surrounded by legend, but his first-hand experiences are also extensive. As a child, he looks at death and seeks a bloody and spectacular revenge on behalf of his grandmother. Grown, he sees death again, when his father is shot; death is more striking this time because John Sartoris lived so vividly through his real and his imagined actions. But his son can no longer be moved to take vengeance.

²The Unvanquished, p. 112.

³The Unvanquished, p. 112.

For when the war and his boyhood are over, there is a quiet change in Bayard, a change which he himself scarcely notices. He is no longer interested in glory. He no longer sees his father as a demigod on a horse; he thinks of his father as a man who occasionally speaks with a "courteous intolerant pride which had lately become a little forensic."⁴ In short, Bayard has become objective. He is no longer the fierce partisan child creating a miniature war in the sand to convince himself and Ringo that victory exists; as a man, he feels himself to be an observer, watching those about him even while he speaks to them.

The change in Bayard's feelings illustrates the central theme of The Unvanquished. Throughout this novel man wants revenge instinctively, without reason, whereas forgiveness and resignation come as the result of thought. In the opening episode Bayard and Ringo prepare their sandy battlefield, but before they can begin the game, Ringo's uncle breaks their mood by his trance-like, exultant hinting at Confederate defeats. The uncle, Loosh, soon joins one of the many groups of Negroes who march north, "reasonless, following and seeking a delusion, a dream...."⁵ Before he goes, however, he retaliates for his years in "the black dark"⁶ (of slavery); he shows the Union soldiers the burial place of the Sartoris family silver.

A few years later, when Bayard's grandmother Rosa Millard is

⁴The Unvanquished, p. 265.

⁵The Unvanquished, p. 92.

⁶The Unvanquished, p. 85.

murdered by the outlaw Grumby, Bayard and Ringo set out to track and kill Grumby. Not yet sixteen, they are guided for a while by their impetuous old neighbor, Buck McCaslin. But McCaslin is forced home by an accidental wound and rheumatism. When the boys finally find and shoot Grumby, their disposition of his body is worthy of the darkest imaginative visions of Tom Sawyer; they peg his body, except for the right hand, to the door of the cotton compress where he killed Granny. They nail the hand to her grave marker so that "Now she can lay good and quiet."⁷ Buck McCaslin, strongly approving the sight, calls Bayard "John Sartoris' boy."⁸

John Sartoris is indeed a father of this sort of violent, amateur law enforcement. Returning from the war to rebuild his plantation, he finds that the South he has known is being changed by Federal Reconstruction. (For literary purposes Faulkner placed the Reconstruction period immediately at the close of the Civil War.) In the chapter entitled "Skirmish at Sartoris," comedy is provided by the older women of the community who decide to salvage Drusilla's "honor" (which she compromised, they are sure, by her fighting beside soldiers) by marrying her to John Sartoris. The men at the same time are involved in their own project. Under the leadership of John Sartoris, they vow to prevent the election of an ex-slave as Marshal of Jefferson. John Sartoris keeps the ex-slave from office by killing two carpetbaggers and sending the ballotbox to his home, thus insuring that no Negroes (who are "herded" by the

⁷The Unvanquished, p. 211.

⁸The Unvanquished, p. 213.

carpetbaggers) vote. He himself does not return home until he has reported to the sheriff to post bond. He explains this delay by asking, "Don't you see we are working for peace through law and order?"⁹

However, several years later, John Sartoris sends Bayard to law school because "the land and the time too are changing....now I shall do a little moral house-cleaning. I am tired of killing men...."¹⁰ Thus he renounces law by impulse; he foresees a time in which knowledge and thought will become more important weapons.

But old conventions remain so strong in John Sartoris' world that his attempt to change his own way of life is cut short. Like William Faulkner's great-grandfather, he is shot as the climax of an old feud.

From the moment Bayard is told of his father's death, he is aware of the tacit, unthinking acknowledgement of those around him that he will punish his father's murderer. Professor Wilkins bustles about Bayard, "trying to find the words with which to offer me his pistol too."¹¹ The first two people Bayard sees are the ineffectual Professor Wilkins, who accepts revenge as a matter of course, but who cannot find the words he needs, and Mrs. Wilkins, who does not even need words to remind Bayard why his father died: "Who lives by the sword shall die by it."¹² The silent dialogue between

⁹The Unvanquished, p. 239.

¹⁰The Unvanquished, p. 266.

¹¹The Unvanquished, p. 246.

¹²The Unvanquished, p. 246.

Professor and Mrs. Wilkins enables Bayard to know that if he has the strength to follow his conscience, he will not kill.

Ringo says, "We could bushwack him, like we done Grumby that day,"¹³ thus offering an alternative to a confrontation, but he knows that Bayard will not accept that alternative. Ringo, however, does not perceive that Bayard has decided that revenge is not right, even if the approach is from the front.

When Bayard returns home for the funeral and is met by several of his father's friends, he resents what he calls "that curious vulture-like formality which Southern men assume in such situations.... that unctuous and voracious formality."¹⁴ His first thought is that he will have to begin his resistance to the community norms that night. The men's assumption that he wants to vindicate his father's memory is only emphasized by George Wyatt's rehearsed offer to "take this off your hands."¹⁵ So sure is Wyatt of the answer that he takes Bayard's "I reckon I can attend to it"¹⁶ to mean "I will kill him."

Subsequently, after he learns that Bayard has faced the killer, Ben Redmond, unarmed, Wyatt does not completely understand. He looks at Bayard "with that pale bleak stare which was speculative yet not at all ratiocinative."¹⁷ Bayard's rejection of formalities becomes unintentionally total; on his way back from this unarmed confrontation

¹³The Unvanquished, p. 251.

¹⁴The Unvanquished, p. 267.

¹⁵The Unvanquished, p. 268.

¹⁶The Unvanquished, p. 268.

¹⁷The Unvanquished, p. 288.

with Redmond, he dismounts, falls asleep, and misses his father's burial.

The men who expect Bayard to use violence are not nearly as compelling as the symbol of masculinity, courage, and revenge who hands him the pistols. Drusilla, like his father's friends, meets Bayard with apparent formality; he sees her "in the formal brilliant room arranged formally for obsequy...the Greek amphora priestess of a succinct and formal violence."¹⁸ Her stylized violence he does not resent; it fascinates him. The difference between Drusilla's attitude and George Wyatt's lies in the intensity of her feeling. She behaves as her emotions impel her to behave, disregarding the standards of class and kind which play such a large part in directing Wyatt's actions. Drusilla offers Bayard the pistols saying

'Take them. I have kept them for you. I give them to you. 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. Do you feel them? the long true barrels true as justice, the triggers (you have fired them) quick as retribution, the two of them slender and invincible and fatal as the physical shape of love?'¹⁹

Drusilla needs only to touch Bayard to know she has failed; he will not use the pistols. Her failure changes her from a priestess to a woman. First she becomes hysterical, then resigned.

Drusilla is an interesting symbol of vengeance. The war has killed her fiancé; the life rhythm of marriage, children, and aging

¹⁸The Unvanquished, p. 252.

¹⁹The Unvanquished, p. 273.

to which she once looked forward has been destroyed. Her reaction is to cut her hair, put on pants, and fight the Union. Hard and bitter, she sums up by saying, "Thank God for nothing."²⁰ After the war she is forced into skirts and a marriage with John Sartoris. But her thinking and her motions remain masculine.

Because a woman is expected to be soft and forgiving, her position as the most determined anti-Unionist during and immediately after the war gives her an aura of strength. The retribution she advocates after John Sartoris' death is not mere convention; it is truly vengeance, "an eye for an eye." Bayard feels her emotional power; thus he is more tempted to comply with her wishes than with those of his neighbors. At the same time he is attracted to Drusilla as a woman, for she never seems to him to be completely masculine.

Shortly before his father's death, Drusilla had kissed Bayard in the garden; he thought of her then in terms of the "eternal Snake."²¹ Her offer of the pistols and vengeance--"an attribute only of God's"--is in the same spirit as the Snake's offer of knowledge; she tells Bayard, "Oh you will thank me, you will remember me when I am dead and you are an old man saying to himself, 'I have tasted all things.'"²² Drusilla offers experience and emotion, but her role is not simply that of the temptress.

There is some evidence that the mature Bayard, with unconscious nostalgia, equates Drusilla with his own boyhood. She is courageous;

²⁰The Unvanquished, p. 115.

²¹The Unvanquished, p. 262.

²²The Unvanquished, p. 274.

she has a strong sense of kinship with the Confederacy. Like young Bayard, she loves to ride and rides well. He often calls her boyish. As a soldier, even though she regards herself as one of the least able fighters, she enjoys the comradeship of her leader, John Sartoris, and his men. Most important, like the young Bayard who avenges his Granny's murder, Drusilla is free to seek retribution without regard to future consequences. Only when John Sartoris begins to consider the future of the South, does he feel the weight of his violent past; similarly, Bayard as a boy does not look far ahead, and as a man he envies Drusilla because she lives in her emotional present.

Several factors incline Bayard toward his final rejection of the traditional role of a man whose family is wronged. He knows that his father insulted Redmond unnecessarily. His father had said that the killing which was given impetus by the war had gone far enough, and Bayard has seen the weight which that killing had placed on his father. He knows that his father went to see Redmond unarmed, and in making a similar unarmed visit, Bayard is continuing the last act of his father. All of these considerations help him to overcome his desire to be thought well of by his neighbors and by Drusilla. Redmond is also tired of killing; he fires his pistol but deliberately misses Bayard.

Both the first episode and the last chapter of The Unvanquished show Bayard Sartoris confronting instinctive emotion. In the first episode, when Loosh causes him to feel the threat of defeat, Bayard's reaction is to pretend a greater confidence. In the last chapter

his victory is unpretentious; it lies in his ability to follow his conscience. Before she leaves the Sartoris home, Drusilla recognizes and acknowledges, by leaving a sprig of verbena on his pillow, that Bayard has shown his own kind of strength.

Regardless of Bayard's mature eschewing of violence, The Unvanquished contains a considerable amount of unintended retribution. The chapter "Raid" is an excellent example of one transgression's leading in Faulknerian fashion to another. Even before the chapter begins, the war has led Bayard's Granny into her first lie; she has hidden Bayard and Ringo under her skirt after they kill a Union horse. The war has also led her into her first theft. She is stranded on the road to Memphis by a group of Union soldiers who steal her mules but leave her wagon. She must return to Sartoris with horses "borrowed" from their missing owner.

"Raid" begins as Granny begins the search for her own property. She seeks out the Union commanding officer at the front and asks him for the two mules, for the chest of family silver which Loosh had pointed out to the invading Northerners, and for the runaway slaves, Loosh and his wife Philadelphia. Presumably, Rosa Millard is the only individual to make such a request. The Union staff, harrassed by guilt and by runaway Negroes whom it can neither organize nor ignore, purges itself of some guilt and some Negroes by giving Rosa Millard considerably more than she asks for. Stunned, she leaves for home with ten chests, sixty-three mules, one hundred and ten slaves (she soon tells them to return to their homes) and a requisition, signed by the general, describing the property and commanding the necessary food.

By overpaying Granny, not only with property, but with a note guaranteeing safe and easy passage, the Northerners expedite the war's undermining of her morality. Before the war she is scrupulously honest. At first she is forced into relatively minor lapses, but her real dishonesty begins after she is rewarded ten-fold in her quest for her own property. In an attempt to explain her caravan to a Union officer, she shows him her requisition; he asks how many mules she lacks. It is the quick-witted Ringo who speaks the first dishonest word: "We like fifty."²³ The second time they are stopped, Ringo tries to force Granny to make her own decision to use their note dishonestly. She sits silently, but finally hands her requisition to a lieutenant who is passing with a small group of mounted soldiers. Ironically, he accepts the loss of his stock as retribution: "I told Captain Bowen not to mount us with captured stock!"²⁴ At the end of the chapter Granny chides Bayard for his silence in the face of chicanery. "We have lied,"²⁵ she says, of Ringo, Bayard, and herself; but in the next chapter she has organized her mule stealing into a system. Ringo scouts the countryside for stock, and Ab Snopes sells the mules and horses back to the Northern Army. Some are stolen and resold more than once. Granny uses most of the profits to improve the impoverished farms of her hill country neighbors.

Significantly, although Ringo and Granny are equally guilty in the stealing and mule trading, only Granny meets punishment of any sort. After the Union forces leave Mississippi she is reluctant

²³The Unvanquished, p. 129.

²⁴The Unvanquished, p. 132.

²⁵The Unvanquished, p. 134.

to stop; with the encouragement of Ab Snopes she tries the same plan--a forged note--on a brutal outlaw, Grumby. Grumby fears a trap and kills her.

This retribution, if such it is, seems inordinately severe in view of her humanitarian intentions; she explains in a prayer, "I sinned first for justice....I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves."²⁶ As an indication that her fate is punishment, Ringo states what has killed her: "That first batch of mules we got for nothing."²⁷ Thus Granny dies, while Ringo continues as a commentator.

Is Ringo exempt because he is a Negro? Ringo himself seems to feel that there are two standards of moral judgment when, after John Sartoris is shot, he tells Bayard, "We could bushwhack him, [Redmond] like we done Grumby that day. But I reckon that wouldn't suit that white skin you walks around in."²⁸ Negroes in Faulkner's books are expected to be a little devious, and perhaps not responsible for their vices; in Go Down, Moses, Negroes are described as having the "vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion...."²⁹ When they are boys, Ringo and Bayard have the same standards; but Granny, and Bayard after he is grown, seem to be judged by a stricter measure. Not only Ringo is exempt; Loosh, whose resentment develops into

²⁶The Unvanquished, p. 167.

²⁷The Unvanquished, p. 211.

²⁸The Unvanquished, p. 251.

²⁹Go Down, Moses, p. 294.

malevolence and betrayal, remains unpunished even by the Sartoris family he has betrayed. He is not merely taken back; Granny seeks him back (although she fails to find him and he returns by himself). Both Ringo and Loosh, although they are unlike each other in most respects, are limited and excused by their color.

Rosa Millard's effort to regain her property involves her in a situation of retaliation and counter-retaliation which includes sharp trading reminiscent of The Hamlet. Her strong will within an apparently frail body places her in a class with Eunice Habersham and other of Faulkner's old women. Ringo's and Bayard's chasing of Grumby invokes a suspense similar to the suspense in "The Bear." There are also similarities between Bayard Sartoris and Charles Mallison, for Charles, like Bayard, grows in his fidelity to his own standards. Both young men find that ultimately their society understands and condones their standards; there is no actual conflict between their ideals and their duty to their families and friends.

However, in spite of all these familiar aspects of character and plot, there is a difference in The Unvanquished. Bayard Sartoris is the only one of Faulkner's people who, faced with the chance to seek retribution, decides to forego his chance. His decision makes him a better man than his father. Thus while the McCaslin family declines in Go Down, Moses, the Sartoris family remains proud in The Unvanquished.

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

With its carefully organized plot and its epic picture of an heroic man fighting for dominion in an unaccommodating world, Absalom, Absalom! is one of Faulkner's most effective works. Thomas Sutpen's goals are high; his near success and his ultimate failure are equally the results of his peculiar abilities and limitations.

These limitations and their effect on Sutpen's life reflect Faulkner's opinions on the essentially compassionate nature of morality, and consequently on the flaws inherent in a mechanical, non-emotional equitableness. Thomas Sutpen, in his limited vision, resembles the blindfolded figure which holds the scales of justice. Looking back at his boyhood, Sutpen says it was marked by his innocence of evil; he is unaware that he was innocent of love and compassion as well, and this latter innocence remains with him all of his life. It is "that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out."¹ Acting in the belief that he is being just, Sutpen resorts to immoralities and cruelties even harsher than the insult which, when directed at him, originally caused him to seek retribution. He says he has "had a design in my mind,"² and as if

¹William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 263.

²Absalom, Absalom!, p. 263.

he is following a symmetrical, repetitive pattern, Sutpen is rigid in his attempts to accomplish his design.

Significantly, when Sutpen's carefully planned empire falls for the second time, he does not consider that the failure is caused by "retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake."³ In trying to find his mistake, Sutpen reviews his life as if he were re-adding a column of numbers.

Thomas Sutpen's first conscious involvement with society occurs during his childhood when he becomes aware of an injustice against himself. Approaching the big plantation house to deliver a message to his father's employer, the boy is prejudged before the message leaves his mouth; he is told to deliver his message at the back door. This part of his story, the rejection of the underling at the landlord's house, parallels the story of Ab Snopes in the short story "Barn Burning" and in The Hamlet.

Although Thomas Sutpen, like Ab Snopes, immediately feels that he must retaliate, he sees his problem differently from Snopes. Ab Snopes takes his rejection (which came after he tracked horse manure onto the landlord's rug) as an insult from a man at his own level, and he retaliates by destroying the landlord's property. Thomas Sutpen, on the other hand, is rejected before he can enter or even state his purpose. The incident compels him to think about his own existence in a world of different classes. Previously, insofar

³Absalom, Absalom!, p. 267.

as he had thought about the landlord at all, Sutpen had taken him to be a man like other men; but after the rebuff by the landlord's servant, Sutpen realizes that the landlord's way of thinking is not like that of the mountaineer folk. Thus the landlord, whose name Sutpen does not even know, suddenly seems to Sutpen an incomprehensible and powerful being; this being is at once a representative of a class and a superior creature. Sutpen thinks of him as "more than all the human puny mortals under the sun that might lie in hammocks all afternoon with their shoes off."⁴

The boy's impression of the landlord as an unfriendly, remote intelligence is strengthened because the door is opened and the rebuff is delivered by a Negro servant. While the servant bars the door to him, the boy Thomas Sutpen feels the animosity of an unseen force; he thinks that

...they (the niggers) were not it, not what you wanted to hit; that you knew when you hit them you would just be hitting a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it, a face slick and smooth and distended and about to burst into laughing, and so you did not dare strike it because it would merely burst and you would rather let it walk on out of your sight than to have stood there in the loud laughing.⁵

The image of Negroes as jeering errand boys of an indifferent or even a cruel providence re-occurs several times. The first Negro Sutpen remembers seeing has carried Sutpen's drunken father from a tavern; he "emerged with the old man over his shoulder like a sack

⁴ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 238.

⁵ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 230.

of meal and his--the nigger's--mouth loud with laughing and full of teeth like tombstones."⁶ Later in the novel, Sutpen's poverty-stricken admirer Wash Jones (who avoids coming to Sutpen's front door where he might be repulsed by a servant) reflects that he (Jones) walks in this world "always in mocking and jeering echoes of nigger laughter...."⁷ In contrast to the Negro characters who are more important to the narrative, these mocking agents are always nameless. Their mocking is always intentional. They are, in part, reflections created within the minds of poor whites who are acutely aware of their own low status. The adult Thomas Sutpen blames his tribulations on his own unseen mistake; but as a child he feels victimized by "them," the unseen mocking power.

Despite Faulkner's omission of a specific statement that retribution in any form is an attribute of a supreme being, many of his characters believe that God exists to punish. This belief is strong in Rosa Coldfield, one of the four commentators through whom Faulkner shows Thomas Sutpen. In his article "Ancient Myths and the Moral Framework of Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!," Lennart Bjork presents parallels between Sutpen and both the Hebrew God of Wrath and the Greek Furies in Agamemnon. "...when God is alluded to in Absalom, Absalom! it is the God of the Old Testament, the God of fear and vengeance....Sutpen, and all men like him, are condemned no matter what moral code they are measured against."⁸ In the course of

⁶Absalom, Absalom!, p. 225.

⁷Absalom, Absalom!, p. 282.

⁸American Literature, XXXV (Summer 1963), 196-204.

Absalom, Absalom!, as in The Unvanquished, The Hamlet, and other novels, apparently extra-human retribution comes to those who are doomed by their own misdeeds.

However, these novels do not indicate that Faulkner himself believes in a punishing God. The retribution which befalls his characters comes from within themselves. Rosa Coldfield can look at Sutpen and say that he was a demon who at last was punished, but Quentin Compson, who also tries to explain Sutpen's life, believes that Sutpen "had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life."⁹ The reader is likely to decide that the force which destroys Sutpen is his own.

The design which young Thomas Sutpen conceives after his rejection at the door is simultaneously his revenge and his escape from the low status which precipitates the insult. As Sutpen considers his relationship with the landlord-God, he realizes "there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him."¹⁰ Instead of burning a barn, Sutpen decides to become a God himself. There is no retribution save in his own triumph--"land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with."¹¹ Sutpen's "them" is the same as Mink Snopes' "old Moster" in The Mansion.

Sutpen is first seen through his sister-in-law Rosa Coldfield's

⁹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 220.

¹⁰Absalom, Absalom!, p. 238.

¹¹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 238.

words as they are interpreted by young Quentin Compson's imagination. Sutpen appears "(man-horse-demon)"¹² with his slaves and his architect, and they create a plantation from one hundred square miles: "the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light."¹³

Sutpen's grandiose empire is similar to the empires which other early settlers of Jefferson have designed in other Faulkner novels--Carothers McCaslin in Go Down, Moses, for instance, or John Sartoris in The Unvanquished. Just as his neighbor's kingdoms do not turn out exactly as planned, Sutpen's kingdom fails. But it fails more dramatically, with a crash. And just as the others fail because they are based on wrongs, the crash of Sutpen's empire is caused by its creator's sin--but not a sin against the land, nor even the sin of slavery; Sutpen's central sin, like that of Flem Snopes, is a lack of humanity.

However, in contrast to Flem Snopes, Sutpen's lack of human soul is only partial. He subjugates his best feelings and all of his normal human desires to his ambition to build an empire. His failure is a consequence, but in his search for his mistake he overlooks the deficiency of feeling within himself.

The Sutpen whom Rosa Coldfield sees as a demon, and who sees himself as a former innocent, builds an estate from little or nothing three times during his life--once in the West Indies, most grandly when he builds "Sutpen's Hundred," and again, but in a more limited form, when he returns to rebuild Sutpen's Hundred after the Civil

¹²Absalom, Absalom!, p. 8.

¹³Absalom, Absalom!, p. 9.

War. Because of his accomplishments he wins the sympathy and admiration of Quentin Compson and his college roommate Shreve McCannon as they reconstruct Sutpen's life in their imaginations. But in spite of their admiration, they are aware of Sutpen's failures in human relations.

When Sutpen discovers that his first wife and infant son cannot be used, because of a trace of Negro ancestry, as the foundation stones of his empire, he deals with them methodically and cold-bloodedly; he makes financial arrangements for their future and leaves them so as to start over again. In the words of Quentin's grandfather, Sutpen tries to buy "immunity from her for no other coin but justice,"¹⁴ but this is the un pitying, unfeeling justice which jailed Harry Wilbourne in Wild Palms, and which seems to be the best which Faulkner expects from man's calculated attempts at rectifying wrongs.

In fact, Faulkner seems to question whether this type of justice can be considered worthy of humanity, for it is applied by a man who has failed to develop man's most distinctive qualities. Reared as haphazardly as a puppy, Sutpen never becomes completely human. As a boy he approaches the plantation house confidently; just as a friendly puppy expects to be accepted, the boy rejoices that "at last he was going to see the inside of it...."¹⁵ But as soon as he is told to go to the back door he sees "his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing

¹⁴Absalom, Absalom!, p. 265.

¹⁵Absalom, Absalom!, p. 229.

them all the time--as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them...."¹⁶ After hiding in the woods to think for several hours, the boy returns to his shack to see

...his sister pumping rhythmic up and down above a washtub in the yard, her back toward him, shapeless in a calico dress and a pair of the old man's shoes unlaced and flapping about her bare ankles and broad in the beam as a cow, the very labor she was doing brutish and stupidly out of all proportion to its reward: the very primary essence of labor, toil, reduced to its crude absolute which only a beast could and would endure....¹⁷

The front door to the plantation house is the door closing on Thomas Sutpen's puppy-like boyhood. Before the door closes, he is unaware of injustice, inequality, and class distinctions; but after the door is closed, he keeps himself unaware of the best of human emotions, love. He marries and begets children for carefully measured purposes; when his plans go awry, he questions his measurements.

Just before he dies, Sutpen seems to feel the irony of his kinship with animals. Visiting Wash Jones' granddaughter on the morning she has given birth to his child, the aging Sutpen first announces that his mare has had a colt; then he asks the Negro midwife if Milly Jones' baby is "horse or mare?"¹⁸ When he hears it is a girl, he can no longer hope to build a dynasty; he utters the words which goad Jones into killing him: "Well, Milly; too bad you're not

¹⁶ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 335.

¹⁷ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 236.

¹⁸ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 286.

a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable."¹⁹
 He reaches for the momentary comfort afforded by needless cruelty.²⁰

If Sutpen's inhuman, unfeeling justice becomes more and more inadequate, it is no worse than the heavily emotional reaction of his wife to her abandonment. For Thomas Sutpen and his first wife are opposite sides of the justice-vengeance coin. After he leaves her, she devotes the rest of her own and her child's life to revenge, with the result that over a period of thirty years she deteriorates into the closest thing to a witch that Faulkner has created. Whereas Sutpen is devoid of love, she allows her love to become so perverted that at last it is non-existent; during his childhood, her son Charles Bon is conscious of her measured tenderness even while he becomes aware that she is passing on to him a "vindictiveness and jealous rage"²¹ to which he becomes indifferent.

Apparently she is successful in destroying Sutpen's self-imagined immunity, inasmuch as the murder of their son, Charles Bon, forces Sutpen's acknowledged second son, Henry, to flee Sutpen's Hundred. However, even if Henry had not murdered Charles, Sutpen's empire could not rest well on Henry's shoulders, partly because Henry is so unlike his father. For although Henry looks like a smaller Sutpen, he is motivated primarily by love. In contrast to his father, he

¹⁹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 286.

²⁰Neil D. Isaacs, "Götterdämmerung in Yoknapatawpha," Tennessee Studies in Literature, VIII (1963), 47-55. Isaacs points out that at the climax of the short story "Wash," which he considers a pattern for Absalom, Absalom!, Wash Jones suddenly sees Sutpen as the beast which he has become, rather than the God for which Jones had taken him.

²¹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 298.

does not calculate; he "felt, and acted immediately."²²

Charles Bon, like Henry, is of a different mold than is their father. Like Thomas Sutpen, Bon first appears in Jefferson full grown, with an unknown background. But this is their only similarity. Even their bearing is different. Charles Bon has an easy effortless elegance; Sutpen's formality is an obvious barrier which cannot hide his strength, determination, and lack of breeding.

Bon's urbanity is not accidental; it has been cultivated by his mother. Whereas his father was allowed to grow haphazardly, Bon was brought up for the one purpose of obtaining his mother's revenge. He knows that she wants to use him, as her lawyer wants to use him, although the lawyer is interested in blackmail rather than in revenge. Bon drifts as his mother and the lawyer propel him. Consequently, when he finds himself at the University of Mississippi at the age of twenty-eight, he is as much an outsider among the countrified freshmen as Thomas Sutpen was to his neighbors when he first appeared in Jefferson.

Bon has never been told about his father, but he recognizes Henry Sutpen as his brother. This recognition leads him to feel that he has always missed a father. As Henry's guest he rides to Sutpen's Hundred, expecting some sign of recognition; there is none on his first visit nor on succeeding visits. In the absence of any sort of acknowledgement or overt rejection from his father, Bon drifts toward marriage with Henry's (and his own) sister Judith.

²²Absalom, Absalom!, p. 96.

Sutpen tells Henry about Bon's octoroon wife or mistress and child in New Orleans; Henry tries to decide whether to stop Bon's marriage with Judith. Both young men welcome the advent of the Civil War, for by enlisting they can postpone their decisions.

Thomas Sutpen, now a Confederate officer in a different regiment, hears enough from home to know that barring a dramatic change, Henry is not going to stop Bon. The father summons Henry to his tent, greets him with the words, "Henry, my son,"²³ and gives him the one fact, Bon's Negro ancestry, that can change Henry's mind. As always, Sutpen makes no attempt to speak to Bon.

Because he uses Henry as an intermediary, Sutpen's position is reversed; the boy who has had the door slammed in his face refuses to open the door to look at his oldest son. Donald M. Kartiganer states that Sutpen "fails to understand that the god must die and be succeeded by the elder son, or at least must meet the face of that son, touch his flesh, and grapple with him for the right to rule."²⁴ Bon, however, never aspires to the right to rule. Until he meets the Sutpen family, his desires are only sensory; after he becomes acquainted with Henry, Bon wants recognition from their father, but he feels no desire to battle for any further birthright. In an unintentional contrast to Thomas Sutpen's pride, Bon justifies his taking of a mistress by saying that at least he has saved her from slavery; perhaps not one in a

²³Absalom, Absalom!, p. 353.

²⁴"The Role of Myth in Absalom, Absalom!," Modern Fiction Studies, IX (Winter 1963-4), 357-369.

thousand is so saved, "but we do not pretend to be God, you see."²⁵

Charles Bon has known since childhood that once his mother has achieved that which she has groomed him for, she would regard him merely as "so much rich rotting dirt;"²⁶ his final disillusionment comes when he sees that his father also regards him as a being of no consequence. He arranges his own death with the words: "No I'm not. [your brother] I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry."²⁷

Thus, with Henry wanted for murder, Thomas Sutpen returns from the war to face a double task, the rebuilding and replanting of the plantation, and the fathering of a new heir. His situation is made difficult by the strain on the plantation of a lost war, and by the death of his second wife, Ellen Coldfield. In spite of war and death, his audacity and perseverance bring his goals close. However, once again he defeats himself by that logic which ignores the reactions of a woman. This time his blindness is more surprising. He alienates his fiancée, Ellen's younger sister Rosa, by suggesting that they have a baby first, and marry if it is a boy. Rosa's childhood hatred of Sutpen is reconfirmed; she is "irrevocably husbanded (and himself, husband or fiancé, already safely cuckolded before she can draw breath) with the abstract carcass of outrage and revenge."²⁸ With his time growing shorter and the plantation becoming more

²⁵Absalom, Absalom!, p. 115.

²⁶Absalom, Absalom!, p. 306.

²⁷Absalom, Absalom!, p. 353.

²⁸Absalom, Absalom!, p. 180.

impoverished, Sutpen courts Wash Jones' granddaughter. When he learns that her child is a girl, he recognizes his final defeat.

Although Sutpen had hoped for the continuation of his line through Henry, it is his daughter Judith who unknowingly insures that there is a male Sutpen on Sutpen's Hundred. She wants to provide for the future of Charles Bon's son, so she moves the boy from New Orleans to her own home. He is cared for in a Spartan fashion by Judith and by her Negro half-sister Clytemnestra. At first he cannot speak their language, but he feels Judith's coldness, which is rooted in her consciousness of his status as not quite white. Clytie, alternately harsh and solicitous, is always alert to keep him away from neighbors. Like his father, the boy is aware of the absence of human warmth. But he is cared for, in spite of the postwar poverty of the plantation. Indirectly he causes Judith's death, thus lending force to Clytie's statement that "Whatever he [Henry] done, me and Judith and him have paid it out."²⁹

Henry pays penance for his crime from the moment of its conception; for he has loved Bon. His conflicting love for Judith compels him to commit a murder which is, in itself, retribution for both his own and his father's faults. Henry's forced departure from Sutpen's Hundred and thus from Judith compounds his punishment. It is not important that he is never brought to trial; after he shoots Bon, legal procedures cannot change his life.

The crime which destroys Henry's and his father's hopes comes

²⁹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 370.

into existence largely because of his father's refusal to acknowledge Charles Bon. Bon says of Sutpen, "No word to me, no word at all? That was all he had to do, now, today; four years ago or at any time during the four years....I would have said, I will never see her again...."³⁰

Bon's life is made meaningless by his father's rejection and by his mother's obsession with revenge. When at last Bon tells Henry to "stop me," he is making a conscious choice: "Now I am thinking of myself."³¹ If he cannot force recognition from his father, he can force a recognition of sorts from his brother; he can force Henry to admit, by using a bullet, that the presence of Charles Bon on earth is of some consequence.

An analogy can be drawn between Judith Sutpen, who takes over the life of Charles Bon's son, and Joanna Burden, in Faulkner's Light in August, who tries to manage the life of Joe Christmas. In both cases the recipient of the woman's attention refuses to be managed; both women lose their lives by their insistence, Joanna Burden by murder, Judith Sutpen by smallpox which she contracts while nursing Charles Bon's son. An attempt to use an unwilling person's life, Faulkner implies, brings failure. This is why Charles Bon cannot use his friendship with Judith and Henry to force recognition from their father; it can also explain Thomas Sutpen's failure to create a son in his own image to continue his work.

There is a strong feeling in Absalom, Absalom! that the

³⁰Absalom, Absalom!, p. 356.

³¹Absalom, Absalom!, p. 357.

characters, like those in a Greek tragedy, are acting out their fates. Their failures are foreseeable, and they can be explained in mythical, classical, or psychological terms.

The fall of Sutpen and his empire is sensed in advance by two women who are frequently likened to Cassandra. One of these is Rosa Coldfield, who observes for the most part from without the Sutpen family circle, and the other is Clytie, who watches from within. Rosa Coldfield is a child when Sutpen comes to Jefferson; when she tells what she knows of Sutpen's story to Quentin Compson, she is an old woman. She has seen Sutpen complete what she calls "his descending ellipsis,"³² but Clytie still lives in Sutpen's decayed mansion, and Rosa has always regarded Clytie as an occult offshoot of the demon. Therefore, Rosa feels that the Sutpen legend is unfinished. She asks Quentin to take her to Sutpen's Hundred so that she can see for herself. They find that Clytie is hiding Henry Sutpen, who has come home to die.

Through the years, Clytie's main interest has been to keep the world away from Sutpen's Hundred. When Rosa Coldfield returns with an ambulance to take Henry to town, there is only one way for Clytie to continue the isolation of the empire. Clytie burns the old house down, and she and Henry die in the fire. She completes the destruction which her father unintentionally began.

The only descendant of Thomas Sutpen who survives at the story's end is the mentally deficient Jim Bond, the great-grandson of Sutpen

³²Absalom, Absalom!, p. 171.

and his first wife. Bond is less than human in intelligence; he knows nothing of his parents, nor of his highly polished grandfather Charles Bon. After the old house burns, Jim Bond remains howling in the ashes.

In a sense, the degenerate Bond is a reversed and distorted image of Sutpen, the man who has risen from a primitive background to acquire the rudiments of culture. So Sutpen's legacy, if it lives at all, lives on in a different shape than he expected. Not God, but beasts endure.

But Faulkner implies that simple survival shows a greater strength than does Sutpen's ultimately destructive pride. After Quentin Compson's roommate, Shreve McCannon, knows the whole Sutpen story, he epitomizes in these terms: "I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere...and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings."³³

An interesting interpretation of the conclusion of Absalom, Absalom! is given by Donald Kartiganer:

...although Faulkner is aware of the necessity for the South to recognize its 'natural heir,' which is the freed Negro slave, he is unwilling to admit that the products of such miscegenation can approach the magnificence of the pure-blooded, if unforeseeing giants who engendered the system. Thus, while he is advocating justice as the only possible preventative against continued decline and the only method of restoring to some degree the health of the land, Faulkner's loyalty to

³³Absalom, Absalom!, p. 378.

his own heritage forbids him from saying that such recognition, such justifiable acknowledgment, can ever produce men of the stature of the young Thomas Sutpen.³⁴

This quotation is akin to the frequently mentioned idea that the fall of Sutpen and of Sutpen's Hundred is symbolic of the defeat of the South in the Civil War. Faulkner himself suggests this analogy by Rosa Coldfield's statement in regard to Sutpen:

'But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it--men with valor and strength but without pity or honor. Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?'³⁵

Faulkner also speaks of

...battles lost not alone because of superior numbers and failing ammunition and stores, but because of generals who should not have been generals, who were generals...by the divine right to say 'Go there' conferred upon them by an absolute caste system....³⁶

However, the analogy between Sutpen and the South becomes strained if it is carried out in detail. Sutpen's defeat cannot be considered typical, as it is more complete and final than is the gradual decline of his neighbors' fortunes. Go Down, Moses, which also bears on the defeat of the South, is only partially the story of the McCaslin fortunes; The Unvanquished is more concerned with moral decline and growth than with the downfall of the Sartoris estate. The burning of the Sartoris house is of minor importance

³⁴"The Role of Myth in Absalom, Absalom!," 357-369.

³⁵Absalom, Absalom!, p. 20.

³⁶Absalom, Absalom!, p. 345.

in The Unvanquished, but in Absalom, Absalom! the burning of the house is a climax. It is the destruction of Sutpen's symbol of peerage or nobility. The importance of the fire in the highly organized structure of the novel, the survival of only one Sutpen, and that one an idiot, emphasize that the tragedy is the tragedy of the proud, ruthless Thomas Sutpen and his family. Sutpen's sins are not only misappropriating the land and owning slaves; his central sins are more personal. Although one might consider the fire tantamount to the Civil War, and Jim Bond tantamount to the freed slaves, Absalom, Absalom! cannot be summarized by this analogy alone.

Yet as Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon try to rebuild Sutpen's legend in their imaginations, they are acutely conscious of the Civil War memories which are part of Sutpen's story, and part of Quentin as well. Shreve wants to understand what these memories mean to Quentin, but Quentin can only say, "You can't understand it. You would have to be born there."³⁷ The fact that Sutpen's design takes the shape of a plantation with slaves makes his story parallel in at least one respect to the story of the South. And no other of Faulkner's books so vividly conveys the destruction of war. The comparison of Sutpen's fall and the South's fall is valid if generalizations do not detract attention from the unique aspects of Sutpen's tragedy.

By inference one may conclude that Faulkner considers slavery a sin or an injustice which contained its own destruction, just as

³⁷Absalom, Absalom!, p. 361.

Sutpen's offspring are "dragon's teeth."³⁸ But Absalom, Absalom! is basically concerned with a general morality rather than with the morality of any one of man's institutions. The general morality of love and compassion is one which Faulkner would apply to all relationships. He dramatizes its presence or absence by the story of people. In the words of John W. Hunt, Absalom, Absalom! indicates that "The [Southern] tradition fails because its moral vision substituted duty for love, or, put another way, its humanity was only rational and therefore incomplete."³⁹ Thomas Sutpen, who is admirable in many ways, is Faulkner's dramatically successful embodiment of the limited moral vision which allows and promotes injustice.

³⁸ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 62.

³⁹ William Faulkner, Art in Theological Tension (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 128.

CONCLUSION

The vast number of analyses of Faulkner's literary work testifies to its rich complexity. He used varied techniques and tones to picture a world which is shaped by the people who live in it. Freudian symbols, Biblical and Shakespearian references, stories within stories, and narratives carried by a stream of consciousness are all employed. Thus, through his varied techniques he presents mankind as a collection of varied and therefore unpredictable individuals existing in a universe which is occasionally benign, sometimes hostile, but most often indifferent.

At times the unpredictable individuals in Faulkner's novels create a milieu which might be described by a child as "just not fair." This occurs when a Flem Snopes, a Clarence Snopes, or even a Thomas Sutpen becomes dominant. At other times Faulkner shows a climate in which equitability flourishes. This occurs when a Gavin Stevens or a Charles Mallison becomes dominant, not only over his surroundings and associates, but also over his own worst impulses. Justice, as Faulkner sees it, is not merely retribution or punishment; it can best be defined as an equitability made possible by man's consideration for man.

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