

*Thesis*  
2130

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**Abstract of thesis entitled  
'Into Faulkner Through a Concept of Landscape'**

**Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**September, 1992**



7/93

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines eight novels by William Faulkner by means of a critical method based on a concept of landscape. The thesis developed out of a curiosity regarding the vivid pictures that Faulkner's novels evoked in the mind of this reader. These reminded the reader of pictures similar in their vividness to those evoked in childhood by fairy tales and children's literature. In the main, here, the vivid Faulknerian pictures are examined from a moral point of view. The critical method follows from the idea of the literary landscape as a holistic entity, 'a prospect such as may be taken in at a glance from one point of view'. The method operates in three stages, and the vivid pictures found in the landscapes of the novels are deemed to function as centres of particular interest. In the first stage of the method, an impressionistic landscape, so called, is established, based on the facts of place, time, society, events and values given in or deducible from the novel. The vivid pictures are noted. The second stage calls for the quantification of the author's technical strategies, and in the third stage the vivid pictures are adopted as the starting points for detailed analyses of one or more aspects of the novel.

The method seems to bring into focus a mature, detailed and satisfying reader's landscape which, it is hoped, functions as an accurate reflection of the author's literary creation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor, Mr Alastair Wood, for the advice, support and criticism that he has afforded me during the writing of this thesis. Very many thanks are due to Sandra Russell for her painstaking reading of my text, to Anne and Colin Mitchell, and Mamie Prentice, for secretarial assistance, and to my husband, Peter, for his monumental endeavours to create for me both time and mental space.



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He saw the novelistic form as a potential way of reflecting meaning, much as an Etruscan urn or Attic vase reflects the cultural sensibility which produced it. For Faulkner, narrative was more than a succession of semantically related words; it was a medium to be worked and molded, a means of saying something. Readers must rise to the challenge of Faulkner's structural innovations, recognizing that beneath the pastoral landscape and the frequently unsophisticated self-tormented characters there works a strictly disciplined, sophisticated, deeply philosophical artistic intellect.

Hugh M. Ruppersburg, *Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p.150

## Introduction

By environment I don't mean the world he lives in, the floor, the ground he walks on, or the city, I mean his tradition, the air he breathes, his heredity, everything which surrounds him. And his past is certainly a very immediate part of anyone's present.

*William Faulkner<sup>1</sup>*

There's always a moment in experience - a thought - an incident - that's there.

*William Faulkner<sup>2</sup>*

This thesis developed out of a curiosity regarding some exceptionally vivid pictures that presented themselves to my mind at first readings of William Faulkner's novels. These vivid pictures constituted *moments of experience* for me. At the time, for the reason that I found Faulkner's novels hard to unravel, the vividness caused considerable surprise. In retrospect, I think that the difficulties helped sharpen the vivid pictures, for I withdrew from sustained engagement with the text, and contented myself with a sort of grand impression in which lay isolated, brilliant cameos. Yet those brilliant cameos did not fade, and they compelled a return to the text. With further reading they came to reveal shades and layers and depths of moral meaning which thenceforth dominated my perception of Faulkner's work. The vivid pictures found in Faulkner's novels are explicated here as moral pictures, and the overall reading offered is a moral reading. First approaches to Faulkner, however, had little or nothing to do with objective critical analysis. In their vividness, the pictures reminded me of others from childhood, these conjured by family tales and fairy tales, and by the children's literature of Enid Blyton, Louisa Alcott and Robert Louis Stevenson, all

of which blossomed in my mind unimpeded and unenhanced by the critical faculty. Not since childhood had such vivid pictorial images been encountered. Therefore they were felt to be precious. In this thesis, vivid pictures out of Faulkner have been harnessed to form part of a critical method, and the phrase 'vivid pictures' has been given specific technical meaning in the scheme.

The critical method was created out of a refusal to relinquish the vivid pictures. But no matter how vivid, the pictures' isolation negated their usefulness unless their location in the general landscape of the novel were to be established, and connections between them made. The general landscape of the novel therefore needed to be quantified, and this by a simple, quick means. An impressionistic landscape was constructed out of five elements: place, time, society, events and values. Clearly, such a landscape was incomplete, but it was nevertheless a holistic thing, and adequate for the purpose. Essentially, this part of the method was a descriptive exercise.

The next step was to address the author's technical strategies. It seemed desirable, in terms of finding a critical method coherent within itself, to proceed from the impressionistic landscape which already existed and which was, inherently, a whole thing. At the same time, the novel constituted a literary landscape brought into being by means of a printed text. Beginning with the physical book therefore, a brief survey was conducted of the textual structures: title or titles, chaptering, sub-sectioning, spacing, and the configurations of textual characters, the presence and density of non-roman type, non-standard line lengths and punctuation. In most of Faulkner's novels, one or more of



these exceptional forms are present, and all are significant. Moving into the text, the larger elements of construction were identified, then the narrative structures, and finally the other expository devices. By proceeding from the 'outer' boundaries of the physical text through the main structures to the 'inner' devices, it was possible to keep the whole impressionistic landscape in focus while yet closing on the details of its make-up.

The third and last part of the critical method involved the vivid pictures. Adopted as starting points, these were examined and linked through the technical strategies to other scenes of the novel. The effect of the analytical process, when repeated through successive vivid pictures, was to create a number of centres of interest from which radiated series of linked patterns. In turn the vivid pictures and their linked patterns, within the pre-defined impressionistic landscape, brought into focus some unusual, although trustfully not deviant, Faulknerian prospects.

The method entails much close focusing, and a considerable amount of casting back and forth over the same material, but since a main aim has been to seek meaning in the text, and re-approach has been necessary, the apparent repetitiousness in some instances is perhaps justified. A disadvantage, or perhaps a greater challenge, comes to light in *The Wild Palms* where, because of the two separate landscapes, extensive contiguous examination of two sets of pictures is required in order to explicate the links between them.

The term 'landscape' is adopted in the title of the thesis because it is the term that best describes my way of seeing novels, which is as a kind of novelistic prospect containable, as it were, in the mental glance of the reader. The kind of landscape found and explored here in Faulkner's novels is a principally a moral landscape. More generally, the term approximates to Faulkner's definition of 'environment' as *everything that surrounds*, and it describes and encompasses the perspective stances of both reader and characters. Although not the ideal term for the reason that it does not embody the camera-like qualities of the human mind, 'landscape' contains both the internal flexibility and the boundaries needed here. In the artistic sense, a landscape is a painted canvas enclosed by its frames, and in the literary sense, a text enclosed by its covers. But not available to the painter is the more fluid power of the written word which, not unlike the camera and the human mind, possesses the capacity to mix, multiply, superimpose and cut, to distance, close, magnify and focus. The complex and shifting patterns of Faulkner's film-like word landscapes resemble the camera's and the human mind's ability to display an extensive range of visual fields, focal variations, and perceptual stances. A meeting point of method exists between Faulkner's mode of presentation and the human mind's mode of perceiving. This kind of consonance works as one part of the key to Faulkner's novels. Another part has fallen into place for me in consequence of the critical method adopted here.

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of landscape is expanded to include figurative landscapes, for example those of time, history, society and human memory. Another facet of the definition as it is used here lies in the relation of one landscape to those adjacent to it. As the term 'landscape' means 'a prospect such as can be taken in



at a glance from one point of view', so the landscape within the glance is a segment. Other landscapes exist beyond the compass of the glance, and others beyond those captured within the frames of paintings, covers of books and reels of films. By virtue of their boundaries, such landscapes are contained and exclusive, yet they are also related to and contextualized by the external world from which they have been drawn. They have a place, therefore, in the universal landscape. The relationship of one landscape to others notwithstanding, none loses its essential sovereignty and wholeness.

Like the literary landscapes of many great artists and writers, those of William Faulkner embody a fictionalized land and people closely modelled on the known and familiar home region. Faulkner's familiarity with the section of North Mississippi in which he lived for nearly all of his life is reflected in the detail of his descriptions, and reflected again in the ease with which the reader assimilates those descriptions. In topographical terms especially, the reader's impressionistic landscape gains a vivid headstart.

To put Faulkner's mythological county into a wider perspective, Yoknapatawpha and Yoknapatawphans form a segment of a geographical, historical, social, economic and political region which is also a segment of America. America, in its turn, is a segment of Earth and Humanity. And as Earth and Humanity and America are from time to time subject to forces outwith their control and from time to time under siege from evils within, so is the minute and microcosmic Yoknapatawpha subject to Faulkner's 'Player and the game he plays',<sup>3</sup> and to his failure of 'Virtue [to] take care of its own as Non-Virtue does'.<sup>4</sup> Within Yoknapatawpha,



Faulkner's ability to draw universal human conditions in his most ordinary of characters enhances the pictures in the reader's impression-

istic landscape. In addition, his Yoknapatawpha and his Yoknapatawphans possess accidentals of geography, history and culture that are distinctive and therefore, for this reader whose prospect they are in the novels, they compose between them an extra-ordinarily interesting 'little postage stamp of...soil'.<sup>5</sup> Faulkner himself staked his claim to Yoknapatawpha - and simultaneously clarified the landscape for the reader - with the sketch-map appended to *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936. Since then, Calvin Brown<sup>6</sup> and others<sup>7</sup> have compared, in very useful detail, the topography, routes and towns of the real and the fictional counties of North Mississippi. When linked to the proposals of this thesis, Faulkner's familiarity with his fictionalized landscape and his capturing of universal humanity in his ordinary people serve not only to stabilize the impressionistic landscapes, but also to act as a referential beacon in the task of teasing out the more difficult of his technical strategies.

The landscapes that present themselves so vividly to this reader's mind derive from distinctively Faulknerian sources: from the sheer attractiveness of the physical land as he describes it; from his ability to make the physical landscape absorb or reflect human travail, folly, resilience, tragedy and contentment; from his character drawing devices; from the succinct patches of dialogue which, despite dialect, once heard in the mind and attuned to, depict easily recognizable human attitudes and situations. Of the physical land the young Ike McCaslin, encapsulating Faulkner's myriad references, says seductively,

This South for which He had done so much with woods for game and streams for fish and deep rich soil for seed and lush springs to sprout it and long summers to mature it and serene falls to harvest it and short mild winters for men and animals..<sup>8</sup>

Faulkner's land is as perfect and as unchanging as it is perfect and ever-changing, and these formal characteristics look to the Keatsean image of the Grecian urn that Faulkner so frequently adopts for the purpose of expressing perfection, and the relationship between stillness and action. In *Light in August* and *Sartoris* respectively, Lena Grove and old man Falls depict nothing if not resilience in their separate landscapes, she 'in a shapeless garment of faded blue' who 'when she felt the dust of the road beneath her feet...removed the shoes and carried them in her hand',<sup>9</sup> he in his 'clean dusty...faded overalls' walking his 'usual' 'three miles in from the county Poor Farm'.<sup>10</sup> These characters possess something of the peasant dignity of the figures in Millet's "The Reapers" and "The Angelus". The pawky pithiness of Faulkner's countrymen and the low-key prosaic wisdom underlying the negro conversations animates the picture in the reader's mind. While elsewhere in *Light in August* humorous white dialogue runs hand in hand with entrenched bigotry, this laconic example reveals male sexist attitudes in tandem with the normal human predilection for gossiping:

"I wonder where she got that belly," Winterbottom said.

"I wonder how far she has brought it afoot," Armstid said.

"Visiting somebody... I reckon," Winterbottom said.

"I reckon not. Or I would have heard..."

"I reckon she knows where she is going," Winterbottom said...

"She'll have company, before she goes much further," Armstid said.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the landscapes are also vividly compelling because Faulkner's societies, for all their pretensions and self-protective prejudices, are morally and economically precarious. Because of their traditions and their concepts of themselves, Faulkner's Southerners are squeezed in one way or another by their 'conquerors' from the North. The black labour force finds irritating and sometimes unacceptable ways of maintaining its



human dignity. There are too many bigots, too many injustices. Yet life in rural Jefferson is also often desperately boring, and diversions therefore eagerly seized upon, such as a rape, a white incomer believed to have negro blood, the occasional murder. But despite his often swingeing indictments, Faulkner creates his landscapes with humour, honesty and love.

Eight of Faulkner's novels are examined in terms of the critical method: *Sartoris* (1929), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *The Wild Palms* (1939), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and *The Reivers* (1962). The novels have been selected because they include most of Faulkner's thematic interests, and they cover most of his technical range. Chapter 1 develops, with reference to the general body of Faulkner's novels, the critical framework briefly outlined in this Introduction. In addition, Chapter 1 discusses Faulkner's evocation of the fictional Yoknapatawpha County and the accessibility of the novels with particular reference to the openings.

## Footnotes for the Introduction

1. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, edited by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p.205.
2. *Lion in the Garden*, p.220.
3. William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, first pub. Harcourt Brace (New York), 1929; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.380.
4. William Faulkner, *The Reivers*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1962; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), p.47.
5. *Lion in the Garden*, p.225.
6. Calvin S. Brown, *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).
7. G.T. Buckley, 'Is Oxford the Original of Jefferson in William Faulkner's Novels?', *PMLA*, 76 (1961), 447-454.  
Thomas L. McHaney, 'The Faulkners and the Origin of Yoknapatawpha County: Some Corrections', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 25 (1971), 247-64.
8. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1942; this ed. (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 271.
9. William Faulkner, *Light in August*, first pub. Smith and Haas (New York), 1932; this ed. (London : Picador Classic, 1991), p.7.
10. *Sartoris*, p.1.
11. *Light in August*, p.9.

Chapter 1

Critical Method, Yoknapatawpha, Accessibility,

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## Critical Method

The term 'landscape' has been adopted as the governing motif of this thesis. It refers to the critical method used, and to the content of the novel as the content is perceived from the reader's point of view. Faulkner's definition of 'environment' as the 'everything that surrounds [man]'<sup>1</sup> is re-defined as 'landscape'; this in order to circumvent the inherently circular compass of the word 'environment', to take in the universal scale of Faulkner's definition, to create a way of seeing closely related to the manner in which human beings perceive images, and to aid critical exposition.

Human beings do not 'see' in the round. Our mode of perceiving images resembles the single, flat camera shot. We can 'pan' in the manner of the moving camera, but much less smoothly. Strictly speaking, in order to 'see' environment, we need to be above it, at which point the environment becomes a landscape; or in effect, the two terms become interchangeable.

In the 'seeing' of Faulkner's novelistic landscapes, in early readings, our definition is inadequately tuned to Faulkner's innovative technical strategies, so that the landscape is hazy. But within the hazy, impressionistic picture, some isolated, brilliant scenes are present, and within themselves these do make sense. This thesis contends that these early impressions are valuable, and that retained and quantified, they form whole impressionistic landscapes in their own right.



The impressionistic landscape, although imperfect, is considered to be a whole thing in so far as it is broadly quantifiable.

The critical method used follows naturally from the holistic quality present in the idea of the impressionistic landscape. Quantifying his impressions in terms of the elements of the landscape, here defined as place, time, society, events and themes, the reader gains a set of flexible margins based on these five elements, which in turn operates as a relatively stable base for the detailed exposition of the reader's vivid pictures. This first part of the critical method is essentially a descriptive exercise. The second part involves an evaluation of the author's technical strategies, and consists of a survey of the 'outer' physical text, an assessment of the major elements of construction, the formal pattern and the narrative structures, and an examination of the 'smaller' expository devices. In the third and final part of the method, the vivid pictures are discussed in detail and linked through the technical strategies to related scenes. Along with other pictures similarly discussed, the effect is to create a number of centres from which radiate series of patterns. These centres compositely, held within the pre-defined impressionistic landscape, bring into focus a mature, detailed landscape.

In assessing, in Faulkner, the elements of place and time in the impressionistic landscape, the reader frequently needs to think cinematographically, for Faulkner, like Joyce, is a cinematographic novelist. By this I mean that, as film does, Faulkner and Joyce harness space to time and time to space in such a way as to create a space-time montage.

The two fundamental aspects of film, space and time...intermingle, interchange and interact. On the one hand the spatialization of time, on the other the temporalization of space. What film shows us is space and nothing but space, so that this space has perforce to be used to express time. And yet on the other hand



space has to be *disposed* in time, has to be fitted into a temporal pattern. Again this temporal pattern is a continuously flexible one and enables us to move about in time as though it were space.<sup>2</sup>

To give an example from the opening scene of *Light in August*, as Lena Grove walks across the landscape, the panoramic physical space across which she travels fuses with the steady, seemingly ant-like pace of her moving. Not only do the elements of place and time merge in this scene, however, but also that of action, and arguably, further, from the soporific quality inherent in the 'hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon',<sup>3</sup> a theme-linked mood of calmness and tranquillity is involved.

### Quantifying the Impressionistic Landscape

Depending on the novel, the elements of the impressionistic landscape vary in their relative importance to the whole landscape and to each other. The elements described below include reference to some of the raw materials commonly used by Faulkner and likely to be found in the novels.

#### Physical setting:

Faulkner's physical settings, in the Yoknapatawpha novels, in terms of geography and climate, remain constant: 2400 square miles<sup>4</sup> of flood plain and rising upland, with plenty of sun, little frost, enough rain and no destructive winds. The town of Jefferson, the surrounding hamlets and the roadways also remain constant (constant enough, that is, for the reader untrammelled by local knowledge of North Mississippi). Within the invariables, Faulkner alters the physical spectrum - and therefore the reader's permitted field of vision - according to the novel,

but he dwells again and again upon aspects of the land itself, upon its abundant yield, spring vegetation, scrub upland and vanished wilderness. He returns repeatedly to the roadways that cross the land, to the crowded central Square and the streets of Saturday Jefferson, to monuments and landmarks, and to homes, gardens, rooms and furnishings. The town of Jefferson functions as the focal point of a little rural world eighty miles from Memphis to the north and two hundred miles from New Orleans to the south. Yoknapatawpha's roads, and the railway built by one of its citizens, link Yoknapatawpha to the city, to the North, and to the outside world. The importance of where the railway comes from and goes to varies with the mental landscapes of the characters. Faulkner's consistent rendering of setting is one of the means through which the reader familiarizes himself with the landscapes of the novels.

#### Time:

By contrast with the physical settings, the factor of time in Faulkner is highly variable, and often also multi-modal, by which I mean not always calendar or clock time. Narrative presents range from three days in *The Sound and the Fury*, if we count Quentin's section as a kind of flashback, to nearly a hundred years in *Go Down, Moses*. (And the long narrative present of *Go Down, Moses* contains perhaps another hundred years of tale and myth.) Time may be pushed back by epoch or generation, as it is in *Sartoris*. In *Light in August*, time is densified by sets of simultaneous or nearly simultaneous action, while in *The Wild Palms*, time separates two different narratives by ten years. Time is often related to and articulated through changes in the physical landscape, to the turn of the farming year in *Sartoris*, for example, or the changes wrought by man, as the coming of the sawmills and the destruction of the wilderness in *Go Down, Moses*. Time is also memory, more fluid and tide-like than mechanical and clock-like, as it is in *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom*,



*Absalom!* and *The Wild Palms*. Perspective and time are often closely related in the novels.

#### Society:

Faulkner's societies take their groupings from the long-standing class structure of the South: white men, white women and negroes. The point of view is that of white society, in whose eyes, even those of its liberal members, skin colour is the primary means of classifying humanity. Only when he is projecting a universal human value beyond the question of racial identity does Faulkner enter the mind of a negro character; Lucas Beauchamp in 'The Fire and the Hearth' from *Go Down, Moses* is one example. Yoknapatawpha societies, with the exception of the Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* and the yeoman and poor white farmers of *The Hamlet*, derive from Faulkner's own original group, the families first-established in Mississippi who were tough enough to survive the frontier and to make money as planters, merchants, bankers and lawyers; who transplanted from Virginia and the Carolinas the pretensions and institutions of those states.

At closer focus, Faulkner's society, again in line with Southern tradition, is family centred, and patriarchal. Within that intimate focus, family can transcend the race barrier. Faulkner's idea of family includes, and often dwells upon, its black members in a way that is not merely implicitly restitutorial but is projected, to quite an extent, as based also on mutual understanding, mutual acceptance of social tradition and mutual tolerance. It is as though, within the familial umbrella, if not without it, Faulkner feels able to articulate affection and trust between black and white; although it is also relevant that the projection of affection and trust notwithstanding, Faulkner's point of view is white and therefore limited. As far as his

portrayal of inter-race relationships in *The Reivers* is concerned this can be read as a kind of late, nostalgic apologia for the South, or, at least for a South. At its fullest extension, the idea of family in Faulkner is a strong and often destructive force, and up to a point, the decline of the South is defined by the aberrant members of its families. This is so in *Sartoris* (1929), set in 1919, and in *The Sound and the Fury* (1931), set in 1928. But by the time of writing *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), set in 1940, *The Town* (1957), set between 1908 and 1928, and *The Reivers* (1962), set in 1905, Faulkner is prepared to project, in young Charles Mallison and Lucius Priest 111 (the re-teller of Grandfather's tale), young Southerners growing up free from the burdens of the past. In the same way that Faulkner defines his family milieu by aberration in *The Sound and the Fury*, so he does with the community milieu in *Light in August*. All the main characters of *Light in August* are outsiders who the community keeps outside itself through its self-retrenching extremes of Calvinism, racial prejudice and sense of history.

Seemingly paradoxically, given the peculiar institutions and the extra-ordinary pretensions of the South, ordinariness is a significant characteristic of Faulkner's societies. Habits, mannerisms and routines of characters and communities are immediately recognizable by the reader as humanly commonplace: old Bayard's untidy desk in *Sartoris*, Dilsey humming in the kitchen in *The Sound and the Fury*, Harry Wilbourne's crouching sit on the edge of the bed in *The Wild Palms*, the tall convict's postured examining of his cigar in the same novel, and all of the milling, slow-moving crowd scenes. Where, however, Faulkner's characters are meant to be exceptional in an adverse way, they are often defined by one isolated feature: Popeye's rubber-eyes and Flem's bow ties set them apart from, for example, the very ordinary Horace Benbow and from the 'overalls'<sup>5</sup> of workaday Jefferson and Frenchman's Bend. Faulkner's



portrayals of ordinariness are important not only because they help to balance out what is extraordinary about the Southern social scenario, but because they seem to act as a kind of authorial plea for his humanity within and despite the extraordinariness. Ordinariness is projected as, on balance, more good than bad, and Faulkner's society and characters, with all their extraordinarinesses and aberrations, are richly underkeyed by it.

#### Action and Events:

This is a broad term encompassing action and events in the physical, temporal and social planes of the landscape. Action is quantifiable as solitary, group, cluster or crowd, and it is qualified by Faulkner's rendering of the scale and pace of movement, which varies considerably between novels and within individual novels. Generally speaking, even within the very different kinds of movement in the examples below, the actions of solitary and small groups of characters mark out some kind of limit or focal area of the landscape: Benjy's perambulations of the Compson fence in *The Sound and the Fury*, Young Bayard's wild driving on the Yoknapatawpha roads in *Sartoris*, Flem's slow overtaking of Frenchman's Bend in *The Hamlet*, Lena Grove's and Joe Christmas's travels, and Joe Christmas's local circuit in the later stages of *Light in August*, Harry's and Charlotte's elliptical journey, and that of the tall convict in *The Wild Palms*. Clusters of movement often express physical inaction and verbal circuitry, passing round the gossip, as do the men on numerous galleries, and in the tennis foursome in *Sartoris*. In *The Reivers*, however, the vibrancy of the cluster scenes enhances what is an already fast pace. Crowds, backed up by bovine imagery, usually mean slow thinking, slow moving but generally peaceful humanity. The crowd as a violent mob exists in *Intruder in the Dust* and other novels. Whether

peaceful or violent, something of an aura of suspicion always attaches to the crowd in Faulkner.

Faulkner's ways of rendering his action and events, taken in conjunction with the greater or lesser physical space in which he contains these, can alter or appear to alter, the pace at which the action proceeds. Frequent re-counting of events lends a kind of pulsating centrality to the reader's apprehension of the landscape. For example, in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*, place and pace conjoin in the fence that marks the outer perimeter of Benjy's clumsy physical, and seriously limited mental landscape. In the second section place and pace conjoin in the grounds within the fence, the location of Quentin's remembered frustration and anguish, and in the third section conjoin again within the house itself, in Jason's furious rampagings. The movement in this novel is centripetal and accelerating, but in *Light in August*, to give another example, the landscape is larger, movement centrifugal, and the pace much more even. Byron Bunch's cogitations help to keep the pace even, while Faulkner's narrative structures prevent any except localised acceleration, as in the posse incident. The centrifugality derives from repeated tellings of tales, for example that of Hightower. These go round and round, covering a little more ground each time. Simultaneously occurring actions in both *Sanctuary* and *Light in August* have the effect of densifying the action, while by an opposite token, in *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *A Fable*, digressions and flashbacks are so massive and so crucial to the dynamics of the whole landscape of the novel as to disrupt both forward flow and time scheme. The *in res medias* opening of "The Wild Palms" aside, the two stories each progress sequentially, but the alternating chapters force the reader to lurch from one landscape to the other until such time as he can create his own new integrated landscape. In relatively few of the



novels does the action flow forward with little interruption, two examples of which are *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Reivers*.

Values:

Because of their complexity and interrelatedness, and because of the shifting scales and degrees of moral value with which he works, Faulkner's value systems require wide definition. Included in the value systems are themes, universals, intertextual references of a religious or ethical nature, and biographical influences. While, arguably, Faulkner often works within a single guiding thematic notion - degeneration in *Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury*, corruption in *Sanctuary*, bigotry in *Light in August*, greed in *The Hamlet*, freedom in *The Wild Palms*, and so on - he allies to, or weaves in to that guiding thematic notion much other material of a thematic or ethical nature. He works with levels and layers of theme and ethic, and he is liable to use elements present in the reader's first, impressionistic landscape as theme densifiers. The reader who is in the process of quantifying his impressionistic landscape picks up impressions of the themes and values, of which there may be many, rather than the means by which they have been portrayed. *Sanctuary* is a good example of mixed strategies and thematic levels.

The tale, in *Sanctuary*, is about corruption and misjustice, about Lee Goodwin's appeal to Horace Benbow to defend him against a charge of murder and rape, and about Horace Benbow's failure to do that successfully. But tied up with that there is, on the one hand, Horace Benbow's profound, sincere sense of and feeling for justice, and on the other Horace Benbow's inability to put that sense and feeling into practice. Coming in on the misjustice from another angle, Faulkner surrounds his tale with other corruptions that impinge on the central misjustice of the trial - Narcissa is devious and hypocritical, Eustace Graham, the D.A., is a cheat,



Clarence Snopes bribes, Temple Drake is a liar and the big city bootleggers bring in their train prostitution and violence. All these corruptions leave Horace Benbow a sorry, isolated, valiant and defeated hero. Leading out from the central story to the secondary story of Horace Benbow's marital and sexual problems, Faulkner places Horace Benbow between two other, different kinds of corruption: his gone-to-seed marriage on the one side and his sexual feelings for his stepdaughter on the other. At a universal level, oppositions are struck between man and nature, between man and society, and between society and nature. Out of Jefferson's moral disarray, there is a mitigatory implication that the disarray is something of a season, with the transitoriness of a season, out of which things will return to a less extravagant, more humanly ordinary level of corruption.

All this is not just theme, but rather sets of values juxtaposed, interwoven, paralleled and underscored with and by each other. With *Sanctuary*, it is possible, as I have just done, to tell a thematic story, and it is possible to let the plethora of moral values swamp the reader's assimilation of the other aspects of the landscape, which in turn makes lopsided his picture of the whole: setting and timescale tend to be lost sight of (the timescale needs close attention anyway), and luridness masks all the counterbalancing marks of human ordinariness. This alone is a good reason for going through the exercise of identifying the elements of the impressionistic landscape.

In some of his novels, Faulkner injects a universalising agent, often in the closing stages, for example, The Player in *Sartoris* and *Sanctuary*, Virtue and Non-Virtue in *The Reivers*. In general, Faulkner's universalising agents are drawn much less frequently from the Christian God as from the physical elements, traditional abstract forces or quasi-

philosophical ideas. Across the general body of the novels, there is an overt and consistent objection to human injustice, a more uncertain, but nonetheless persistent questioning of traditional attitudes towards women, a determined engaging of the matter of the negro in Southern society, and always, a profound belief in man's ability to prevail, if not against, then within adversity. But because Faulkner tends to work with shifting scales and degrees of moral value, and because he tends to work, as it were, upwards from the negative side of his moral concepts, with the emphasis on the effort and the enduring rather than on outright success or outright failure, it is all too easy to label his novels as pessimistic.

There is nearly always success of sorts in Faulkner, even in the face of overt failure, as in *Sanctuary*. An easy success, to find one that never seems to be in any doubt, is Lena Grove's walk away from yet another (after *Sanctuary*) messy Jefferson. Another success, although scarcely easy, is Harry Wilbourne's moment of enlightenment at the end of *The Wild Palms*. Perhaps success is neither findable nor meant to be found in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but rather effort and enduring, in Thomas Sutpen's great and tragic, tunnel-visioned panorama of dynasty. The success or otherwise of Grandfather's moral tale in *The Reivers* lies in the future of young Lucius Priest 111, but from the boy's demeanour in his telling of the tale, it is reasonable to expect a fair measure of it.

Faulkner's moral vision ranges so widely and defines itself so closely and calls in so much that is humanly ordinary or naturally magnificent in support of itself - as indeed does Dickens's - that to confine it within traditional definitions of theme is not critically adequate. Because also



of his range of vision, the moods of Faulker's novels are influenced by the differing sets of values, so that mood becomes a nebulous mixture, in the major novels, of human folly in action, of sympathetic narratorial involvement and of cosmic authorial distance that yet has about it a quality of understanding.

### Approaching the Technical Strategies

The technical part of the critical method takes as its starting point the whole 'outer' physical text of the novel. The reader considers the layout of the text in terms of chapters, sections, paragraphs and spaces, and he looks for trends in the textual characters, for the presence and density of non-roman type, and for non-standard line lengths and punctuation. Consecutive pages without paragraphs and upper case characters deserve note, as do interleaved lines and passages in italics, and unpunctuated dialogue. If these departures from conventional textualizing do not tell us, at this stage, a great deal about the content, they serve to indicate an emphasis of some sort. It is interesting to note that Faulkner strove, within the limits of typesetting, to find ways of indicating a move into or out of a character's mind, or into or out of a temporal mode, and he would have used, if his publisher had allowed it, coloured inks.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes a relationship exists between the way the author has sectioned his text and the outline of the landscape. A glance at the textual layout of *A Fable* reveals chapters un-numbered but named in terms of one, or else three, days of the week, and some night-times. These are not necessarily consecutive but there is a general concatenating movement that appears to cover a one week period:

[Ch. 5]	[Ch.6]	[Ch. 7]
TUESDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY NIGHT
WEDNESDAY	WEDNESDAY	
	WEDNESDAY NIGHT	

The chapter headings operate as the very simple keys to a very complex set of narrative movements. And also, as the reader discovers, they act as subtext for Holy Week. In the case of *A Fable*, and also in *The Sound and the Fury*, the chapter headings are crucial to the reader's understanding of the author's organisation of the novel's time schemes. Other novels are merely chaptered by number and in these, with the notable exception of *Light in August*, the reader gains by reconsidering the titles of the novels themselves.

Next the reader looks to the major technical structures, to the narrative patterning, and the sequencing of events. The sequencing of events can have profound effects on the reader's perception of the landscape, as it does in *Light in August* and *The Wild Palms*. He looks for evidence of, to name some of the more easily seen narrative patterns, laterality, frame, episode or digression. For example, a small consideration of the text of *The Wild Palms* reveals the interleaved narrative structure. A scan across the first two and last two chapters of *Light in August* could suggest a frame structure in Chapters 1 and 21, and a scan of *Requiem for a Nun* reveals alternated prose and drama forms. Two sections of *As I Lay Dying* verify what the reader might suspect from the chapter headings, that Faulkner is making his textual structure point the way to his primary narrative technique in the novel, that of multiple narrators.

Where possible, for example at the beginnings of the novels, the reader considers also the role of the narrator, and his stance towards the



reader. In *The Town*, for example, the reader is being implicitly addressed by a companionable young I-figure. In *Sanctuary*, the meeting of two men is being described in terms of what each sees of the other. The first time reader of *The Sound and the Fury* is unlikely to know what to make of the very strange first person narrator. Nothing in the opening chapter of *Light in August* alerts the reader to a narrator manipulative of the reader himself.

Finally, the reader moves to the finer strategies and devices. These are placed last in this critical method for the reason that they do not usually come into significance until after the descriptive parameters and the larger technical elements have been established. Having said that however, I am aware that to appear to relegate any of Faulkner's devices to any kind of lesser place constitutes something of a folly, given that he is liable to turn some of them into major narrative structures. I think of the patterns of the characters' thinking in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* for example, that operate as keys to the landscapes of the novels, and the patterns of imagery in *Light in August*, which, taken in conjunction with the patterns of rhetoric, give on to, as I intend to show, an alternative and unconventional perception of the landscape. The reader is on the look-out for devices that contribute to or enhance the mode of telling, the narrative structures and the overall feel of the novel. To give a few of the less common, Faulkner leaves gaps in the telling (*Sanctuary*), he sets up parallels of situation or character in quite different orbits (*The Wild Palms*) and he uses descriptive elements as agents of the thematic systems. By this last device I mean the kind of scene that occurs at the end of *Sanctuary* in which Temple sits disconsolately in the Luxembourg Gardens contemplating her face in the mirror of her compact. The physical surrounding, the statues of the queens, the trees and the sky, function as an Olympian

perspective that implicitly contrasts with Temple's shallowness. All of these finer devices serve to enhance the reader's perception of the landscape and sometimes, as with Faulkner's use of the pivot in *Go Down, Moses*, these smaller devices are made to play important roles.

In all of the novels, the vivid pictures present within the impressionistic landscape are too many to evaluate in detail in this thesis. Two or three images from each novel are taken as starting points, and others that form linkages with the nuclear pictures are subsequently drawn into the discussions. An interesting aspect of the critical method has been found to concern the different ways in which, and the extent to which Faulkner's novels respond to or resist quantification in its terms.

## 2

### Faulkner's Build-up of the Yoknapatawpha Landscape

This section looks at the concept of the impressionistic landscape in relation to Faulkner's gradual defining and filling in of his Yoknapatawpha County across the body of the novels.

The fictional Yoknapatawpha takes its beginnings, as far as we know, from Sherwood Anderson's advice to Faulkner, in New Orleans in 1925. "You have to have somewhere to start from," Anderson told Faulkner, "You're a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi".<sup>7</sup> The fictional Jefferson of the novels closely resembles Faulkner's home town of Oxford. The northern boundary of Lafayette County, the Tallahatchie River, remains the same in the fiction, but in the south the factual Yocona River becomes the Yoknapatawpha. Despite



highways built in recent decades, some older roadways still exist and some of Faulkner's views of Oxford-Jefferson are still to be seen. Although it has been argued on the basis of some of Faulkner's statistical inaccuracies that Oxford is not Faulkner's Jefferson,<sup>8</sup> there seems to be no doubt that Faulkner's two maps of Yoknapatawpha County (the first drawn in 1936 for *Absalom, Absalom!* and the second in 1946 for the Viking Press *Portable Faulkner*) represent a geographical reality. As one proponent of Oxford as Jefferson, Calvin S. Brown, says,

Sometimes things said about Jefferson are not true of Oxford simply because the truth is not important for the novel and hence is not worth running down. Mink Snopes, returning to Jefferson in the fall of 1946, after thirty-eight years in the penitentiary, has learned that there have been no passenger trains through Jefferson since 1935...Faulkner is not a researcher...Hence there is no reason for him to check with the Illinois Central Railroad and to be reminded that passenger service through Oxford was actually discontinued on 16 August 1941.

There is one sense, however, in which it can be maintained and proved that Jefferson is Oxford and Yoknapatawpha County is Lafayette County. Faulkner habitually imagines his characters moving about the square and streets of Oxford and the roads, hills and swamps of Lafayette County. Since he often describes his settings in detail, it follows that anyone who knows the town and country well will frequently recognize these settings, especially if he has known the territory long enough to recall many features and landmarks now either obliterated or altered beyond recognition.<sup>9</sup>

In late 1926 and early 1927 Faulkner was working on two novels. Of these, "Father Abraham" remained unfinished, although Faulkner used much of it for his Snopes trilogy. The second was published as *Sartoris* in 1929. Writing in anticipation of the publication of both, Faulkner's friend, Phil Stone, said,

Both are Southern in setting. One is something of a saga of an extensive family connection of typical 'poor white trash'...The other is a tale of the aristocratic, chivalrous and ill-fated Sartoris family...Both are laid in Mississippi.<sup>10</sup>

In *Sartoris*, Faulkner draws a landscape reeking with old men's tales - and old ladies' - of the Civil War. The year is 1919, the land a land of large plantations and rougher hill farms. In the middle of the region lies the town of Jefferson from which dusty, hedgerow-ed dirt roads



radiate. Early in the novel, Faulkner focuses closely on the nature of the landscape. There are, we are told,

bordering gums and locusts and massed vines [and] fields new-broken or being broken spread[ing] on toward patches of woodland newly green and splashed with dogwood and judas trees. Behind laborious plows viscid shards of new-turned earth glinted damply in the sun.<sup>11</sup>

'This', the reader is informed,

was upland country, lying in tilted slopes against the unbroken blue of the hills, but soon the road descended sheerly into a valley of good broad fields richly somnolent in the leveling afternoon.

Whatever else lurks in the landscape of Faulkner's first Yoknapatawpha novel, and much does lurk, the place is beautiful, and from the care and detail of the description, also dearly loved. As the passage proceeds, two kinds of movement appear, that of automobiles that 'sped' and 'cluttered', and that of the horse that 'trotted'. The automobile that implies disturbance and disharmony contrasts with the horse that is explicitly linked to the land's 'changing and peaceful monotony'. These two movements work as a quiet precursory parallel for a play-off of two opposing forces in the novel's thematic systems, the destructive incursions of modernism and wilfully past-locked attitudes. Faulkner criticizes both forces, and he projects, finally, a moral stasis that rests uneasily over the changing and peaceful monotony.

The tendency to look back to the past appears again in the second Yoknapatawpha novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) (Yoknapatawpha has still not been so-named, but will be in the following novel, *As I Lay Dying*). This time Faulkner focuses on a single enclosed patch of land, on which stands an old house inhabited by one family, the Compsons. In the narrative present of 1928, the house is a memory-haunted place, and the remnants of the once affluent and still proud

family, resentful and locked into their memories of what once was and is not now, suffer. Faulkner writes into the physical landscape, in these first two Yoknapatawpha novels, contemporaneous tales of two families whose lineage goes back to settlement days in the 1800s. In so doing, he thrusts a long genealogical and historical line across the relatively confined landscapes of his narrative presents, thus creating a kind of space-time montage. Faulkner will create this kind of montage again and again, and from it the reader will learn to establish his bearings quickly in the landscape of the novel.

In the third novel, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Faulkner brings into focus an entirely different segment of the geographical and social landscape, from which, because there is no proud genealogy, the historical dimension is absent. The Bundren's part of Yoknapatawpha is not the rich flat land of the Sartoris plantation north and west of Jefferson, but the poorer, hillier, pine country to the south east. Here live tough independent yeomen farmers, and equally tough but much more vulnerable share-croppers, spread out from each other, yet united by toil, by Calvinism, and by the thin line between economic survival and disaster. (I am aware that the geography of *As I Lay Dying* is inconsistent with the other Yoknapatawpha novels,<sup>12</sup> but for my purpose in tracing the building up of the landscape, I do not think that this matters very much.) The people of the Frenchman's Bend region need to be astute, in their own way, and thrifty. To be not both is to court economic calamity. Journeys to anywhere are an undertaking, except for those of the doctor who, summoned only in extremity, goes everywhere. Anse Bundren's journey to Jefferson with the broken down equipment that he possesses, for the purpose of burying his wife, takes him along rougher roads than those of Sartoris. These are rain damaged mud roads that lead from one washed away or collapsed wooden bridge to another, and the Bundrens travel for a



whole week to get to Jefferson. So exceptional is journey-making of any sort that each Bundren attaches to this one a private ambition of his or her own. The various ambitions are unlikely to be typical of the community, since the Bundrens, in its eyes, constitute something of a feckless burden upon it, but they add a rough texture to the Yoknapatawpha landscape.

Around the time of writing *As I Lay Dying*, when the idea of Yoknapatawpha County was clearly taking shape in his mind, Faulkner also wrote some short stories about the Indian days of the County, before the influx of white settlers. Of the sources for the stories' Indian characters and activities, Faulkner would later say that he made them up.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the truth of this remark, not dissimilar tales must have been part of his oral heritage. They describe, in addition to dispossession, Indians corrupt among themselves, and Indians corrupted by the white man; not only the successful settlers owned slaves, but also some Indians. Even at this early stage of his career, and long before his explicit portrayal, in *Go Down, Moses*, of Yoknapatawpha as an Edenic land 'already tainted even before any white man owned it by what Grandfather and his kind...had brought into [it]',<sup>14</sup> Faulkner was clearly interested in, if he had not yet developed, two ideas: of Yoknapatawpha as a God given land, and of a mankind who inevitably spoiled things for himself. Yet, as we see from *Go Down, Moses*, he is also taken up with the idea of the occasional appearance of an 'untainted' man, a Sam Fathers who drew from his Indian and negro ancestors a pantheistic sense of the land, and an Ike McCaslin, who cast off a morally tainted inheritance, replaced it with values learned from Sam Fathers and lived by those values in the workaday social and economic Yoknapatawpha.



The town and community of Jefferson serves as the centre of Yoknapatawpha things, and the reader comes to know well its pretentiously portico-ed but typically Southern courthouse, its jail with the 'smell of creosote and excrement and stale vomit and incorrigibility and defiance and repudiation',<sup>15</sup> its central Square filled in the early days with horse-drawn or mule-drawn vehicles and later with cars, and every Saturday with people. Streets and corners and buildings become familiar by day and by night, as do the residential sections of the town, the higher parts where the white homes are, and the hollow where the negroes live. The reader knows the railway yard, the road and the path out to Joanna Burden's house, the sawmill where Byron Bunch worked, the shrub country where Joe Christmas hid out, and the view of the town from the point on the Frenchman's Bend road from which Lena Grove first saw it. Jefferson is a place of intense atmosphere, and for all that it is a fairly anonymous, small Southern town, it remains vividly in the reader's mind.

With the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936, with its appended map of the County, Faulkner laid official claim to his Yoknapatawpha. The land into which Thomas Sutpen rode one Sunday morning in June, 1833 was largely still virgin to the white man.<sup>16</sup> Sutpen bought one hundred square miles of it from the decamping Indians, recorded the deal in the log courthouse that the first arrivals' families had just built, and not long afterwards set about placing his own tremendous mark on the landscape, in the form of the pseudo classical mansion in which he would beget the children of his dream dynasty. The long, history-encompassing time setting offers texture enough to the Yoknapatawpha landscape, but when overlain with the scenes of a man in contention with the land and bent on founding a dynasty, and overlain again with the meeting of Rosa

Coldfield and Quentin Compson forty-three years after Thomas Sutpen's death, and Shreve's and Quentin's ('Shreve, the Canadian, the child of blizzard and of cold...Quentin, the Southerner, the morose and delicate offspring of rain and steamy heat'<sup>17</sup>) anguish-filled, painstaking look back into Sutpen's great yet terribly flawed dream, the time setting turns into a locus and repository for the whole South. If Faulkner's concentration on the past and the planter community in *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to distort the build-up of Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner remedies the imbalance when he turns to the rural community in *The Hamlet*. The physical, historical and cultural landscape of Yoknapatawpha is well established by now, but Faulkner reworks and augments aspects of it in all of the novels, so that the landscape is continually densifying in the reader's mind. From around this time, the late 1930s, with the exception of the non-Yoknapatawphan *The Wild Palms*, Faulkner begins to address contemporary social and moral issues.

Although not all Snopeses are destroyers, Faulkner's message for the Yoknapatawpha yeoman farmers of *The Hamlet* is, implicitly, and in the event uselessly, to wise up or be swallowed up. The share-cropping system had been in existence in Ante-bellum days, but during the Depression years, many yeomen farmers had been swallowed up, and far many more tenant farmers, as James Agee and others have shown, were in hopeless thrall to the system.<sup>18</sup> If Faulkner's whole psyche militated against not so much change itself as too great a rapidity of change, this is expressed in his 'thumb in the hole in the dam' approach to Snopesism in Yoknapatawpha. He never, fortunately, loses his sense of humour in articulating the mature Yoknapatawpha, and he never loses his gut belief in his characters' ability to physically endure and, at least spiritually prevail, over adverse circumstance. He looks to the younger generation of characters, to Chick Mallison for example, to do the holding back and



the considered advancing. The closer Faulkner inevitably comes, in his later writing, to the real life large scale unrest and change of the fifties and sixties, the less clear, also inevitably, becomes his ability to either round off Yoknapatawpha or to provide it with clear contemporaneous context. He did round it off, in a sense, with *The Reivers*.

## 3

## Accessibility

Faulkner's landscapes become familiar to the reader more easily than we might imagine, given the complexity of some of his technical strategies. Thinking about this process of becoming familiar, and making comparisons, one recognizes, with initial surprise, that the sense of familiarity that accrues from reading Faulkner does not accrue in reading, for example, Scott. Because Scott's homeland is also mine, his landscapes are topographically familiar (except in those places where, as in North Mississippi, Progress or social need has changed them) but I do not identify with his fictional world, nor feel at home in it. It is not the difference of time and cultural epoch that fails me with Scott - the poetry of Burns from the same approximate period strikes piquantly homely notes - but rather the combination of his romantic distancing with his arguably stodgy style. (I do not decry Scott. I like Scott for qualities that have no relevance here, and I use him simply to make a point about Faulkner.) Faulkner is just as capable of romanticizing as Scott is, as we know from *Sartoris*, but despite the differences of time and culture as well as topography in *Sartoris*, the world of the novel seems familiar; this because Faulkner identifies with the soil and



community of Yoknapatawpha, as Burns does with the soil and community of lowland Scotland; and Faulkner's *Mankind*, like Burns's, is largely formed by or attuned to the land. The reader enters Faulkner's South with relative ease because he recognizes, among the violence and bigotry and racism, small details of universal human behaviour. Faulkner projects his South as a good place to be in, in the being in it, except for sometimes. His better humanity is aware of and even actually strives for better things, like justice. His Snopeses take, by threat or trickery. The rest behave with familiar ordinariness: well, wisely and unwisely, and badly.

In some of the novels, *Sartoris* and *The Town* for example, the reader slips into the landscape in the opening paragraphs. In *Sartoris*, the reader comes upon an old man who has 'walked the three miles in from the county Poor Farm'.<sup>19</sup> Not *walked three miles*, we note, but *walked the three miles*, and he has walked *in*. We are assumed to know about these three miles, as though we too can visualize the landscape of the walk and the old man in it, approaching the *in*, the centre of things, where we, along with the general world, are. We have not been so much as beckoned, let alone summoned, yet we are *in*. The old man, of course, has brought a very strange thing with him, 'the spirit of the dead man'. We would cope with that by suspending disbelief, but we cope easily because we are not only in, but also privileged. We, but - naturally - not the general population of Jefferson, enter the private room in the bank and we witness the meeting, 'in *that* room' [my emphasis], of two old men and a ghost. We are even further privileged by the implicit assumption that we too, along with the narrator, view the entire scene as an unremarkable event. By the end of the first paragraph, we have a firm sense of place in the landscape of the novel, even if we do not yet know much about it.

The reader's entry into the world of *The Town* is quite different, but here too he feels a sense of place, this time because he is more or less given one. In the opening paragraph, the reader is being greeted, as a stranger, by an amiable 'I' figure who is presumably the Charles Mallison of the chapter heading, who very much wants to put us in his family picture. A thoroughly un-lucid picture it is too, with its generations of 'cousins' and an event that is 'it' and a location that is 'there'. We latch on to the hard fact in the middle of the paragraph, that Cousin Gowan was thirteen when 'it' happened, and there we have a starting point on a kind of time-and-event grid. But all in all, we feel that if these relations are as outgoing as eager young Charles, we should not have too much trouble finding our way about.

*Sartoris* absorbs and *The Town* beckons the reader into the world of the novel in the first paragraphs. Other novels do neither, and in some of these Faulkner leaves the reader to struggle, embattled, among technical innovations. Novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example, attract with the attraction of an adventure. The technical country is difficult and there is neither subtle narrator nor tenderfoot scout as guide. The reader must energize his or her own powers of mind and imagination, and move from a passive mode of approach to an active. At worst, sheer irritation pushes the reader forward.

No hint exists in *Sartoris* of the new ways of reading required for the next published novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner simply dumps the responsibility for finding them on to the reader and the expectant unwary reader, fresh from *Sartoris* or not, finds little enough to see and a great deal to frustrate his powers of seeing. There is an 'I' figure watching other figures 'hitting'. There is a removable 'flag', a 'table',



more 'hitting', and a moving on by the figures doing the hitting.<sup>20</sup> Not telling us that we are simply watching golf operates as a construct, an authorial strategy for telling.\* The author's 'I' figure does not tell because he cannot constitute the elements of golf. But we know that many two-year-olds can constitute the elements of golf. Our half-constituted realisation that the 'I' narrator is some kind of two or three or four year old is partly confirmed in the next few lines by 'Luster':

"Ain't you something, thirty-three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake, Hush up that moaning."

The 'I' figure's age is stated, the going to town to get a cake would fit the interests of a two year old and the injunction to 'Hush up' implies some kind of authority on the part of the Luster-speaker. The final and crucial constitutive element, which is blatantly present in the first spoken words of the novel, 'Here, caddie', is unavailable to the reader because he does not yet know that caddie is also the name for Benjy's much loved, long gone sister. In the same way that Benjy's inadequate mind denies him the power to constitute the game of golf out of the elements of *hitting*, *flag* and *table*, Faulkner's 'malformed' elements of information deny the reader the power to constitute a full picture of Benjy. By placing character and reader in the same position in these first fourteen lines, Faulkner simultaneously sets out his primary mode of telling, and teaches the reader to learn by his own experience. Benjy's world works for him through memories associated with and triggered off by artifacts in the landscape. The reader must learn to recognize these triggers.

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\* My approach to the first pages of *The Sound and the Fury* is based on the chapter on the novel in Arthur Kinney, *Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1978).



Another novel, *Light in August*, has teased and troubled its critics and interpreters. The key for the way into this novel, however, does not lie in the first pages of the novel, yet a key exists. As we saw above, the way into *The Sound and the Fury* derives from Faulkner's model of the associative thinking of a limited mind. For the interpretation of *Light in August* offered here, the way into the novel derives from the tendency of characters to misperceive, that is to say, to think only what they want to think, filter out what they do not want to think, or augment what they think in accordance with what they would like to think. For example, the citizens assume that Joanna Burden has been murdered and raped by a negro because it is part of their mythology that negro men want to rape white women. Joanna Burden cannot see that her views on negroes are segregationist. Gavin Stevens cannot see that his theory of blood is racist, and Hightower does not want to see that his reasons for coming to Jefferson are false to his vocation. It is somewhat as Byron Bunch muses: 'The town had had the habit of saying things about the disgraced minister which they did not believe themselves for too long a time to break themselves of it' (p.57). We think in accordance with our habits of thinking, we respond to our own patterns. If we think, for example, that *Light in August* is a novel deploring the plight of the man of mixed blood, we read it as such, and are not wrong. But if the notion of anyone in the South in 1932 writing a novel on the theme of the man beyond race lies outwith our habits of thinking, and even outwith our range of conceptions altogether, we do not find that theme in the book. I am suggesting here that Faulkner projects Joe Christmas as a man who, unlike everybody else in the novel, is capable of thinking, and who does in fact think, and act upon the thought, of himself as a human being first, and as a man of mixed blood second. The textual back-up for this interpretation of the novel comes from Chapter 20, and more circumstantial evidence from Faulkner's structuring and locating of some

passages, and from his use of black and white imagery. My reading will be explicated in detail in Chapter 5.

With *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader is forced to slow down his pace of reading but with *Absalom, Absalom!*, the opposite is required. The galloping speed at which the reader must take the opening paragraphs if he is to hold in his mind the complex flow of images operates as a kind of template for the speed and complexity of the whole novel. In the first two paragraphs of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the reader enters, as an observer, upon a singularly still scene. Faulkner's technique is cinematographic and Ibsen-like, with a room wall implicitly removed, and with the placed and detailed arrangement of the chair in which Miss Coldfield sits, the drawn blinds, and the dust motes. Such a room is firmly there, and not mirage-like in the heat, but the reader is not in it, privileged, with the rest of the world outside, as he is in *Sartoris*. Rather, it is as if the reader were integral with the pre-defined time span, 'From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown', and the atmosphere of the 'still hot weary dead September afternoon'.<sup>21</sup> The room is as hot and still as the afternoon and one of the figures is as dominating as the heat yet as small as a child. Within the room's stillness and heat, the narrator's voice races through the first paragraph and a half, pushing in clause after clause and evoking in vivid phrases Rosa Coldfield's 'grim haggard amazed' voice and her forty-three years of 'indomitable frustration', as if hurrying to complete this tight, compacted scene before Quentin Compson's imagination impresses another scene, which is mirage-like, upon it. The reader's reading speed and his powers of assimilation must rise to a gallop to match the narrator's telling speed, so that, in a way, the exercise of reading *Absalom, Absalom!* becomes a challenge and steeple-chase between author and reader; and if the end result is a sense



of exhilaration and triumph in the reader, we might well argue that the author has won.

From these examples, we see that Faulkner's readers, in entering the landscapes of his novels, need to be prepared to be flexible. In the re-reading, the reader does well to remind himself of the pace and style of narration of the opening paragraphs. From this point, the novice reader moves forwards by recognizing the signposts that Faulkner provides, but the connoisseur's instinctive understanding of the described landscape of the novels, accruing out of long-term familiarity, permits him a different set of views and prospects.

Perhaps *Go Down, Moses*, by itself, offers a fine, compressed example of the kind of accumulating awareness and compacted levels of understanding that comes from reading the body of novels. In that novel, Faulkner builds up a vast base landscape out of a series of space-time-action montages in which physical space is the one consistent element. If, cinematographically, we might think in terms of 'seeing' time, we find that it is the mighty time span conjoined with the relatively small physical space that makes the landscape vast. Alan Spiegel describes this process, albeit on a very much smaller scale and with reference to Joyce when he says:

A temporalized space is 'alive' as process, developing, changing, infinitely flexible, quick with advances and recessions, expansions and contractions, openings and closings, accumulations and dissolutions.<sup>22</sup>

Time is history and change in *Go Down, Moses* and these are exteriorized and focused in the McCaslin family whose generational (time) and contemporaneous (place) parameters parallel the time-space base landscape. The reader accumulates understanding from bright cameos of action temporalized in the physical space of McCaslin Yoknapatawpha,



through all of which run common factors. These common factors are multi-dimensional, from the simple motif of the hunt, through aspects of family to inter-connected moral absolutes of possession, loss, regeneration and renunciation. Faulkner reworks and pivots these common factors across each of the seven stories that compose the novel, in the course of assimilating which the reader cannot but accumulate an impressionistic landscape that is at once profoundly redolent of the whole of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha South, and in its bright, totally different cameos, crystal clear.

## Footnotes for Chapter 1

1. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, edited by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p.205.
2. Stephenson and Debrix, *Cinema as Art*, pp. 132-136; quoted in Alan Speigel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p.170.
3. William Faulkner, *Light in August*, first pub. Smith and Haas (New York), 1932; this ed. (London: Picador Classics, 1991), p.8.
4. Malcolm Cowley, *The Portable Faulkner*, first pub. Viking Press (New York), 1946; this ed. (1974), Introduction, xii.
5. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York), 1930; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1984), p.232.
6. Joseph Blotner, *William Faulkner: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p.586.  
*Lion in the Garden*, p.147.
7. William Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, edited by James B. Meriwether (New York: Random House, 1965), p.8.
8. G.T. Buckley, 'Is Oxford the Original of Jefferson in William Faulkner's Novels?', *PMLA*, 76 (1961), 447-454.
9. Calvin S. Brown, 'Faulkner's Geography and Topography', *PMLA*, 77 (1962), 652-659.
10. James B. Meriwether, 'Sartoris and Snopes: An Early Notice', *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas*, 7 (1962), 37; quoted in Martin Kreiswith, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Novelist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p.100.
11. William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, first pub. Harcourt Brace (New York), 1929; this ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p.6.
12. Calvin S. Brown, *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 234-236.
13. *A Glossary of Faulkner's South*, p.5.  
Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 419 fn.

14. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1942; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1982) p.197.
15. William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* first pub. Random House (New York) 1948; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1984) p.55.
16. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, first pub. Random House (New York) 1936; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980) p.8.
17. Ibid. p.286.
18. James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*; this edition (London: Picador, 1988).
19. *Sartoris*, p.1
20. *The Sound and the Fury*, p.1
21. *Absalom, Absalom!*, p.5.
22. Alan Speigel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), p.165.



Chapter 2

*Sartoris*

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In the first battle of Manassas, the second Mississippi played a prominent part. Under the command of Col. Falkner they were in the thickest of the fight...General Beauregard asked, "who is the knight with the black plume? Men you may follow where he leads," and...thus Col Falkner earned this honorable soubriquet.

The following dispatch was sent to a Mississippi paper at the close of the battle by a spectator: "A Mississippi Regiment covered itself with glory...Col. Falkner of 2nd Mississippi Regiment, charged and took four pieces of Sherman's battery. His loss was a hundred killed and wounded." <sup>1</sup>

Faulkner returned from New Orleans and Europe in late 1926 and set about making good Sherwood Anderson's advice to go home and write what he knew about. What he knew about was his own family history, and what else he found he 'created out of tales...learned of nigger cooks and stable boys'.<sup>2</sup> The novel he wrote he called *Flags in the Dust*, which ran to three hundred and seventy pages, and was not accepted for publication. With Faulkner's permission, large chunks of text were cut and re-arranged by his friend Ben Wasson. These changes, and the new title of *Sartoris* had the effect of shifting the emphases: 'whereas *Sartoris* is chiefly about the Sartoris clan...*Flags in the Dust* is far more complicated: primary focus is still on the Sartorises, but Faulkner clearly wished to make of his novel an anatomy of the entire Yoknapatawpha social structure, excluding only the Indians'.<sup>3</sup>

*Sartoris* was finally published in 1929, followed closely by *The Sound and the Fury*, also in 1929. The "Father Abraham" material, the genesis of the Snopes novels, lay unfinished. The original first of the Yoknapatawpha novels, *Flags in the Dust*, was published eleven years after Faulkner's death, in 1973.

### The Impressionistic Landscape

In *Sartoris*, physical place is so much bound up with different dimensions of time that it is at once simpler and more appropriate to the novel's past-present dichotomy to describe physical place in terms of time. Probably the only factors of place not allied to time are raw physical distances. The Sartoris mansion is four miles from town (Jefferson, not so-named in this novel), and seventy-five from Memphis.<sup>4</sup>

Simon drives from Sartoris to the bank with the carriage and horses to pick up old Bayard. Old Bayard leaves the bank after it has closed (p.3). 'Toward the middle of the afternoon', (p.35) the old dog quits the 'cool dusty obscurity beneath the kitchen' and goes to wait for the carriage to come up the drive. On the journey, old Bayard travels as much through yet another dimension of time as through geographical space, 'across burgeoning countryside' and 'changing and peaceful monotony' (p.4). It is therefore springtime at the beginning of the novel. In contrast to the slow pace of old Bayard's day, automobiles speed 'back and forth' in town, and 'clutter' the countryside. Young Bayard Sartoris will shortly be one of these 'gasoline-propelled paupers' (p.4), as old Bayard calls them. Young Bayard drives his car from Memphis in 'an hour and forty minutes', and would have done so in less time had it not been that 'some of the road was clay country road' (p.77). The roadways of Yoknapatawpha and an automobile eventually take young Bayard on a prolonged and finally fatal journey to cities across America. As a dimension of both place and time, speed is an integral factor in relation to young Bayard, but speed is also violence. Periods of hiatus



occur, but these are untrustworthy things, and the precursors of more violence.

Remembered time cuts deeply into the factor of place. The Sartoris mansion itself goes back beyond the Civil War 'day long ago' when 'a Yankee Patrol...halted' by the 'bed of salvia' (p.6). Rooms in the mansion, the office in the bank, the cemetery and the statue of John Sartoris all function more strongly as elements of time than they do of place. The spirit and characters of times past invade times present. Time extends backwards from the narrative present in generations and epochs of Sartoris, past re-building during Reconstruction, past valour and defeat in 1861-64, past romance and glamour in the Ante-bellum decades, and far back to the tales of the family's beginnings. The epochs of Sartorises represent Faulkner's collective myth of the Southern past, which forms a looming background to the foreground of a contemporaneous unsettled post World War 1 present. In his few months at home after serving in France, young Bayard dishonours the past and wreaks havoc with the present.

Society in *Sartoris* consists of the old established Sartorises and Benbows, and the nouveau riche Mitchells, in a world that is marked by post World War 1 materialism. Within this group, there is a separate female society. The negroes function as a sub-society in their own right, but also as a foil for the white groups, while the MacCallums, as independent, successful hill farmers complement yet also contrast with the Sartorises. The crowds in Jefferson town and the patrons of the San Francisco dance hall work principally as backgrounds highlighting the emotional state of young Bayard.

Action and events in the narrative present fall into two main categories, group and solitary. Sartorises generally, except Miss Jenny and Colonel John Sartoris in his time, engage in solitary activities, for example, old Bayard in the attic, and young Bayard in his bedroom and in the jail. Most of young Bayard's social activities involve his car, and all of these are disasters. The Mitchells are brash, trendy party-givers. Of the Benbows, Horace gravitates towards the Mitchells and marries Belle, and Narcissa towards the Sartorises, to marry young Bayard. Stories of episodes in the past strongly influence Sartoris attitudes in the present.

The prevailing moral characteristic displayed by the Sartorises is a flamboyant pride, and by the Mitchells, flamboyant materialism. A sense of disenchantment with contemporary society underkeys the narrative present, while the glamorous exploits and ambitions of great-grandfather John Sartoris dominate it. In so far as it serves as an inalienable criterion, the Southern past works as a universalizing agent, although in the final pages Faulkner incorporates an external figure, greater even than Sartorises, in the form of Player and the 'game' of Sartoris.

Nine vivid pictures impress themselves on this reader's mind: John Sartoris's seeming to loom above and about old Bayard (p.1), the ladies leaving Belle Mitchell's afternoon tea party (p.29), the appearance of young Bayard from the lilac bushes in the moonlight (p.43), old Bayard opening the chest in the attic (p.90), young Bayard in the jail-keeper's bed in the moonlight (p.160), the conversation at the tennis court (p.185), young Bayard in the night at the MacCallums (p. 322), the San Francisco dance hall (p.359). Two aspects of the landscape are considered in detail in Section 3: Colonel John Sartoris as Environment, and Young Bayard Sartoris.



## Technical Strategies

From the physical layout of *Sartoris*, we note that the text is partitioned conventionally enough. There are five Parts, so-named, each internally sectioned by number and sub-sectioned by spaces. The first and fifth Parts are shorter than the central three. A closer scan of these two sections reveals that it is springtime at the beginning of each of them, May 1919 and May 1920, and then June at the end of Part 5. If the events of the narrative present take place between those dates, which they do, these are contained within the larger second, third and fourth Parts. The *Sartoris* Past, however, is called up in all five Parts, so that we may assume a relative importance.

In considering the larger elements of the novel's construction, the reader needs to be aware that in the course of Ben Wasson's cutting of the manuscript of *Flags in the Dust* considerable changes were made. Too much narrative material existed in the original, and despite the excision of about a quarter of the original text, too much still remains.<sup>5</sup> Out went a good deal of Faulkner's concentrated character balancing of young Bayard Sartoris and Horace Benbow, and nearly all of the material dealing with Horace's incestuous feelings for Narcissa. In the architectonics of the original narrative, this was sound enough middle-weight, sub-plot material. With the excisions, what is left of the character balancing - and certainly the incest - is untidily patched in to the narrative and in danger of getting lost among the excess of undeveloped, light-weight, plot material. The result is to give an unsettling imbalance to the narrative. Nevertheless, the restructuring gives us one of Faulkner's best openings.



The narrative movement of the novel is lateral in so far as the story is underkeyed by the sequence of the seasons and follows the period of time between young Bayard's arrival home and his death. Set into the lateral narrative, there exist a number of stories about the activities of Sartoris forebears, all of which act as time-laden and epoch-laden commentaries on Sartorises in general and the character of young Bayard in particular. Reaching across the story of the Sartorises are the twin axes of two time-separated wars, the Civil War and World War 1. The war of the Past shadows the war of the present, and the conduct and demeanour of the characters of the first underwrite the conduct and demeanour of characters of the second. Within these broad parameters, Faulkner works with three sets of juxtapositions: of times past with times present, of young Bayard Sartoris with his great-grandfather, Colonel John Sartoris, and of the two World War 1 repatriates, young Bayard and Horace Benbow, with each other and with the society to which they both belong. Two of the novel's episodes, the card party and the tennis party, describe the general tenor of the modern post-war world while another, the San Francisco dance hall, functions as a vivid and concrete statement about the moral state of young Bayard. Young Bayard's stay at the MacCallums is an episode in his life story, but the MacCallums as a unit stand as a kind of alter-family, in apposition to things Sartoris. Flashbacks in the memories of characters function, in the case of young Bayard in the scenes of the burning of young John's things and in the night at the MacCallums, to inform the reader, but not the other characters, of young Bayard's inner grief. Other flashbacks, like the scene of old Bayard in the attic, function to enhance the reader's picture of the family and times of Sartoris, and to fill out the character of old Bayard. To summarise the narrative structures, Faulkner uses a lateral plot that includes deep and seminal forays into the Past. The dimension of the Past overshadows that of the Present. Episodes in the narrative present

highlight the weakened moral fibre and the psychological distress of the chief character, young Bayard Sartoris.

By comparison with later narratorial roles, that of the narrator of *Sartoris* is relatively straightforward; his various stances towards the characters emerge principally through the styles, tones and imagery of the language with which he surrounds them. The narrator is a third person speaker, but he is not an objective figure. In the way that he shifts his tone of voice and his style of language, he either demotes the character he is describing or, where a character is telling a story, his flanking remark remarks undercut the character's point of view. There is a significant exception to the narrator's undercutting of the characters: he does not undercut old Bayard Sartoris, but supports him not only by absence of undercutting but by the quiet positiveness of the language. In general, the novel contains very little symbolism, and none of the densely figurative patterning that marks, for example, *Light in August* and *Go Down, Moses*.

## 3

## Vivid Pictures 1

## Colonel John Sartoris as Environment

...John Sartoris seemed to loom still in the room, above and about his son, with his bearded, hawklike face, so that as old Bayard sat with his crossed feet propped against the corner of the cold hearth, holding the pipe in his hand, it seemed to him that he could hear his father's breathing even.

p. 1-2



This part-sentence comes from the second paragraph of the novel and its power derives not only from the grand cadences with which it closes (the sentence is quoted in full on page 41 below), but also from the descriptive vocabulary. Assonance in *loom* and *room*, and the two groups of consonance in *seemed, loom, room* and *loom, still*, have the effect of heightening John Sartoris's lingering ghostliness, while the adjectives ascribed to the face, *bearded* and *hawklike* bring the Sartoris features into sharp relief. At the same time, John's ghostly omnipresence is counterbalanced and faintly diminished by old Bayard's casual posture, and by the crispness inherent in the three words Faulkner uses to describe that posture, *crossed feet propped*. The whole image represents less a difference between Sartorises - although it is also that - as an initial calibrating of two types of Sartoris; the one portraying a certain arrogant authority, the other a definite imperturbability.

Faulkner expends more energy on the character of Colonel John Sartoris than he does on either old Bayard or any other Sartoris, for the reason that John is the principal figure against which young Bayard is measured. But from the older Sartorises, dead and alive, collectively, Colonel John, old Bayard, the Carolina Bayard and Miss Jenny, there emanates an aura of pride and stubborn remembering of a past way of life. The evocation of John Sartoris begins with the first paragraph of the novel, and develops through the following three paragraphs.

With the opening phrase, the reader prepares for a customary action, 'As usual...'. As it happens, there are two actions, both of which attach to the subject of the sentence, old man Falls. Old man Falls 'had brought' John Sartoris and 'had walked...in from the county Poor Farm'. Since the primary focus is on old man Falls, and since the feat of the walking is more interesting than the bringing in of somebody else, we



pass over John Sartoris for the moment. By the end of the sentence, however, the focus will have shifted to John Sartoris.

As usual, old man Falls had brought John Sartoris into the room with him, had walked the three miles in from the county Poor Farm, fetching, like an odour, like the clean dusty smell of his faded overalls, the spirit of the dead man into that room where the dead man's son sat and where the two of them, pauper and banker, would sit for half an hour in the company of him who had passed beyond death and returned.

After its opening announcement, the sentence continues with old man Falls as its ostensible subject, but with the isolated participle *fetching*, Faulkner shifts to a present tense that begins to draw John Sartoris in from the periphery of the picture. *Fetching* repeats *had brought*, but with stronger meaning, and it is separated from its object in the sentence by a double simile that subtly colours and directs the reader's apprehension of the object, *the spirit of the dead man*, when it comes. John Sartoris is fetched in *like an odour, like the clean dusty smell of...faded overalls*. As an odour is an unseen presence, so also is John Sartoris and as the clean, dusty smell of the overalls carries with it connotations of ordinariness, so the reader is led to view this ghostly manifestation in the same light. At the same time, Faulkner's ascription of slightly elevated language to a mere insubstantial ghost might point to the stature of the man when alive, and to the pervasiveness of his spirit when dead.

In the second paragraph, Faulkner expands upon John Sartoris's stature and pervasiveness by comparing and contrasting his ghostly presence with the two old men.

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

deafness to a dead period and so drawn thin by the slow attenuation of days; even now, although old man Falls had departed...John Sartoris seemed to loom still in the room, above and about his son, with his bearded, hawklike face, so that as old Bayard sat... holding the pipe in his hand, it seemed to him that he could hear his father's breathing even, as though that other were so much more palpable than mere transiently articulated clay as to even penetrate into the uttermost citadel of silence in which his son lived.

Faulkner enhances the ghost by reducing the two old men. He widens the angle of perspective suddenly - *people in the adjoining stores on either side* - and shows the old men juxtaposed with the outside world, for whom they signify no more than *an indistinguishable uproar*. Then, using the powerfully expressive verb *cemented* to tie them to their physical deafness of the flesh and to their mental orientation to a *dead period of time*, he sets John Sartoris's freedom from the confinements of flesh and time side by side with the old men's manifest subjection to them. The close juxtaposition of the two words *palpable*, used of John Sartoris who is dead, and *cemented*, used of the two who are alive, has the effect of pushing the reader into acceptance of an odd concept - that spirit has more substance than cement.\*

In the third of the opening paragraphs, these ideas are developed, but there creeps in to the passage, through a subtle opposition between the

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\* If the pipe were made of clay, which as far as I have been able to determine is unlikely, a further development of Faulkner's sharpening of the figure of John Sartoris can be extracted from the end of the paragraph. With old man Falls gone, the narrator dwells upon the continuing presence of John Sartoris by bringing his face into focus as *bearded* and *hawklike*. He takes the reader into old Bayard's consciousness, where another comparison is set up, this time between degrees of materiality, or perhaps immateriality: the clay pipe and its associated memories appear to old Bayard to be less substantial than his father's breathing, *as though that other were so much more palpable than mere transiently articulated clay*. At the same time, there is a muted bending of this comparison between the pipe memories and John Sartoris's breathing, away from its association with degrees of materiality and towards a different cluster of concepts, of mortality, death and immortality. As clay is associated with mortality as well as with pipes, so the *uttermost citadel of silence* in which old Bayard lives resembles, in a sense, the impregnable fortress of death. Through the memories that are infused in the clay pipe and the breathing that seems to penetrate old Bayard's deafness, John Sartoris is made to seem to be able to surmount mortality. He has become not only a pervasive spirit and a vivid memory, but a powerful and enduring force.



elevated tone of the language and the alternative meanings of the words themselves, an element that might - at this stage, only might - be irony.

The bowl of the pipe was ornately carved, and it was charred with much usage, and on the bit were the prints of his father's teeth, where he had left the very print of his *ineradicable bones* as though in enduring stone, like the creatures of that prehistoric day that were too grandly conceived and executed either to exist very long or to vanish utterly when dead from an earth shaped and furnished for punier things. Old Bayard sat holding the pipe in his hand.

The narrator's voice hovers on the edge of old Bayard's musing thinking. But the words that make up the majestic cadences of phrases like *ineradicable bones* and *enduring stone*, can denote, as well as everlastingness, the highly reductive idea of fossil. This idea of fossil that is couched in the flowing language that has been used up to this point only of John Sartoris, is brought to the forefront of the sentence in the simile connected with the teeth marks, *like the creatures of that prehistoric day*. The notion is then blazoned into grand prominence in the heady language of the clauses extending from *creatures...that were too grandly conceived and executed either to exist very long or to vanish utterly...from an earth shaped...for punier things*. The train of associations that derives from and returns to the pipe impresses the reader with new and possibly conflicting impressions of John Sartoris: as the teethmarks are like fossil imprints, so by implication are the *creatures too grandly conceived* like him. The reader does not know whether the analogy is good or bad, only that as the prehistoric creatures were too big for the little earth, so in ways unrevealed might John Sartoris have been. The possibility is lightly accentuated - lightly because it is cast in dialect that in the context of the passage may be construed as the opposite of 'heavyweight' rhetorical language - in old Bayard's remembering of old man Falls's remark about John Sartoris's pipe, 'A po'house ain't no fitten place for anything of his'n, Bayard.'



Faulkner is approximately one page into his text at this point yet he has introduced a complex set of motifs linked to an exciting past, and possibly also to the ideas of decline and degeneration. Six pages on, the eighty-year-old Miss Jenny casts an impossibly glamorous light on the exploits of dead Sartoris. The narrator, however, becomes much less invisible in these scenes, and he plays a devious role. The reader begins to become aware that this figure has views of his own that do not necessarily accord with those of his characters.

As Miss Jenny begins her story, Faulkner draws the narrator out of straightforward objective reporting, making him forewarn the reader that Miss Jenny's picture is romanticized: 'the tale itself grew richer and richer, taking on a mellow splendour like wine' (p.9). In giving this warning, the narrator seems to be shifting his stance slightly. He is no longer commenting unobtrusively on the private attitudes of two old men, but appears to be deliberately stepping back from any association with Miss Jenny's tale. He calls it a 'hair-brained prank' and endows his own precursory version of it with a somewhat two-edged medievalism:

his high-coloured face [the Carolina Bayard of Miss Jenny's tale, John Sartoris's younger brother] wore that expression of frank and high-hearted dullness which you imagine Richard First as wearing before he went Crusading (p.9)

and with an ironic classicism:

Stuart at thirty and Bayard Sartoris at twenty-three stood briefly like two flaming stars garlanded with Fame's burgeoning laurel and the myrtle and roses of Death (p.10).

Between the bits of medievalism and classicism, moreover, the narrator injects a small tale of his own about the Carolina Bayard, about the fox hunt that rampages through the Methodist revival meeting. The tale is funny in the mode of telling, but speaks of cavalier arrogance in the act. At this stage, the narrator might be doing no more than adding some

spice to the glamorous name of Sartoris, but he might be also moving towards disassociation. Miss Jenny's story is an oft repeated tale of gallantry and death and honour, but it is a tale rooted in a quest for coffee and a sudden belly notion for anchovies, not in war, or even in the South's vision of its way of life, so that for all the language of chivalry, it contains an inherent bathos, and the death of the Sartoris concerned stems not from an act of valour but from a stupid escapade. At the end of the story, the image of the bearded, hawklike John Sartoris remains as yet untarnished, but it is now accompanied by another Sartoris in whom is invested glamour, folly and death.

At this stage in the novel, the chief character of the narrative present, young Bayard, has been talked about in the passing, but not shown. He is not to appear until after a third view of the family past, by which time the reader has a number of varied and conflicting impressions of Sartorises, dead and alive. The third evocation comes from stories told by the old man seen in the opening paragraph walking in from the Poor Farm, old man Falls. In these passages, Faulkner implicitly reduces John Sartoris by weakening the credibility of old man Falls. There is also, in old Bayard's irritation at hearing the stories for the umpteenth time, a further hint of disassociation. The stories are being recalled in old Bayard's mind, so that old man Falls's voice is allowed to run on without interruption. In a passage of dialogue much later in the novel, however, old Bayard is to challenge old man Falls's uncritical point of view, 'you damn fellers quit fighting and went home too often' (p.223), and in summarising the same passage, the narrator also implicitly demotes old man Falls, 'his voice trailed away among ancient phantoms...in those regions of glamorous and useless striving where such ghosts abide' (p.223).



Old man Falls tells two tales about Colonel John Sartoris (pp.20-23). Although both of these read with the verve and the detail of first hand accounts, the first, because of giveaway phrases like 'Cunnel says...' and the impossibility of old man Falls's having been present throughout John Sartoris's escape from the Yankees, is not. Rather, it is an episode recounted to old man Falls by John Sartoris and recounted in a way that reveals something of John Sartoris himself. Old man Falls's first story of John Sartoris's outwitting of the Yankee patrol is undoubtedly one of cool courage, but it is tinged with showmanship too, and it skips over the bravery of the then fourteen year old Old Bayard. The second story has to do with John Sartoris's building of his railroad and his killing of the carpet-baggers.\* The manner of old man Falls's telling establishes him as someone for whom John Sartoris can do no wrong, whose adoration of him transcends both discretion and moral judgement. The nearest he can come to censuring John Sartoris is to say, 'when a feller has to start killin' folks, he 'most always has to keep on killin' 'em'. Taking over from old man Falls, the narrator gives an account of the violent death of John Sartoris. As before, the language used of him is heightened, but this time it is heightened to a reductive melodrama: 'and doom lay on his brow, and weariness' (p.23).

The reader is only twenty-three pages into the book at this point, yet in these twenty-three pages Faulkner has evoked a powerful and detailed picture of the past, and invested it in the figures of John and (Carolina)

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\* Calvin Burden 1 and Calvin Burden 11, the Abolitionist forebears of Joanna Burden in *Light in August* (Picador Classics edition), p.187.

Bayard Sartoris. Both were arrogant, and headstrong to the point of folly, but John, unlike his brother, was not a fool. In summarizing John Sartoris as a figure 'to be evoked like a genie or a deity by an illiterate old man's tedious reminiscing or by a charred pipe' (p.23), the narrator reaches back to the motifs of the opening paragraphs, and he quietly splits up the two old men paired by their common deafness.

Old Bayard snaps mildly at old man Falls from time to time, but the 'small parcels' that old man Falls gathers up as he leaves are gifts of necessities that old Bayard regularly has ready for him (p.222). In calling old man Falls's reminiscing tedious, the narrator reflects old Bayard's private thoughts. He is at once empathizing with old Bayard's point of view in a way he has not done of the other Sartorises, and implying forbearance in old Bayard. Old Bayard functions in his own right as a type of Sartoris different from John, and as a foil for both John and young Bayard.

The trunk of memorabilia passage offers a sustained and private view of the character of old Bayard, but at the same time the layers of memorabilia signify generations of Sartorises and they serve as probes for the novel's value systems of degeneration and change. Old Bayard visits the attic of the Sartoris house to record in the family bible the deaths of young John (young Bayard's twin) and John's wife and child. Enveloped as the recording is in old Bayard's musing memories, it is nonetheless a formal act of record, and this gives to the whole passage an authority that is absent from any of the earlier passages. This is one of Faulkner's early multi-layer passages in



which the described action is capable of metaphoric interpretation.\*

There are three layers in the memorabilia passage, all rooted in aspects of time: the narrative movement itself, the associations of the articles in the trunk with the dynasty of Sartoris and finally, the opposition between finite Sartoris and infinite Time - an opposition Faulkner develops explicitly later in the novel. The passage dwells upon the 'glamorous and old disastrous days' of Sartorises (p.90) but it contains glamour without being glamorized, it constitutes, in the articles in the trunk, a biography of the family and lineage of Sartoris and it is grounded, as I have said, in a formal act of record.\* The very quietness of the language, and old Bayard's orderliness, and above all his physical touching of these items transforms them into not merely a history, but a vivid, remembered landscape of things Sartoris. The passage displays too, a structured distinction between conscious and unconscious thinking, and this Faulkner articulates through the narrator's language, in conjunction with the narrator's showing; as the narrator evokes the past through the feel and the smell of the articles in the trunk, so at the same time, he transmits old Bayard's unconscious thoughts through the tones and images with which he surrounds those articles.

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\* A subtle example of Faulkner's multi-layering occurs in *The Wild Palms*, in the narrator's description of the convicts' sense of the floodwaters - the 'three strata' passage, that also vividly and impressionistically describes Harry's and Charlotte's conduct vis-a-vis society. *The Wild Palms* (New York: Vintage Books), p.62.

\* In the way that the passage is set up - the light source that shadows and reveals - it resembles the commissary scene in Part 4 of "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses*. The discourse of that scene is replaced here by the orderly revealing of the artifacts that represent the Sartoris family.

These same tones and images serve a related purpose, the effect of which is to reveal old Bayard's character. They express a distinction between old Bayard's reactions to those items that belong to his own time and cluster of memories, and his reactions to items that are too old to belong to him. As his reaction to the latter is untinged with experience, so old Bayard may justifiably mull over them with some private romantic nostalgia, and as his reactions to the former are influenced by experience, so they reflect non-romantic realism. Old Bayard's romanticizing, however, is of quite a different order to the wild exaggerations of Miss Jenny and old man Falls, and from the orderliness of his movements, it is an almost detached romanticizing. Bayard's unconscious reactions, taken in conjunction with the narrator's explanation of the trunk's remaining shut for eighteen years despite the fact that there had been deaths to record - 'he had forborne...expecting to be able to kill two birds with one stone, as it were' (p.90) - speak of a quiet and deep thinking old man, and they prepare the way for his considered, consciously expressed philosophy of time, man and mortality at the conclusion of the passage. Time and the irrevocable passing of Time are quietly objectified through old Bayard's slow mulling over of the older items and his quicker treatment of the more recent ones.

Old Bayard is shown shadowed and revealed by a bare electric bulb. The attic is 'a fitting place for dead Sartorises to gather' (p.90), and Bayard is surrounded by the 'patient ghosts' of the old chairs and sofas. None of the items that he removes from the trunk is described in terms of particular Sartoris. Each represents an epoch rather than a person, so that the underlying reference is to time rather than to Sartoris. The



brocade garment and the rapier come from before Bayard's lifetime. The quality of each is superb, as would befit a great family, 'a fall of fine Mechlin', 'a Toledo', and old Bayard's romantic and justifiably pleasureable contemplation of them is reflected in the narrator's language: 'the lace cascaded mellow and pale as spilled wine upon his hands', 'a blade delicate and fine as the prolonged stroke of a violin bow'. The next items are of his time, however, and the imagery surrounding the derringer reflects not only actual experience of war and killing, but old Bayard's attitude towards violence: 'a stubby, evil-looking thing...viciously and coldly utilitarian'. Bayard puts things aside 'with sudden purposefulness' as he nears the present, as though all at once conscious of Time hurrying at his back. But he becomes still once again at the ultimate point of confrontation of Sartorises with Time, and vanquishment of Sartorises by Time - the family bible with its time-faded record of the lineage of Sartoris. The concrete evidence of the Sartoris past - the items in the trunk - is transposed to the medium of pen and ink that, like Sartorises, is capable of degeneration: 'Old Bayard sat for a long time, regarding the stark dissolving apotheosis of his name' (p.92). Within the train of old Bayard's contemplations, there is to be a further dissolution, and a very austere resolution.

Up to this point, the reader has followed old Bayard's thoughts and actions and he has discovered a nice old man with a streak of unexpected aestheticism, a dislike of violence and an ability to look with some dispassion on the activities of Sartorises. The image of imperturbability from the first paragraphs of the novel has been borne out, but Faulkner is not yet done, for old Bayard's thoughts and actions are to reveal an order of bravery quite different from John's. Old Bayard dwells upon

John's philosophy of life: 'only what a man takes and keeps has any significance...a Sartoris can have a little vanity and poppycock, if he wants it' (p.92). Both men are talking about Time, Sartoris and destiny, but where John begins with criminal transportation out of London and stops at material success, old Bayard begins with success and looks forward, with manifest awareness of the paths of glory that lead but to the grave, to 'the augury of a man's destiny peeping out at him from the roadside hedge...a skull'. Old Bayard's philosophy takes him further, beyond death, to a visionary landscape contemplated with equanimity: 'he sighed quietly'. It is a nightmarish landscape of a cold and still-warring heaven 'filled with every man's illusion of himself and with the conflicting illusions of him that parade through the minds of other illusions' (p.93). His peacefulness in face of such a vision reveals the courage that old man Falls skips over in his tale of John Sartoris's escape from the Yankees,\* and the same dispassionate orderliness that has characterised his lifting and laying of the items in the trunk is delineated here by the succession of 'ands' that mark their return. Among the contents he places the pipe that has triggered off the memories, as though trying to consign it to the past, or trying to ward off from the present the fatal follies of the Sartorises, or simply accepting them. The Sartoris past is fully exposed at this point, with twenty pages and a clutter of disparate episodes still to go before young Bayard erupts into the unfolding landscape with a savage violence from which both John's glamour and old Bayard's austerity are missing.

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\* Faulkner develops this tale far more fully in *The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938).



## Vivid Pictures 2

## Young Bayard Sartoris

Old Bayard's cigar was cold again. He sat with it dead in his fingers and watched a tall shape emerge from the lilac bushes beside the garden fence and cross the patchy moonlight towards the veranda. His grandson wore no hat and he came on and mounted the steps and stood with the moonlight bringing the hawklike planes of his face into high relief while his grandfather sat with his dead cigar and looked at him. "Bayard, son?" old Bayard said. Young Bayard stood in the moonlight. His eyesockets were cavernous shadows. p.43

For the second time that day, old Bayard encounters a kind of ghostliness. But the *tall shape* of young Bayard, with the *hawklike* Sartoris features, carries with it none of John's bold panache. News of young Bayard's arrival has been attended by rumour and uncertainty: 'He got offen de two o'clock train...Jumped off de wrong side and lit out th'ough de woods. Section han' seed him.' (p.5). Rather, there is a certain surreptitiousness, and a sense of something amiss. The moon casts a natural shadow, the effect of which makes young Bayard's eye sockets look deathlike, *cavernous*. In retrospect, the image of the *cavernous shadows* serves as a prefiguration of his desperately dark view of himself and the world to which he has returned.

Faulkner offers few insights into young Bayard's mind, and most of them are accompanied by moonlight. Young Bayard's first appearance is strategically important because it follows on from Simon's and Miss Jenny's and old man Falls's mythologizing of Sartorises in general and the glamorous Colonel John in particular. For all that the tales are exaggerations, they leave the reader in no doubt as to Colonel John's charismatic qualities. In the first glimpse into the mind of young Bayard the reader sees violent grief and self-blame for the twin brother dead in France: "'I tried to keep him om going up there on that goddam little

popgun" (p.43). The 'treacherously' moonlit bedroom to which young Bayard retires holds two memories: the young masculine violence...of twinship' and 'her who lay rigid in the dark beside him' (p.47). The reader learns - told by the narrator, not merely implied, and told twice - that of the two relationships, the bond of twinship is closer than that of marriage: 'the spirit of their violent complementing days lay like dust...obliterating that other presence' (p.48). Sartoris pride prevents young Bayard from talking to anyone but a Sartoris, or anyone at all except John, and John is dead, old Bayard deaf and Miss Jenny impossibly committed to her own view point. Young Bayard's grief and his struggle for a sense of place lie within himself and find their expression in violent action and callous misuse of everybody with whom he comes in contact.

Faulkner organizes the narrative in such a way that the actions of young Bayard are shadowed by those of the illustrious and omnipresent John. He draws spectacular contrasts between the two men that point up the idea of degeneration: John's vision has seen a railway 'from Lake Michigan to the Gulf of Mexico'(p.43), and John's energy has gone far towards making it come about, 'him ridin' up and down the survey with a saddle-bag of money night and day' (p.22), but young Bayard's vision begins and ends with 'Johnny' (p.214) and in the six months of his stay at home, his energy is used to tear meaninglessly and destructively round the roadways of Yoknapatawpha. The passages to do with young Bayard are episodic in character, and are made more so by the inadequately integrated sections concerning Horace Benbow, to which very limited reference is made here.

Faulkner devotes the second half of Chapter 2, pages 114-160, after his main evocation of the Past, to Bayard's crazy day. The events of



this section are marked by speed or violent movement and they work as an externalization of Bayard's grief, and for his need for an anchor of some sort. That only 'Johnny' can assuage the grief is implied in the language of flying in the last of the episodes: 'the car swept on with a steady, leashed muttering like waking thunderous wings; then the road flattened in a long swoop toward another rise' (p.149). That Narcissa is to be a temporary anchor is suggested in the appearance of her face in his drink-blurred mind: 'those two eyes...two dark wings of hair. It was that Benbow girl'(p.150). Despite the cruelty and savage folly of the day, by its end, the reader's sympathy is being invoked: alone in the jail-keeper's bed in the jailhouse, in moonlight again, Bayard considers his future: 'Nothing to be seen...Three score and ten years to drag a stubborn body about the world' (p.160). At this stage, only the reader's sympathy is sought; this is not yet the tragic pity of the San Francisco dance hall scene.

There is a keying of the physiological Bayard to the seasonal landscape (pps.203-215), to 'the sober rhythms of the earth'. For a time, the tortured interior, 'the trapped beast in the high blue, mad for life' withdraws (p.203). The recession is marked by a purposefulness in the narrator's tone and by the increasingly practical nature of the things Bayard does: 'he planted things in the ground...put the grist mill in running shape...taught Caspey to drive the tractor' (p.203). Hope is implied, but the end of the planting season brings with it renewed purposelessness and alienation, this shown by means of a sudden burgeoning into metaphor by the narrator:

'It was like coming...out of the warm sunny valleys where people lived into a region where cold peaks of savage despair stood blackly above lost valleys, among black and savage stars' p.205

The unrealistic landscape, compacted by the pathetic fallacy, marks Bayard's drift away from the stabilizing rhythms of the earth, and underscores the pitiless alienation of his internal landscape. Bayard embarks on another trajectory of recklessness in the car and in the pain-seared, drink-anaesthetised, memory-filled aftermath, he burns all the things that were John's (p.214-5). There is directly evoked pathos in Bayard's taking out and holding of the three items, carried in the straightforward, statement-like language of the passage. To each item is attributed a memory, and to the last of these - a hunting coat - a smell that breaks Bayard into the sole expression of grief, 'Johnny'. The measure of the privateness of their relationship is told in Bayard's glance over his shoulder and his 'defiantly and deliberately' kneeling with the coat pressed to his face.

As Bayard seeks to recover a lost relationship, so also does Horace Benbow. In many ways, it is a women's Jefferson to which young Bayard Sartoris and Horace Benbow return from the war in Europe; a social round of parties and gossip-mongering and flirtations into which Horace, but not young Bayard, is willing to fit. Bayard's twin is dead, Horace's sister grown up. But where Horace finds a way to eternalize the perfect and irrecoverable childhood relationship, through the glass vase that he creates and names after Narcissa, 'apostrophising both of them impartially...as "Thou still unravished bride of quietness"' (p.182), Bayard, without the creative resources of either Horace or his twin, and heir to the destructive aspects of the Sartorises, turns to violence. Faulkner has Horace fix Narcissa with the timelessness and perfection of the figure on the Keatsian Greek urn, but he leaves the dead and graveless young John quite literally up in the air. Young John's non-existence and placelessness contrasts with Narcissa's existence in both fact and symbol. In another not dissimilar pair of contrasts, Faulkner conjures up



the dead Colonel John in a manner deliberately powerful and concrete, but his evocation of young John is just as deliberately fragmentary and inconsistent. There is not even a full outline of young John, only an incidental remark here and there to denote a habit or a characteristic. With young John, Faulkner creates space where the character should be visible - as, for example, Narcissa is visible, and also the dead Colonel John. The effect is to complement and underline Bayard's isolation and the futility of his lifestyle. Horace Benbow settles for life with Belle, but young Bayard, faced implicitly with the same life or death choice that Harry Wilbourne faces at the end of *The Wild Palms* - 'Between grief or nothing, I will take grief' - chooses the nothingness of air, death and John.

Bayard's last escapade in the car brings about the death of old Bayard and he sets out for the last refuge within his local world, the MacCallums. What Faulkner does in the MacCallum section, one of the longest in the book, is to contrast them with the Sartorises. Arrogance, glamour and folly are set aside for a minor apotheosis of benign patriarchy, constancy and harmony between man and the natural world. Faulkner's language and sentence structure are markedly different from those used of John Sartoris. Rhetorical and figurative language are absent, and with a particular and important exception (the introduction of Mr. MacCallum) the sentences begin with the subject and flow forward consequentially and without deviation. Combined with the consistent use of *and*, the effect is to emphasize the simple dignity, orderliness and uncluttered pace of the MacCallums' lives. By contrast, the passage describing young Bayard's thinking in the night (p.324) is jagged with colons and semi-colons, and harshened by the drip, drop and beat of the rain. Bayard keeps the MacCallums in complete ignorance about his grandfather's death, and fears that news of it will reach even their isolated

homestead. He leaves them on Christmas Eve, ostensibly to return home, he takes two steps to the edge of the Yoknapatawpha world that has no place for him, and quits it forever. Faulkner skips over the final stages of young Bayard's disintegration, marking it by a series of postcards sent from distant places.

The San Francisco dance hall episode comes late on in the book. In relation to the value systems of the novel and the theme of degeneration in particular, it is climactic. Young Bayard's trajectory of misadventure has propelled him out of Yoknapatawpha County and set him on a hedge-hopping flight among the lower echelons of society. The scene opens in a straightforward narrative style that informs the reader about his current milieu: 'He was sitting among saxophones and painted ladies and middle-aged husbands at a table littered with soiled glasses and stained with cigarette ends and spilt liquor, accompanied by two men and a girl' (p. 359). Young Bayard is in a state of savage and maudlin despair and transfixed by the sight of Harry Mitchell: 'Brother-in-law over there...Don't speak to family. Mad at us. Beat him out of his wife'.\* Both men are being hustled and both, out of the background of understanding that the reader now has of each, arouse pity. But also out of the reader's understanding is his knowledge that in other circumstances, in another era, a Sartoris would have extricated himself and any member of his family, military or otherwise, from an embattled situation. Now, in embattlement, the best this Sartoris can manage is to walk out of his own volition (a feat in itself, though scarcely one of honour, given the drunken circumstances) and to note in the passing Harry Mitchell's comatose state and the predatory

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\* Harry Mitchell is not young Bayard's brother-in-law. Bayard's wife's brother (Horace Benbow) 'stole' Belle from Harry. Bayard's words indicate how far his concepts of family are prepared to reach, and by extension, the extent to which he must feel bound by the far more important blood ties to the dead Sartorises.



struggle that is going on over his diamond tie pin.

Times have indeed changed for Sartoris. Faulkner's Past and Present touch in this scene with the magnificence and the pity of tragedy. From such a moral elevation, Bayard's death-seeking flight in the untried plane is neither melodrama nor sensationalism, but denouement, reparation and justice in the Sophoclean tradition. The step to death is a very short one, a mere two pages of the text. Young Bayard is beyond recall once he leaves the MacCallums. In his last, brief piece of self-examination, Sartoris pride prevails against the unbearable humiliation of either seeking or accepting help: 'a hand, no matter whose, to touch him out of his black chaos. He would spurn it, of course, but it would restore his cold sufficiency again' (p.323-4).

The vivid pictures and the scenes related to them expose two major, inter-related aspects of the landscape of *Sartoris*. Between them, they lay down the historical and ideological base upon which Faulkner founds Yoknapatawpha. In many ways, history and ideology constitute a tremendous burden on the fictional people of Yoknapatawpha. The old bind the young to the past. Half a century on from the Civil War, they yet cling to the chivalric notions their fathers fostered in the Ante-bellum era. They are hopelessly at odds with the early twentieth century. Faulkner's romanticizing of the past in *Sartoris* is also, implicitly, a criticism. Yet from his portrayal of the Mitchells, he is distrustful of the present, and of prospects for the future. In a sense, there is nowhere to go in *Sartoris*. After the undoubtedly grand, if also anti-climactical panorama of Sartoris action, the note upon which Faulkner ends the novel strikes one as trivial, conjured and artificial. There may be a new Sartoris to carry on the line, but he is all but embalmed in his

mother's fond dreamy smiles, and Faulkner's distinctly Hollywoodish exit of the 'maroon curtains' 'motionless' before a 'windless lilac dream' of an evening. In the event, in the Yoknapatawpha saga, young Benbow (Bory) Sartoris seems to slip into anonymous normality. In 1937, he appears as Chick Mallison's boyhood hunting companion,<sup>6</sup> and in 1942, 'although only nineteenth in the class', he has 'his commission and [is]...in England on something hush hush'.<sup>7</sup> If Bory has inherited the Sartoris love of wars, at least he is still alive when last seen.



## Footnotes for Chapter 2

1. Alexander L. Bondurant, "William C. Falkner, Novelist", *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 3 (1912), 113-125; in Arthur F. Kinney, *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sartoris Family* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), p.73.  
In a footnote, Arthur Kinney writes, 'Dr. Bondurant...was a close friend of the Falkner family as well as young William Faulkner. This is the "official" biography of Colonel Falkner that canonized him; doubtless young Faulkner knew it well' (p.72).
2. William Faulkner\*, [On the Composition of *Sartoris*], in Arthur Kinney, *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sartoris Family*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), p.119.  
\*Transcribed by Donald Gallup, James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, with emendations by Joseph Blotner, and published as "William Faulkner's Essay on the Composition of *Sartoris* by Joseph Blotner, *Yale University Library Gazette*, 47, No. 3 (January, 1973), 121-124. Kinney notes, 'This is Faulkner's fullest statement on the abridgement for publication of *Flags in the Dust*.'
3. Douglas Day, Introduction to *Flags in the Dust* (New York, Random House, 1973), x.
4. William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, first pub. Harcourt Brace (New York, 1929); this ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), p.4. Further references to this edition in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
5. Douglas Day, Introduction in William Faulkner, *Flags in the Dust*, (New York: Random House, 1973).
6. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, (London: AUP, 1988), pp.246. See also p.13.
7. William Faulkner, *Knight's Gambit*, first pub. Random House (New York, 1951); this ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p.212. *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, p. 264.

## Chapter 3

### *The Sound and the Fury*

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"This novel began as a short story...It struck me that it would be interesting to imagine the thoughts of a group of children who were sent away from the house the day of their grandmother's funeral, their curiosity about the activity in the house, their efforts to find out what was going on, and the notions that would come into their minds. Then, to complicate the picture, I had the idea of someone who would be more than just a child, who in trying to find the answer, would not even have a normal brain to use - that is, an idiot. So Benjy was born. After that, the same thing happened to me that happens to many writers - I fell in love with one of my characters, Caddy. I loved her so much I couldn't decide to give her life just for the duration of a short story. She deserved more than that. So my novel was created, almost in spite of myself. It had no title until one day the familiar words 'the sound and the fury' came to me out of my unconscious. I adopted them immediately, without considering then that the rest of the Shakespearean quotation was as well suited, and maybe better, to my dark story of madness and hatred."

William Faulkner<sup>1</sup>

"It's the book I feel tenderest towards".

William Faulkner<sup>2</sup>

Faulkner's switch of perspective from panoramic historical survey in *Sartoris* to intimate family cameo in *The Sound and the Fury* marks a drastic alteration of focus. The Sartorises leave flamboyant marks on Yoknapatawpha, the Compsons have none of that panache. Colonel John stands in the cemetery 'in pompous effigy',<sup>3</sup> and young Bayard rips over Yoknapatawpha's dirt roads in his 'eighty miles an hour' car,<sup>4</sup> but the Compsons, their public achievements notwithstanding, have a long history of failure or skulduggery: the first of them fled Scotland for Carolina after Culloden; Jason Lycurgus Compson got hold of a piece of prime Jefferson land by somewhat dubious means; General (Jason 11) Compson's men suffered defeat at Shiloh;<sup>5</sup> Jason 111 (Quentin's, Caddy's, Jason's and Benjy's father) fails as a lawyer and a father; Quentin commits suicide and Jason 1V extorts money. The birth of a new Sartoris suggests continuance of the blood line. No such suggestion attends the Compson family.

### The Impressionistic Landscape

Faulkner renders physical place in *The Sound and the Fury* in concrete if somewhat unusual terms, in terms of artifact. These artifacts are objects in the landscape, or parts of rooms in the house, habitually visited. Either in the course of his day or in his memory, Benjy makes visits to the fence,<sup>6</sup> yard (p.3), gate (p.4), carriage driveway (p.7), stream (p.11), barn (p.16), steps leading to the kitchen (p.19), Dilsey's cabin (p.24), the tree beside the parlour (p.30), the cellar (p.33) and the garden swing (p.39). Inside the house, he visits the kitchen (p.3), the dining room (p.3), the back stairs (p.22), the hall (p.28), Mother's room (p.34), his own room (p.37), the library (p.61), and the measles room (p.62).

Since all of these artifacts have a fixed location, and nearly all are walked to and from several times in the course of Benjy's day ("April Seventh, 1928"), a map-like picture of the landscape forms in the reader's mind, added to which all the artifacts possess a particular significance: the gate is where Benjy habitually waits for Caddy, the stream where the children play, the tree beside the house the one that Caddy climbs, and so on. Thickening the texture, the three Compson brothers' different memories attach to the various artifacts in the landscape, and these create a continually densifying place-memory-time montage. Part of the reader's increasing familiarity with the landscape and the characters and events within it derives from artifacts repeatedly returned to from separate perspectives: Benjy's memories of the stream are very different from Quentin's, and Jason's memories of their father at the dining room sideboard are not Benjy's.



Summing up the main physical place of the novel, a sizeable house stands in a large piece of ground on which there are also negro cabins, animal steadings, and many interesting places for children to play. But to put this relatively small, if intimately detailed place in a wider perspective, the Compson domain lies inside heavily fenced boundaries, outside Jefferson town centre, and the town of Jefferson operates only as the place to which circuses come, and where Jason Compson works and Benjy is taken for outings.\* The flower-filled fence behind which the Compsons conduct their lives marks them off from the community, and the community off from them.

Where in the Compson world time relates to artifact, in the reader's, time is contemporaneous (1928), and spans three specific days, so-named April Sixth, 1928, April Seventh, 1928 and April Eighth, 1928. But Faulkner presents these days out of sequence, and inserts a fourth day, Second June, 1910. Less confusingly, all four day-long periods of narrative present time are followed through sequentially, from morning to night, despite frequent flashbacks in the first three sections. The narrator in the fourth section is omniscient, and the day Easter Sunday, so that the passing hours of the day are overseen, as it were, by both universal and Christian time, and the reader's sense of perspective, that has been assaulted by Compson time, is contextualized for

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\* Once upon a time, around 1820, Compsons owned the square mile of land around which Jefferson grew. It was a fine place then, 'with its slave quarters and stables and kitchen garden and the formal lawns and promenades and pavilions laid out by the same architect who built the columned portico-ed house furnished by steamboat from France and New Orleans...known as the Compson Domain'.

William Faulkner, "Appendix: the Compsons", in *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking Press, 1946); this edition 1974, p.707.

him in this final section.\*

Society for the Compsons consists, in effect, of themselves and the family negroes. The Compson children, as children, demonstrate a happy secure childhood, but as adolescents, they encounter troubles that shape their lives. By 1928, Jefferson society is perceived by Jason and Mrs Compson as a potential or actual agent of criticism. Jason's employer treats him with tolerance for the sake of his mother's one-time position in society and with a good deal of reserve on Jason's own account, while Job, the negro worker, treats him with veiled mockery. Mrs Compson and Jason are supremely conscious of genteel society and the declining place of the Compsons in it.

The main action and events of the novel are made up of daily activities. In two of the sections, Quentin's and Jason's, exceptional events take place, of which one is foreseen and the other unexpected. Quentin plans and commits suicide, and Jason finds his hoard of money stolen. The action of the fourth section, observed by the reader from an Olympian perspective, draws together and summarizes the Compson family.

In terms of the thematic systems, Faulkner deals primarily with the decline of a once prosperous family, but also with parental inadequacy, burgeoning sexuality and endurance. Dilsey's Christian fortitude is set over and against the Compsons, and what sense of endurance there is, in the Compsons, is invested in Jason's bitter fury.

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\* Faulkner's time strategies are discussed in Frederick R. Karl *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp. 357-358; in Michael Millgate, H.P. Absalom and Cleanth Brooks in Kinney, *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family* (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall, 1982).



Many vivid pictures arise against what must be, from first readings, a very hazy 'impressionistic landscape'. Those to be discussed in Section 3 derive from the novel's implicit gap between the older members of the family, with whom Dilsey is included, and the younger generation, Quentin, Caddy, Jason and Benjy. Two aspects of the Compson landscape are discussed, the first of which, *The Brothers in the Landscape*, has its source in the three vivid images that make up the reader's first view of each of the three brothers (pages 1, 65 and 155). I elected to approach the first analysis by means of these particular pictures in order to follow through on Faulkner's pattern of continual return to concrete artifacts, and in the broader perspective, in order to keep in focus the whole landscape. The second analysis, *The Older Generation*, derives from vivid pictures involving Mrs Compson (page 88), Mr Compson (pages 61 and 151) and Dilsey (pages 231).

## 2

### Technical Strategies

In the process of understanding the landscapes of *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader attends to two perspectives simultaneously in each of the first three sections: his view of the whole landscape and the figures in it and his view of the personal prospect of each of the narrating characters. But because the narrator of the first three sections is a wholly subjective, first-person figure, the reader cannot look to him for guidance: the reader must find the key to the landscape for himself, and learn to use the pointers that Faulkner provides.

A glance across the text of *The Sound and the Fury* reveals features not present in the conventional text of, say, *The Reivers*: four substantial blocks of narrative, many unpunctuated paragraphs and passages of dialogue and a number of italicized sentences or part sentences, these often oddly scattered among roman text.<sup>7</sup> The reader learns about the landscape of the novel text-block by text-block. Because the blocks are not chronologically ordered and because the thinking of the three first-person narrators appears to be wildly erratic, the reader can not make sense of the prospects before him by reasoning alone. The blocks of text with their disordered chronology might signal no more than a non-sequential narrative, with which the reader can cope, but the scrambled information that comes to the reader from the three blocks forces him to learn impressionistically. Not all the information is scrambled however. In Benjy's section, the plot line of Luster's search for the lost quarter runs parallel with narrative present time, and with the movement of the two characters in the landscape. The points of return to the search are also points of return to the narrative present.<sup>8</sup> Luster and his search operate, for the reader, as the signifiers and fixers of Benjy in his physical landscape; the search itself has no meaning for Benjy. From the great number of associative triggers that exist, and the pointers, the reader can construct a framework for one layer of the whole landscape, and for the whole of the prospect that is Benjy's.

Faulkner's main narrative structure is indicated by the structure of the text. The reader beguiled by the Shakespeare in the title is moved in the direction of Compson sound and fury by the disordered chapter headings. Because the textual layout dictates the shape of the main narrative framework, because Faulkner plunges straight into the tale from the viewpoint from which he does and because the reader begins



reading at his normal reading speed and with his reasoning processes in gear, there is a considerable gap between what Faulkner is doing and what the reader expects to perceive. Faulkner's pattern of providing and withholding information in the first section of the novel demonstrates both the reader's and Benjy's inability to constitute the prospect before him unless all the elements are present, which in Benjy they never are and have not been since Benjy was three years old.<sup>9</sup> The reader adopts Benjy's associative mode of thinking as his key to Benjy's landscape. In turn, he uses the same key, in a different register, for the purpose of constructing next Quentin's, and then Jason's landscapes.

Faulkner also provides helpful pointers for the reader within the landscape of the novel. Finding these becomes something of a textual treasure hunt. Some are hidden and others are withheld (the significance of the word 'caddy', discussed in Chapter 1). One of the more obvious pointers is the name of the negro in charge of Benjy. From the name, a period of time of a decade or more is indicated: in the narrative present, "April, Seventh, 1928", Luster looks after Benjy;\* around the time of Mr. Compson's funeral in 1912, it is T.P. and at the time of Damuddy's funeral in 1898 and the incidents of the splashing in the branch and Caddy climbing the tree, it is Versh. Within Benjy's landscape of memory, the negro parents (Dilsey and Roskus), children (Versh, Frony and T.P.) and grandchild (Luster) act in accordance with their chronological ages, so that Luster is 'little' (p.26) when he and Caddy's baby daughter, Miss Quentin, play in the dirt outside T.P.'s house and Frony complains that 'he [Benjy] fighting these babies again. Taking they play things'

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\* Luster was born in 1910, T.P. in 1895 and Versh at some time before that. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens* (London: Associated University Press, 1988), p.288.

(p.25). This is 1912, the time of Mr Compson's death, and Benjy is a very large, clumsy seventeen year old. Two further pointers arise from the negroes' talking among themselves at the times of the three deaths (Damuddy in 1898, Quentin in 1910, Mr Compson in 1912), and from the many incidental references to the ages of characters. Like Luster's search, the negroes' talking among themselves has no meaning for Benjy (unless the word 'Caddy' is used). The talk merely attaches itself to whatever happens to be the significant family event in his mind.

A pointer that opens on to more complex information is the shift to and from italics. The shift signifies not only a simple movement into and out of contemporaneous time in Benjy's mind, but more often a shift into and across and between associated scenes in his mind, which from Benjy's point of view, have nothing to do with calendar time but all to do with feeling. The nature of the change, however, in whatever period of time change is taking place, is signalled to the reader and triggered in Benjy's mind by some accidental in the environment that repeats a sensation familiar to Benjy from Caddy's time: the sound of the golfers calling 'Caddy!', caught clothing, the smell of trees, the swing in the garden.

While the blocks of text determine the order in which the reader assimilates the general landscape of the novel, they serve two other purposes: they are the bases for a set of perspectives that collate the historical landscape of the family, the child's perspective (Benjy), the adolescent's (Quentin) and the adult (Jason), and they serve as bases for two narrative movements, the chronology of the dated days, and the four times repeated story of the family. By having one of his characters an eternal child and another, Caddy, eternally alive in the memory of other characters, Faulkner manages to impact on to the given narrative



presents of the dated days, a sense of a whole and immediate present that is being continuously reviewed.

## 3

## Vivid Pictures 1

## The Brothers in the Landscape

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting.  
Benjy, p.1.

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. Quentin, p.65.

Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. Jason, p.155.

From the first fourteen lines of text, the reader forms an elementary picture of Benjy:

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.

"Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.

"Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Ain't you something, thirty-three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning."  
p.1

If the reader reads the lines again - as he probably will do because, understandably, he has come at them first time round at his normal reading speed - with his partly constituted figure of Benjy in his mind, he discovers the 'fence', which, he realises, must be high if a thirty-

three year old - unless he is a dwarf - needs to peer 'through' and 'between' the flower spaces rather than over it. And if the fence is high, it is probably so for the purpose of keeping the thirty-three year old in. This small deduction, added to what he has already, enables the reader to put together a picture of Benjy's physical stature and mental limitations. The picture is accurate as far as it goes, but it is inadequate since we cannot deduce the scale of Benjy's emotional torque from Luster's "Hush up that moaning". Also in the first fourteen lines, as if to contextualize Benjy as a detail of a larger picture, Faulkner forces two perspectives on the reader: from implicitly, being at the fence and seeing what Benjy sees through it, the reader is taken back to a farther vantage point by virtue of Benjy's moving back and forth along the fence, and the golfers' moving away across the course.

The reader has been able to put together a kind of man in his landscape picture, but he is not able to gather the elements towards any progression of meaning. For that he must read on to page 2 where, from a picture cluster composed of the fence, Luster and the 'I'-Benjy crawling through the fence, the reader is suddenly and, but for the pointer of the italics, arbitrarily confronted with a superimposed picture cluster composed of the same fence and the same crawling but with 'Caddy' replacing Luster. The reader learns by association, as Benjy does, and he comes to recognize superimpositions of time and incident. Sooner or later in the novel, from the accretion of images, the reader will also come to see other significances in the 'fence': the fence that not only keeps Benjy in and the world out, but isolates the whole Compson family and augments Jason's consciousness of the zoo-like spectacle that they present to the rest of the town.



To render Benjy's world by one of the major ways in which Faulkner himself has set it down, that is, impressionistically, we might say that it consists of: a place of flowers, of splashing sunny water, and Caddy and Quentin and Jason playing, and Versh and Frony; a place of beds and bedtimes, and Dilsey; of sarsaparilla and cows and Roskus; of firelight, and rain and the trees in the rain; Caddy wet in the sun, Caddy and Jason fighting and cut paper dolls, Caddy in the doorway, and coming from the swing in the dark, and with a shining veil; a place and a long time of moaning, and no Caddy, and Luster, and Dilsey. It is an innocent landscape, if one dreadfully cast over by Benjy's moans, in which children played and grew up, in which there was a good father-figure, and negroes who lived their own lives and went about their various Compson businesses. The children knew about funerals but not about death. Benjy knew Caddy's warmth. He sensed her sexuality, and he sensed that it somehow deprived him of her. He knew she had gone, but not why.

Benjy's landscape, rendered impressionistically, is also Quentin's, articulated in a different intellectual register and compounded by his troubled landscape of mind. In 'let[ting] Quentin tell his version'<sup>10</sup> in the text block entitled "June Second, 1910", Faulkner lays down another level of the whole landscape, densifies by one stage the reader's concept of it, and reveals what is Quentin's perception of his environment. The transition to a new layer of the landscape and a new voice is abrupt, even startling, for the reason that the reader finds himself confronted with a civilized sentence and a set of concepts that betoken an intelligent mind: 'When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch' (p.65). By the end of the paragraph, he is in rhetorical heights and philosophical depths: 'The field of battle] only

reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools' (p.65).

Faulkner's picture of Quentin on June Second, 1910 is not one of man in contention with, or in harmony with his external environment, but one of man juxtaposed with his own, idiosyncratically conceived, psychological environment. In retrospect, the well formed sentences in the opening pages and the obvious intelligence of the character who is thinking them work as a shocking introduction to the reader's gradual understanding that Quentin's prospect for the day follows from his decision to commit suicide. As with the Benjy section, the reader must connect up clues. The reader, for example, cannot pick up from Quentin's destroying, first thing in the morning, of one facet of time (the twisting off the hands of his Grandfather's watch) that he intends a much greater destruction of it (himself) by the evening. But the reader does notice that Quentin selects from the general environment of the streets, buildings and people in and around Harvard time-related attributes of it, shadows, clocks, water, and he comes to realize that these things are relevant to Quentin's inner landscape: shadows that lengthen, shorten and lengthen again mark the inevitable passing of the day; the minutely different times of all the different clocks in the jeweller's shop are of no possible consequence to the Quentin who is about to stop time altogether, while the water will be the medium of that stopping. Repeated incidents involving shadows, clocks and water work as pointers like those in the Benjy section.

Underlying the physical prospect of Harvard with, in it, the figure of Quentin intent on suicide, two interconnected layers of psychological landscape gradually impress themselves upon the reader. The first layer



leads through powerful memories to Quentin's mental topography; from the smell of honeysuckle, through his fears of his own sexual inadequacy intermixed with knowledge of Caddy's manifestly rampant sexuality, to his urge to keep Caddy for himself and at the same time to 'save' her from the world. The second layer is composed of memories that have, in effect, bruised and distorted that topography; his father's despairing and sometimes cynical nihilism and his mother's lacklove of him. The reader gains access to Quentin's first inner landscape, that has its roots in the same Caddy-in-the-stream episode that Benjy remembers, by means of Quentin's leaps into memory from triggering incidentals in his environment during the day. The bridge from which the boys fish reminds him of his encounter with Dalton Ames at the bridge at home, and his jealous, abortive and humiliating attempt to get Caddy's lover out of both their lives (pp. 104-6). The incident of the little Italian girl, which from Quentin's point of view serves to remind him of the painful time when he realized Caddy was not a little girl any longer, works as an important element of the reader's perspective, in that it has a comic poignancy for the reader that Quentin does not see. In these passages, Faulkner signifies the movement into Quentin's disordered inner world by abandoning the syntax and shortening his textual lines.

Below this landscape of incident-triggered memories lie the root causes for Quentin's state of mind, the nihilistic father with his outmoded code of Southern honour, and the cold and 'missing' mother. As he wakes up on the second of June, 1910, Quentin recalls seeking help from his father. Faulkner leads into the passage through two complementing clusters of thought separated by an interruption in the form of Shreve MacKenzie: from father Caddy and virginity, to virginity, Quentin and father:

In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it's like death: only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity, and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it, and Shreve said if he's got better sense than to chase after the little dirty sluts and I said Did you ever have a sister? Did you? Did you? p.67

One word sentences and disrupted syntax indicate very troubled thoughts. Faulkner matches each of Quentin's implicit, seeking questions with responses from his father that move from mere unhelpfulness to self-centred pessimism. Father begins with an interesting premise about which he might well be right, *men invented virginity*, but without considerable explication, it scarcely helps Quentin. And while the reader might manage to cope with the idea of virginity as an 'unalive' state preceding a 'live' post-virginal state, *like death: a state in which the others are left*, it is a perverse notion, and most unhelpful as an answer to a young person's question. Very much to Quentin's credit, his reply, *But to believe [that] doesn't matter*, holds germs of commonsense, positiveness and perseverance. Significantly, in face of his father's ultimate piece of pessimism, for which Quentin, understandably, has no answer, *nothing is even worth the changing of it*, his thoughts break away and switch to defence of himself and Caddy against another sector of the unhelpful or uncomprehending world.

It is from this pitch of anguish that Faulkner moves to the passage that reveals the depths of Quentin's fragile, troubled, and essentially aesthetic psyche. He switches the focus from the quadrangle below Quentin's window ledge to the sparrow on it, and to three signifiers of very different orders of time that find correlations in the narrative movement: the flick of the sparrow's eye for Quentin's flicking thoughts, the beat of the pulse in its throat for his suicidal intention,



and the chiming of the clock outside for the time that is at once running out for Quentin, and pursuing him. All of these orders of time are set aside in the new passage, to be replaced by the only kind of time, future and prospect that Quentin can now conceive of, a visionary landscape of utter alienation, and great beauty:

It was a while before the last stroke ceased vibrating. It stayed in the air, more felt than heard, for a long time. Like all the bells that ever rang stil ringing in the long dying light-rays and Jesus and Saint Francis talking about his sister. Because if it were just to jell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. *I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames* And when he put Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. When he put the pistol in my hand I didn't. That's why I didn't. He would be there and she would and I would. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If we could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today and I said, You can shirk all things and he said, Ah, can you. And I will look down and see my mumuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand...It's not when you realize that nothing can help you - religion, pride, anything - it's when you realize that you don't need any aid. p.68

If Quentin could have done so, he, like Benjy, would have held time still and converted it into a very exclusive eternity for Caddy and himself, fashioned out of an interfusion of the felt and heard vibration of the last chime that *stayed in the air* and out of a place, 'down the long and lonely light-rays' where 'you might see Jesus walking' (p.65). The ticking and striking of clocks keeps him in the world of time, not eternity. But even Quentin's eternity, like Hamlet's undiscover'd country, might have held a rub; it might contain ills like Dalton Ames, *who would be there and she would and I would*. Quentin had devised a scheme, in his mind, for attaining exclusivity within the world of time: he would say, *I have committed incest*; but that has been debunked by his father, *People...cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today*. Quentin has been left with no place to go, except to *shirk all things* in suicide. So he has devised a scheme for that. The change in tense at this point, *and I will look* indicates Quentin's plan for this, the last day of

his life. If he cannot make an eternity in hell, 'beyond the clean flame' (p.100), he will go to the 'deep water like a wind', to what Caddy has called 'the caverns and grottoes of the sea' (p.150). Quentin's resolution is signified by his breaking off of the hands of his watch. Despite the incidents during the day that might conceivably, on the psychological level, have given Quentin pause, but which work primarily as steps in the narrative structure (the fight with Gerald Bland and the incident of the little Italian girl who follows him and causes him to be arrested for abduction), Quentin has already passed into a realm of mind beyond such props of humanity as *religion, pride*, and beyond also, *despair, you realize you don't need any aid*. Thus, in a terrible way, Quentin creates a place and a future for himself, as *murmuring bones...upon the lonely and inviolable sand* (p.68).

Quentin's father fails to help Quentin towards a mature sexual frame of mind. From Quentin's point of view (and also the reader's), his mother fails to mother him. Faulkner evokes her in Quentin's consciousness in four different ways: through recall of one of her 'speeches', through direct articulation, through a fantasied childhood memory, and through a set of clustered images.

The recall passage is a catalogue of Mrs Compson's ill-fortunes, beginning with 'what have I done to deserve children like these' (p.88-89). Unpunctuated text underlines her monotonous, whining tone. Jason is frequently mentioned, along the lines of 'Jason with no one to love him shield him'. Benjy gets some attention, 'Benjamin was punishment enough for my sins' and so does the un-named and un-nameable Caddy, 'never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought' but Quentin, implicitly working on the premise that negative attention is better than no attention, is simply not there. Next, and thus signifying



how nearly beyond conscious expression Quentin's feelings are, Faulkner limits Quentin's direct articulation of his sense of motherlessness to a few phrases around the single word 'Mother'. The fantasy picture appears near the end of the section, when Quentin's mind is very disturbed. In the jumbled memory of the torn out picture in the book, of a dungeon-like place and two faces that come to be his parents' rising up away from the children, he finds an impotent, vengeful thought:

*You know what I'd do if I were a King? she never was a queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them good*  
p.149

Finally, there is the image-cluster passage (pp. 146-7), in which that of mother-wisteria-playing-rain slips into honeysuckle-water-sex-Caddy. There is an element of synaesthesia that, together with disrupted syntax, contributes to the powerful and terrifying vortex that Faulkner works in the passage. Quentin is travelling in a streetcar (p.146), so that there is what we might call an active set of conscious impressions deriving from the movement and the 'twilight and the sense of water peaceful and swift beyond' and the 'odour of summer and darkness except honeysuckle'. His mind slides to a remembered set of impressions, of playing on the porch when it rained until they all made too much noise for mother and went to play under the wisteria frame instead. His mind slides again to summer bed-times infused with the smell of wisteria and the sound of the rain, and again to when 'the honeysuckle got mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest' (p.147). There is an implicit movement from childhood to adolescence, and to Quentin's sexual confusion and feeling of placelessness. He sees himself in a kind of limbo, 'looking down a long corridor of grey half-light' where 'all things stable' lose their form, then become maniacal - 'antic and perverse' - and then meaningless - 'mocking without

relevance. With nothing to relate to, Quentin seems finally to lose the sense of his own identity - 'thinking I was I was not who was not was not who'. The nightmare that is being worked or re-worked inside Quentin's head illustrates how little of the external environment, apart from specific, isolated attributes of it, has meaning for him.

By the end of the Quentin section, the reader's understanding of the landscape of the Compsons has been impacted by Quentin's vivid, repetitious and disordered remembering of his personal landscape. Caddy has come into focus as the central figure in the psychological landscapes of both Benjy and Quentin. The shortcomings of the two parents have been revealed, and Jason's day and his acerbic, sardonically funny review of the things that have blighted his life are about to add a clarifying layer to the landscape of the whole novel.

Although Jason possesses none of Quentin's sensitivity, intelligence, or imagination, he does have energy and astuteness. In his section of the novel, Quentin has been dead and Caddy gone for eighteen years, and Mr Compson dead for sixteen. The family circumstances are considerably reduced. Jason is no more loveable now than he was as a tell-tale child in "That Evening Sun Go Down".<sup>11</sup> From Jason's point of view, the family limits both his life-style and his ambitions. He has to cope with his whining old mother, his huge, thirty-three year old, crazy brother, his promiscuous bitch of a niece, Miss Quentin, his sponging Uncle Maury and the six family negroes. He is stuck in a job he considers demeaning, in a town that he thinks - probably rightly if Old Job's barely veiled mockery is anything to go by - thinks of him and the rest of the Compsons merely fit for 'chasing butterflies' (p.198). Faulkner builds up Jason's sense of frustration through the pace at which he thinks and moves and through the clocks that are always



ahead of him, and he builds up Jason's aggressive, self-centred nature through the tones and styles of Jason's language. The reader, from his perspective of the whole landscape, sees all Jason's futile sound and fury, recognizes him in his mother, and vice versa, in the random thinking that reaches out to blame anyone in sight or memory for the environment in which he is, and sees that he is a sadist and a cheat. The reader also recognizes Faulkner's clues for Jason's day, in yet another set of time-markers, that operate not as the hounders and reminders that they do in Quentin's section, but as a kind of elusive colossus unsuccessfully chased by Jason. Where both reader and character recognize that limits of Jason's physical prospect are also the limits of his mental and moral prospect, only the reader sees his selfishness, deceitfulness and cruelty as well as his bitter, dynamic humour and his truly unenviable family situation. No less here than in the two previous sections, the reader needs to hold in mind the dual perspective of the whole landscape, and Jason's perception of Jason's landscape.

From the beginning of Jason's section, the reader is assailed by spoken language. Its violence - 'once a bitch, always a bitch', its slangy tone - 'gobbing paint on her face', its locational leaps - 'school', 'kitchen', 'her room', 'breakfast', and its unrelated juxtapositions - the schoolgirl, the adult woman, the six negroes - all stun the reader. The sense of nervous over-activity in the first paragraph is heightened by the continuous present tense and the interjected, self-returning phrases, 'what I say', 'I says', Jason needs to verbalize all his thoughts. The language of the opening paragraph pre-figures others in which Jason tears around in a self-aware frenzy, like that in which he follows his niece:

Well, I can stand a lot; if I couldn't, damn if I wouldn't be in a hell of a fix, so when they turned the corner I jumped down and followed. Me, without any hat, in the middle of the afternoon, having to chase up and down back alleys because of my mother's good name. p.200

Chasing up and down the back alleys sums up the limited horizons of Jason's mind, the social level to which the Compsons are reduced and Jason's searing awareness of his family's decline.

Alongside the barrage of spoken language and the frenzy of movement, the reader becomes aware of the sounds of time-signifiers - bells ring, clocks chime, music plays. They serve not as markers of chronological time, but as arbitrary points of reference for activities in Jason's day. The Compson clock that is three hours slow signifies breakfast when it chimes five times. It symbolizes both the Compson's defection from everybody's else's time and Jason's perpetual chase after it. Public time-markers like the town clock are always ahead of Jason's working day. Arbitrary time-markers, like the arrival of the mail and the daily habits of the sparrows obsess Jason; chronological time betrays him.

Because he cannot order his activities in a disciplined and selective way, Jason is always trying to catch up with time. At work, he thinks of Uncle Job's uncrating of the cultivators in terms of time, 'at the rate of about three bolts an hour' (p.163). Uncle Job's response about time and the boll weevil sets up a contrasting, but well ordered view of the relationship between time, labour and money. Uncle Job has mastered time; Jason is its slave. Where Quentin would destroy time, Jason cannot catch it. Obsession with time and money complicates Jason's day; he checks the state of the stock-market at 10am, before lunch at 12, after lunch at 2pm, and after he returns from chasing Miss Quentin for the second time, around 5pm. By then chronological time and his disordered activities



have conspired against him. He has missed the telegram advising him to sell, the stock-market has closed and he has lost money.

Faulkner's portrayal of Jason's limited mental horizons works through the compression of surges of speech and action into contained physical space. He compounds the impression of sound and fury that surrounds Jason through the very simple structure of his sentences and the associative train of his thinking. Jason's mind works like Benjy's and Quentin's, by associative trigger and also like Quentin's, by imaginative leap, but with lesser range.

The thirteen page long digression recalling Mr Compson's funeral (pp.169-181), through its sardonic tone, further illustrates Jason's frustrations, but the digression works also, for the reader, as a revelatory landscape of the past, in which the roots of Jason's bitterness are exposed. The digression is a catalogue, like his mother's in Quentin's section, of the ways in which members of the family have reduced Jason's financial horizons. Up to a point the reader sympathizes with Jason, but he cannot condone his extortion of money from Caddy or his misappropriation of money that is Miss Quentin's. Jason resembles Flem Snopes in that he cares for nobody but himself, and is willing to use members of his own family for his own ends, but unlike Flem, Jason has an inherited social status to uphold, and powerful Southern traditions. Decayed as these are, and much as they operate against him, Jason feels imprisoned by them. The reader is left with a sense not only of sound and fury and petty pace, but of acerbic and unseeing resilience that is of a different order altogether from Dilsey's resilience, and different too, from the kind of landscape that surrounds and defines Dilsey.

## Vivid Pictures 2

### The Older Generation

what have I done to deserve children like these                      Mrs Compson, p.88

Caddy and Father and Jason were in Mother's chair...and I went and Father lifted me into the chair too...                      (Benjy) p.61

Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away...

(Quentin) p.151.

"All right...all right, here I is."

Dilsey, p.231.

Earlier in this chapter, I said that the blocks of text operated as a structure for revealing the whole of the thirty year Compson landscape, almost as though it were all in the present. Repeatedly referred to episodes help to fix points of time in the family history, and various kinds of keys help to make sense of the first two layers of landscape. Among all these structures for fixing and showing the landscape, the figure of Mrs Compson functions as another structure. She appears in all four sections in her capacity as mother of the family, so that she operates both organically and structurally as a lynchpin. The reader's information in the first three sections comes mainly through remembered dialogue. Although the remembering minds are, respectively, limited, unstable and bitter (which renders their reliability suspect), Mrs Compson's patterns of speech and behaviour are consistent. They describe a vacillating curve that always returns to herself, along with which there are a number of recurring mental bolt-holes. She uses Calvinistic clichés as a means of blackmailing her family, but for the reader, these same clichés define her selfishness and intractability. The consistent patterns are verified in the fourth section, at which point Mrs Compson is directly in view and under the scrutiny of an objective narrator.



From the reader's perspective of the whole landscape of the novel, Mrs Compson has a lot to cope with, without much in the way of either moral or physical stamina to help her. She has come ill-equipped into marriage with a large amount of inflated family pride and social expectation and out of it she has got four children in five years, one of them severely mentally and physically handicapped. If she more or less runs her household from her bed it is because she has, in the normal way of her social things, a whole family of servants to do the lifting and laying. In some other segment of the world landscape, fictional or not, she would have had to get up and get on with it, but in Faulkner's South, she need not and she does not. She becomes instead, across the thirty years of narrative time, more and more selfish, manipulative and intractable, and in consequence, a more and more damaging influence on her husband and her children. Faulkner articulates the character of Mrs Compson through the pattern of her spoken language, through dialogue, through what other characters say and through the observations of the objective narrator in the fourth section.

Referring again to the recalled speech from Quentin's section, in their primary context, the truncated and unpunctuated sentences in this passage serve to mark a stage in Quentin's mental disintegration, but the quality of monotonous continuum that accrues in them echoes Mrs Compson's self-pitying tone. The passage affords the reader, implicitly, a sustained view of Mrs Compson's mental landscape, and it evokes sympathy for Quentin in whose mind every nuance and phrase is stamped, and to whom it must have been a familiar diatribe. Beyond the novel's limited horizons, the passage works as a portrayal of a type of Southern woman.

Mrs Compson operates under two controlling beliefs, both of which are repressive: the existence of a retributive God, and Southern blood

hierarchy. In a very real way, these shackle her and she, in turn, attempts to use them to shackle others. In another way, however, she is the only Compson who remains shackled. Her husband retreats into alcohol, her eldest son fashions for himself a pitiful and beautiful place in the 'peaceful grottoes' (p.96) of the sea, her daughter escapes because of her pregnancy, her youngest son was born free of shackles and Jason, 'more Bascombe than Compson' (p.88), manages to find some poor, mean and petty ways out. In the diatribe, Mrs Compson sets off from two implied premises, that divine punishment attends certain human acts, and that women are 'given' children: "what have I done to have been given children like these". Neither of these ideas is particularly Southern, and both are, for 1928, sound received notions. In terms of Calvinist principles, Mrs Compson might possess divine knowledge that Jason 'was to be [her] joy and [her] salvation' but to extract sufficiency from her thought that 'Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins' could work as a presumption incurring further punishment. Mrs Compson has reached back in search of a sin to account for having been given Benjy, and she has come up with one that is peculiarly and unequivocally and twistedly Southern, and not part of Calvinist principles in anybody's terms (except the South's): "I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me". Well might the reader wonder where she is going to go from here. But she retreats into safe Calvinism with,

but I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your [Mr Compson's] sins as well as mine what have you done what sins have your high and mighty people visited upon me, p.88

following which she proceeds via premises that, if they are soundly believed in by the likes of Mrs Compson, are not necessarily sound in themselves, and become thoroughly unsafe (and in a wider context, racist) when mixed: of sins that are capable of being visited, and of 'bad



blood' that is capable of 'beginning to show'. Mrs Compson goes on to find Compson blood 'bad', 'the very air...[the] children breathe' corrupted by Caddy, and 'the others...not...[her] flesh and blood like...[Jason] is'. Her solution to the problem deteriorates into melodramatic self-pity tinged with Calvinistic rhetoric:

I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse. p.89

The point about the passage is that despite the fact that this exhibition of Mrs Compson's is not first hand, but merely recall, it carries a pervading and claustrophobic power. The following dialogue is not first hand either, but recalled in Jason's mind in his section, "April Sixth, 1928". From the dialogue, as from the passage discussed above, a pattern of thinking emerges that reflects both its familiarity to its hearers and, for the reader, the vacillating, self-returning curve of Mrs Compson's thinking. At the point at which Mr Compson brings home Caddy's baby, the reader is fresh from Jason's sardonically funny summary of his family's fortunes (p.169). Dilsey and Mr Compson, working in tandem, engage Mrs Compson about where the family cradle should or should not go:

So we carried the cradle down and Dilsey started to set it up in her old room. Then Mother started sure enough.

"Hush, Miss Cahline," Dilsey says, "You gwine wake her up."

"In there?" Mother says, "To be contaminated by that atmosphere? It'll be hard enough as it is, with the heritage she already has."

"Hush," Father says, "Don't be silly."

"Why ain't she gwine sleep in here," Dilsey says, "In the room whar I put her ma to bed ev'y night of her life since she was big enough to sleep by herself." p.171

Both Mr Compson and Dilsey begin with the useless convention of hushing her. (She wails much as Benjy moans; both are constantly and abortively hushed.) Mr Compson's "'Don't be silly'" is not strong enough

to evoke either antagonism or retreat from Mrs Compson, but Dilsey's common sense produces both:

"You don't know," Mother says, "To have my own daughter cast off by her husband. Poor little innocent baby," she says, looking at Quentin. "You will never know the suffering you've caused." p.171

When Dilsey persists, Mrs Compson summons up two well tried weapons, "'I know I'm just a troublesome old woman. But I know that people cannot flout God's laws with impunity'", and a new tack, "'If she could grow up never to know that she had a mother, I would thank God.'" Quite strenuously countered, for him, by Mr Compson, "'Don't be a fool'", she produces an ace:

"I have never interfered with the way you brought them up...But now I cannot stand any more. We must decide this now, tonight. Either that name is never to be spoken in her hearing, or she must go, or I will go. Take your choice." p.172

Faced with this kind of ultimatum, Mr Compson backs down and reverts to hushing, Dilsey turns her attention to him, "'En you's about sick too...You git in bed and I'll fix you a toddy...I bet you ain't had a full night's sleep since you lef'", and promptly gives Mrs Compson opportunity for a new foray and a recapitulation of her felt moral position:

"Why must you encourage him to drink? That's what's the matter with him now. Look at me, I suffer too, but I'm [not] so weak that I must kill myself with whisky."\* p.172

The baby's cradle finally does get set up in Caddy's old room, but at a cost the sad poignancy of which quite escapes the spying, seventeen year old Jason:

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\* The Picador text is wrong here. Mrs Compson's sentence should contain the word 'not' where I have inserted it.



I heard the sideboard. I woke up and heard him going down again. Mother had gone to sleep or something, because the house was quiet at last. He was trying to be quiet too, because I couldn't hear him, only the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs in front of the sideboard. p.172

Mrs Compson is a powerful, negative force in the landscapes of her children. With her husband dead two years after the furore over Caddy and the death of Quentin, she becomes intractably and pettily anarchical (p.8: c.1913; p.260: 1928). Jason resembles her enough (p.241: 1928) to be able to cope with her, but he himself describes such fraught and furious circles that he simply rotates into and out of her orbit with his customary violence and cheats her in the passing. Mrs Compson has always had the potential to become what she has become in thirty years. Mr Compson, however, had positive qualities that are finally and tragically swamped. In the thirty years of the novel's time, he changes from a loving father in 1901, to a nihilistic alcoholic by 1910, and in 1928, he is a memory eighteen years long.

The prospect that Mr Compson offers the adolescent Quentin has been discussed above. At that point, the reader sees him as a defaulting parent, and from the culmination of the cradle episode of roughly the same period, as a man burdened beyond his moral stamina. Yet as a younger man, ten or so years earlier, he appears as a warm and caring father to his four small children:

"We must be quiet while Quentin's studying." Father said. "What are you doing, Jason."

"Nothing." Jason said.

"Suppose you come over here to do it, then." Father said.

Jason came out of the corner...

Caddy and Father and Jason were in Mother's chair...Caddy's head was on Father's shoulder...I went and Father lifted me into the chair too. p.61

This very ordinary family scene comes from around the same time as another well recognized type of childish incident, that of Jason cutting

up Benjy's paper dolls. Benjy is five and Quentin eight or nine at this time, and the children still able to cluster on Mr Compson's lap. In 1908, Mr Compson sold the last piece of Compson land in order to send Quentin to Harvard in fall 1909, and in 1911 he performs his last act of love when he succeeds in bringing home Caddy's daughter. He wins the battle with his wife over the cradle, but he loses the war over the return of Caddy herself to the family. Faulkner does not develop the relationship between Caddy and her father beyond these few incidents, yet it seems from them that Faulkner is postulating a kind of ideal father-daughter relationship and one that, like Quentin, he is able to eternalize through death (like also, Horace Benbow eternalizes Narcissa by switching to vase making). In 1912, Mr Compson dies and in 1928, Jason is still nursing his wrath to keep it warm: 'if he had to sell something to send Quentin to Harvard we'd all been a damn sight better off if he'd sold that sideboard and bought himself a one-armed strait-jacket with part of the money' (p.170). Mr Compson's decline is drastic and tragic, and because he is less fixed and stable in the general landscape, he attaches more to the mood and the values of the novels rather than to the structures.

In one of the draft Introductions for the unpublished 1933 Random House edition of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner wrote:

I wrote Quentin's and Jason's sections, trying to clarify Benjy's. But I saw that I was merely temporising; That I should have to get completely out of the book...I could then give a final turn to the screw and extract some ultimate distillation.<sup>12</sup>

Faulkner turns the moral screw on the Compsons in the fourth section of the book. For his part, the reader might well feel relieved to rest in the contextualizing viewpoint of an omniscient narrator. It is true that the layers have been becoming successively easier to make sense of, but the reader has had a tough time nonetheless, fighting his way through what amounts to three sets of sustained interior monologue articulated by minds



that are all / and lacking in even the faintest concept of *you* the reader, or *you* anybody else. The reader is particularly receptive to the relative peace and tranquillity of the fourth section. Since Faulkner gives Jason his comeuppance within the narrative instead of leaving it a point for speculation outwith it, the reader has before him, at the end of the novel, its complete, finite landscape. In rounding off the Compsons years later however, Faulkner proposes a fate for Caddy that makes nice believing for Jason, and for Dilsey something she can not, and does not want to see :

One day in 1943...Jason looked...at...a photograph in color clipped obviously from a slick magazine...the woman's face hatless between a rich scarf and a seal coat, ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned; beside her a handsome man of middleage in the ribbons and tabs of a German staffgeneral...

"It's Caddy!" the librarian whispered...

"It's Cad, all right," Jason said. Then he began to laugh.<sup>13</sup>

But in the narrative present of 1928, such news is outwith the landscape of *The Sound and the Fury*, in the same way that Narcissa's bitchiness in *Sanctuary* is over the horizon in Sartoris.

From the point of view of all the Compsons, Dilsey is the family negro of whom service is expected and whose services are taken for granted. To the reader, she is the figure who holds the household together. The effect of Faulkner's switch to a third person narrator is to verify and finally clarify the layers of landscape that have emerged in the foregoing three sections. At the same time, in terms of mood, the Dilsey section, along with the opening Benjy section, enframes and contrasts with the very different moods of the two inner sections. On a universal level, Dilsey becomes, as Faulkner himself put it in 1945,

the future, to stand above the fallen ruins of the family like a ruined chimney, gaunt, patient and indomitable' and Benjy 'the past. He had to be an idiot so that, like Dilsey, he could be impervious to the future.<sup>14</sup>

Such a vision says little for the Compsons as a family, or for them as representatives of the Southern way of life. The image of the ruined house looks metaphorically back to the Civil War and the extent to which it was fought over slavery, and in later Faulkner novels like *Absalom, Absalom!* the ruined house becomes a major symbol of the self-destructive South. In line with Faulkner's habit of marginalizing his positivensses, neither the 'white' house nor the 'black' chimney looks fit for much of a future, but of the two, the balance lies with the chimney that is Dilsey.

The muted pathetic fallacy in the description of the weather in the opening sentence at once opposes and encloses the figure of Dilsey: 'a moving wall...of...venomous particles which when Dilsey...emerged needled...into her flesh' (p.229). Dilsey's clothing establishes her as a person with a firm sense of herself, and as it emerges, a firm sense of occasion also: 'She wore a stiff black straw hat perched upon her turban, and a maroon velvet cape...above a dress of purple silk' (p.229). She does not retire from the needling chill immediately; her face is 'lifted to the weather'. Faulkner's prosaic description of the physical woman, her gown that hangs 'gauntly', the 'fallen breasts', 'unpadded skin' and 'collapsed face', is underkeyed by the language of moral strength, 'as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude', 'indomitable skeleton'. Dilsey's very gay attire is a celebration of Easter Sunday and behind her facial expression, 'at once fatalistic and of a child's astonishment and disappointment', lies her hope of weather more appropriate. The landscape around the cabin expands upon the impression of harassment from the weather and upon the implied indomitability of Dilsey's character. Dilsey is allied with the earth in a way that enhances both; the 'bare' earth has a 'patina' as though from 'bare' feet, like 'old silver' (p.230), the leaves of the mulberry trees that



shade the cabin in summer are now, like Dilsey herself, 'streaming...upon the driving air'. The jaybirds that scream in the branches remind the reader of the Compsons as the wind 'rip[s] their harsh cries onward and away like scraps of paper', so also in the novel's landscape of time are the sounds and the furies of the Compsons like so many scraps of paper. Into this prospect, Dilsey re-emerges, dressed for the weather in a way that underscores her commonsense, her resilience and her poverty, 'in a man's felt hat and an army greatcoat' (p.230).

The collection of small and necessary but wind-harassed chores that Dilsey performs outside leads into the kitchen scene, to another collection of chores and the harassment of Mrs Compson's voice 'calling "Dilsey" at steady and inflexionless intervals' (p.231). Faulkner uses physical landscape to imply external buffeting and internal resilience, and to prepare for the action, in which Dilsey is implicitly compared, to their disadvantage, with the Compsons. A sense of harmony and peacefulness develops out of the silence left as the dining room door gradually ceases to flap: Dilsey's hands go through the rhythmic movements of biscuit-making, and her voice sings 'to herself at first', a hymn 'without particular tune or words, repetitive, mournful, plaintive and austere' (p.233); sounds of the fire in the stove underkey Dilsey's voice in 'murmurous minors'. As Mrs Compson's voice breaks in, 'calling [Dilsey's] name with machine-like regularity', the peacefulness becomes infused with a transcendental quality as Dilsey listens 'as if her eyes could and did penetrate the walls and ceiling'. This quality is quickly passed over at this point, because the reader's attention is taken up with the spectacle of Mrs Compson 'clutching [the hot water bottle] by the neck like a dead hen' (p.234).

To expand a little on the transcendental quality Faulkner gives Dilsey, Dilsey is alive in Memphis in 1943, almost fifty years after her youngest child, T.P., was born, in 1895.<sup>15</sup> We do not know, but it could have been that Dilsey's forebears were Compson slaves, although there is no hint of a blood relationship (as was a proven fact in the McCaslin family<sup>16</sup>, and a supposition in the Sartoris family<sup>17</sup>). If the Gibsons came to the Compsons when Quentin was born in 1891, her distressed cry after the Easter service, 'I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin' (p.258)' would refer only to Quentin's generation, which might seem too limited when set alongside the Reverend Shegog's relentless, far seeing, incantatory sermon. Whatever meaning the reader cares to draw from Dilsey's words, it is possible that they derive from and refer to a lifelong first hand knowledge of the Compsons as an old Southern family. Looked at this way, Dilsey's ability to penetrate the walls and ceiling comes out of commonsense experience of the Compsons augmented with a salting of genuine spiritual sorrow for their plight. (We might also argue that Mrs Compson thinks that she herself possesses transcendental qualities, and prefer Dilsey's.) Howsoever we read 'I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin', there is no doubt that Dilsey's Christian faith sustains and enhances her gut ability to survive, and to endure.

Faulkner quits the landscape of *The Sound and the Fury* on a note of order. But it is an order imposed at the will of an idiot in accordance with his spectrum of perceptions. Within the narrative, peace reigns again, but nothing changes, and the stone Confederate soldier stands with his back to the North, mutely silencing his own dissenting voices. By implication, more in the South than the Compsons live in a landscape of sound and fury that signifies, if not nothing, then nothing that smacks of change.



## Footnotes for Chapter 3

1. Maurice Edgar Coindreau, *Le Bruit et la fureur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938). Copyright Editions Gallimard 1938. Trans. George McMillan Reeves, from *Mississippi Quarterly* 19:3 (Summer 1966); copyright □ Mississippi State University and reprinted by permission of the editors.  
Here in *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family*, Arthur Kinney (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp.105-111; note 1, p.111. 'This quotation from Faulkner was never written down in English; the version given here is an attempt to approximate his idiom'.
2. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, edited by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p.245.
3. William Faulkner, *Sartoris*, first pub. Harcourt Brace (New York, 1929); this ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), p.119.
4. Ibid. p.77.
5. William Faulkner, "Appendix: The Compsons", in *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking Press, 1946); this ed. 1974.
6. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York, 1929); this ed. (London: Picador Classics, 1989), p.1. Further references to this edition in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
7. For Faulkner's remarks see Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp. 357-8.
8. *The Sound and the Fury*, pps. 1,11,12,16,29,42.
9. Arthur F. Kinney, *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), p.72.
10. *Lion in the Garden*, p.147.
11. Published as "That Evening Sun" by *Scribner's Magazine*, 6 October, 1930; as "That Evening Sun Go Down" by *American Mercury*, 22 (March, 1931).
12. *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family*, p.73.
13. The Compson Appendix, in *The Portable Faulkner*, p.712-713.

14. *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family*, Appendix 1, p. 73; *Faulkner: A Biography*, p.571.
15. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, (London: AUP, 1988), p.28
16. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, first published Random House (New York, 1942); this ed. (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p.257
17. *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, pp. 293, 296.



## Chapter 4

### *Sanctuary*

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"This book was written three years ago. To me it is a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money." Thus begins the Introduction that Faulkner wrote for the Modern Library issue of *Sanctuary* in 1932, one year after its original publication...Faulkner's self-deprecatory statements were promptly seized upon to disparage the novel and discredit the novelist, so that for several decades Faulkner scholars busied themselves demonstrating that neither *Sanctuary* nor Faulkner's comments on it offer valid justification for the charge of premeditated sensationalism.

Today *Sanctuary* no longer needs defense.<sup>1</sup>

In a sense, *Sanctuary* might be almost any community's gothic nightmare. Since the major premise of this 'most horrific tale'<sup>2</sup> is that corruption is everywhere, corruption is as much a part of the landscape as the air the characters breathe. Incorruption is non-existent. Less corrupt characters like Horace Benbow and Lee Goodwin are insufficiently astute in contending with evil, and capable of being outmanoeuvred by its forces. The grossest of the corruptions in *Sanctuary* relate to the prohibition era, so that the novel also works as a period piece complete with gangsters, bootleggers and prostitutes. That Faulkner successfully transfers such a scenario to rural North Mississippi is possible for the reason that in a sense corruption is the landscape, needing only specific location to make it meaningful. The town of Jefferson functions as a base from which to describe 'ordinary', local corruption, and upon which to foster, for the season so to speak, big time city evil. But for his inclusion of the peculiarly Southern burning incident, Jefferson could be many places.



### The Impressionistic Landscape

Three areas of landscape form the main physical settings of the novel, the Old Frenchman place, twelve miles from Jefferson\*, Jefferson itself, and a brothel in the city of Memphis eighty miles to the north. The non-American reader, and perhaps also the non-Mississippian, experiences some difficulty in establishing his physical bearings in *Sanctuary*. This is partly because the first location is nowhere, so to speak, a 'spot' 'isolated' by 'a suspirant and peaceful...silence',<sup>3</sup> partly because the significance and relative importance of the several named places is not disclosed, and partly because the settings change suddenly, without prior indication. We learn that Horace Benbow lives in Kinston on page 7, and that Kinston is in the Mississippi Delta on page 15 (not the same thing, as I eventually discovered, as the delta of the Mississippi), after which the place drops out of sight until the penultimate chapter of the book. A railway map of north Mississippi might help us locate the university town of Oxford in relation to Jefferson and Memphis, if we know that "Oxford" in the fiction is not the town upon which Jefferson is based, but a place somewhere up the railway line towards Memphis, between forty and fifty miles from Jefferson.<sup>4</sup> Places are frequently a matter of hearsay. The reader learns something about the location of Jefferson through an accretion of incidental references. Horace Benbow wants to 'get to town, to Jefferson' (p.7); Narcissa Benbow Sartoris's home is 'four miles from Jefferson' (p.21);

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\* Frenchman's Bend varies in distance from Jefferson. In *Light in August* it is twelve miles, in *The Town*, twenty.

Gowan Stevens, on the road between Oxford and Taylor, says he is '[from] Jefferson' (p.28), and at the old Frenchman Place he says he must 'get back to Jefferson by night' (p.34). Along with Horace Benbow, the reader finally gets to town in Chapter 15, at which point, through Horace's remembering of the place, Faulkner describes it. In the original version of the novel, the present Chapter 16, which is set in Jefferson and centred on the jail, served as the opening chapter.

Unlike *The Sound and the Fury*, *Sanctuary* is a public novel in which small town civic and moral consciousnesses are on display. All places, with the ironic exception of Jefferson jail function as seats of corruption, rooms in houses, the Benbow family home, Narcissa's marital home, offices and public buildings. The jail, arguably, represents the only sanctuary of the novel. The Old Frenchman place at Frenchman's Bend serves as the setting for the acts of violence that lie at the dramatic centre of the tale, while Miss Reba's brothel in Memphis, the university campus at Oxford, the trains between Oxford and Jefferson, and other minor locations are repositories of different kinds of corruption.

Time setting of *Sanctuary* is contemporaneous, and the time span a period of seven weeks in May and June of 1929, with a brief 'addendum' in the autumn of the same year. But time within the narrative is severely distorted, for the reason that while the reader follows the activities of Horace Benbow, which progress laterally, Horace Benbow himself is out of sight for very substantial sections of the novel, during which events take place about which he has no current knowledge.



The structure of society in the novel consists of white characters from all sections, together with an immigrant group of Memphis bootleggers. Characters who are citizens of Jefferson consider themselves to be active upholders of what they perceive as the moral values of the community: devious and self-seeking Narcissa, sleazy and crooked Clarence Snopes, the opportunistic D.A., the hypocritical 'Christian' women, the Baptist clergyman, and the mob that burns Lee Goodwin. The anarchical Judge Drake and Temple, his daughter, are not citizens of Jefferson but they are also tarred with corrupt values. Popeye the gangster, Lee Goodwin the bootlegger and Ruby Lamar the ex-prostitute belong to the world of urban crime. Inevitably, in such a social landscape, there are losers. Horace Benbow is defeated, Lee Goodwin dead and Ruby destitute, and of their brief testimony to human caring, nothing tangible remains.

The action and events of the novel flow out of Horace Benbow's seeking sanctuary from his marriage and from the step-daughter who arouses his sexual feelings. From his chance involvement with bootleggers, he finds himself called upon to defend one of them against a charge of murder and rape. A second set of events occurs in the private internal life of Horace Benbow, related to his seeking of sanctuary, and functioning as a kind of rite of passage.

The dominating theme of the novel is corruption, about which I have commented in Chapter 1. To be brief at this point therefore, Faulkner attaches kinds and levels of corruption to a main plot concerned with misjustice, into which he incorporates a substantial salting of both big city evils and lesser community evils. Against these, one well-meaning but inept man tries and fails. The final, explicit emphasis is

on failure, but this is underlain by Horace Benbow's belief in justice and his efforts to secure it. The important sub-plot opens on to Horace Benbow's private landscape of sexual temptation. Although the overall mood of the novel is dark with various shades and densities of moral greys and blacks, *Sanctuary* is, I suggest, essentially a novel of season, a season in the life of its chief character and a season in the affairs of Jefferson, summed up in the final phrase of the novel as a 'season of rain and death' (p. 253).

The vivid pictures arising from *Sanctuary* are more than those given here. This list is restricted to pictures related to the two aspects of the landscape discussed in detail: the conversation between Horace Benbow and Popeye, along with the physical setting (pp. 5-7), Horace's drunken monologue (pp.13-16), Horace contemplating Little Belle's photograph (pp. 133, 177), Horace thoughts after visiting Temple in Miss Reba's (p.176-178), Belle's pink lamp shades, and Horace's phone call to Little Belle (p.238-239), and Temple in the Luxembourg gardens (p.253).

Most of the vivid pictures attach to either the main plot of Horace Benbow's quest for justice, or to the sub-plot of Horace's private sexual problems, but some link the two. One of these link pictures, the meeting of Horace and Popeye at the stream, is used as a starting point in Section 3. A sentence from Horace's drunken monologue, "I thought that maybe I would be all right if I just had a hill to lie on for a while" (p.15) forms a second starting point.



### Technical Strategies

The text of *Sanctuary*, like that of *Sartoris* and *The Reivers*, is partitioned conventionally; there are thirty-one chapters and no evidence of unusual character. For sight of the narrative structures and the time scales, the reader needs to get within the text, where he finds that a kind of frame operates, in as much as Jefferson is the town towards which Horace Benbow travels at the beginning of the novel and from which he departs at the end. It is not my intention to discuss the differences in the two versions of the novel in detail, but some reference needs to be made to the structural changes and the re-balancing of emphases that results from the reworking.

In the published version, the novel becomes more symmetrical, with the rape of Temple Drake the undisputed dramatic centre of the narrative, and the rape flanked by, and exerting an influence upon, the quieter story of the sex-besieged Horace Benbow. Although the reason for the publisher's rejection of the original version seems to surround the horror element in the novel, it would look as though - since none of the horror elements were, in the event, deleted - Faulkner's comment that 'it was so terrible that there were but two things to do: tear it up or rewrite it'<sup>5</sup> referred as much to his artistic sense of the novel as to its being what he much later called 'a base thing...in concept'.<sup>6</sup>

Faulkner organizes the published version of the novel into chapter blocks that parallel five phases of the landscape of corruption: Chapters 1 and 2 function as a kind of overture, Chapters 3 to 14 develop the theme in terms of (mainly) imported urban corruption,

Chapters 15 to 17 work as a point of pause and re-orientation, Chapters 18 to 30 as a development of the theme in terms of (mainly) home-grown corruption, and the final chapter as a coda piece. The narrator's account of Temple's journey to, and her first hours at Miss Reba's, in Chapter 18, pre-empts Ruby's incomplete version of Temple's experiences given to Horace in Chapter 19. The result is to give the reader more knowledge than the character, with the subtle, and perhaps slightly unfair effect of sharpening his apprehension of Horace Benbow's ineptitudes. At the same time, the episodes in Narcissa's parlour in Chapters 15, 16 and 17, for example, which seem to reduce Horace, are counteracted by those in the jail in the same chapters, which positively enhance him. There is a general absence of elevated rhetoric in *Sanctuary*, such as that used in *Sartoris* to convey pride. With the particular exception of Horace Benbow's speech in which irony works as a character enhancer, and has a thematic function, the speech of the characters is a straightforward reflection of attitude. A certain amount of tonal complicity implicitly supportive of Horace exists between what he says and what the narrator says, especially regarding Clarence Snopes. Sudden shifts in point of view, and gaps in showing, in particular those between Horace and Popeye in the opening chapter, usually carry thematic meaning.

Because Horace Benbow comes under close scrutiny in the following section, it is helpful to compare the effect on the character of the structures in the original and the published versions. Gerald Langford suggests that the passages omitted from the published book

clarified the personality of Horace and made him a more understandable character than the somewhat plausible idealist he becomes in the revised version.<sup>7</sup>

The passages Professor Langford refers to concern Horace's sexual attraction to Ruby. Perhaps it is the case that in the original



Faulkner intended to place Horace at the centre of a large number of different kinds of sexual experience, disenchantment with his wife, interest in his sister, desire for Little Belle and dream partner of her, attraction to Ruby, listener to Temple's account of her sexual experiences, dream partner of her too, and observer of the couple in the alley-mouth. But I do not feel that the original text makes Horace a more understandable character. Rather, it seems to me that if the original text *clarifies his personality*, it also turns him into a cross between a pulp fiction lurid and a weirdo. This might well have been how Faulkner wanted to portray Horace Benbow at first, but such a portrayal sets up a division of thematic interest in which Horace appears to be more occupied with sex than he is with defending Lee Goodwin. By reducing the number and the kinds of connections between Horace and sex in the revision, the theme of corruption stands clear, powered by sex rather than in competition with it. By a similar token, with the removal of the incest element and much of the biographical material, Faulkner's evocation of Horace Benbow becomes more streamlined and more rigorously focused in the narrative present.

In the published text, Faulkner excises neither the overtly titillating scenes connected with Temple that form part of Horace's professional life, nor the subtler scenes describing Horace's sexual feelings for Little Belle that exist in his private thoughts, but the scenes midway between the two that attach to Ruby. Horace's attraction to Ruby Goodwin at the Old Frenchman Place is scarcely allowed to surface in the published text, and amounts to no more than a hand on Ruby's face and a moment of recognition of sexual attraction; and in the jail her offer of sex is rejected. In the incident at the old Frenchman Place, Horace might well be beginning to behave like the kind of men Ruby has known, but in the jail, he obviously does not. By

toning down the Ruby scenes, Faulkner retains a very muted connection between the exterior and interior Horace, and this works as a structural link, but far more importantly, he gives the character moral room to manoeuvre. The re-structured personality appears as less of a Southern oddball, and more as a reasonably normal man who badly needs some mental fresh air, who finds himself, instead, all but asphyxiated in a nightmarish swamp of corruption. The told story depicts a slice in the life of Horace Benbow, and the fewer number of connections between Horace and sex in the published version become structures that Faulkner plays off against each other within Horace's private thoughts.

In Chapter 23 of the published version, Faulkner uses the incidents of Temple in Miss Reba's brothel, the couple in the alley and Little Belle's photograph as a set of leading marks for a point of catharsis in Horace's thinking. From the reader's point of view, the varying kinds and degrees of sexual activity, and Horace's responses to these provide him with a kind of moral gauge against which Horace's particular 'pattern to evil' (p.176) can be measured. There is no reason why Horace should not be, at one and the same time, a plausible idealist, and a sexually beset man. But feeling sexually beset on account of his step-daughter, and feeling a small surge of sexual attraction for Ruby Goodwin does not turn him into one of the kind of men that Ruby has known. By the same token, there is no reason why Horace should not be professionally inept as well as a believer in and striver for justice.



## Vivid Pictures 1

## Horace and Popeye

In the spring the dinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking. When he rose up he saw among them the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat, though he had heard no sound. p.5.

The first section of Chapter 1 is reminiscent of a Victorian book of moral tales and pictures for children. Thus, we might say, one sunny day in May, in a isolated piece of countryside full of 'thick growth[s] of cane and brier...[and] cypress and gum', a man named Popeye, dressed like a gangster watches another man. This other man is ordinary looking, 'tall, thin...hatless, in worn grey flannel trousers'. The two men talk and then the first leads the second off towards a dark house. Who are the two men? Where are they going? Why do you think the artist has painted this picture?

*Sanctuary* begins with the chance meeting of Horace Benbow and Popeye. In the original version, the meeting takes place in Chapter 2. Faulkner's re-positioning of the scene, and the strange character of the scene itself, mark it as significant in two ways. The scene suggests what develops as a prevailing mood: the malignity that is Popeye stands out in a landscape that is natural and ordinary. By a similar token, in the ordinary, workaday landscape of Jefferson, a season of evil stands out. Then the mirror-matching of the ordinary-looking Horace and the evil-

looking Popeye in the water of the stream leads into a major premise: that the potential for evil exists in all humanity, and that within the concept of evil there exist widely varying orders and degrees of evil. The reader must deduce from these juxtapositions, and from the movement of the passage that Faulkner is alternately fusing and polarising the two men.

Faulkner's setting for the opening is scrub land in the vicinity of the Old Frenchman Place at Frenchman's Bend. Unlike the opening scene of *The Hamlet*, where the landscape of Frenchman's bend is directly focused upon from an Olympian point of view, the landscape in the opening scene of *Sanctuary* is closely yet incidentally juxtaposed with the figures in it, upon whom the primary focus rests. Embedded in the landscape lies one of the dominant images of the novel, that of a screen. There is a 'screen of bushes' behind which Popeye hides, 'a thick growth of cane and brier', a 'secret and hidden' bird. The narrator projects the scene from Popeye's viewpoint initially, so that the reader sees that Popeye has knowledge of Horace before Horace has knowledge of Popeye. The device works not only as a way of advantaging the reader and disadvantaging Horace, but also as a neat and convenient way of introducing the character, as a means of implying Popeye's function as a major character, and as a lead in to the carefully orchestrated psychological mirror-matching of Popeye with Horace.

What little information is given about each man in the first paragraph is suggestive of social designation: the name 'Popeye' is one loaded with underworld connotation;<sup>8</sup> the 'tweed coat' carried by the other man might place him in a professional group. The unlikely presence of either beside a scrubland stream twelve miles from the nearest town is implied through the unsuitable clothing of each man. An indefinite sense of



menace derives partly from the various screens and partly from the hidden bird that sings three notes, like a signal or a warning, twice, once before Horace leans to drink from the stream, and once after he sees Popeye's reflection in the water. In the third paragraph, the narrator shifts to Horace's point of view:

Popeye watched the man...In the spring the drinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking. When he rose up he saw among them the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat, though he had heard no sound.  
p.5

There is not only a shift of viewpoint, and a signal, but also a convenient natural gap at the point of Horace's actual drinking. Faulkner exploits the gap, and compels the reader, through Horace's eyes, to witness the replacement of Horace's reflection with that of Popeye's straw hat. It is a minor phenomenon, but one that emerges as significant. The reader is further compelled to witness, along with Horace, the physical actuality of the man named Popeye. What Horace sees, 'a man of under size, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette slanted from his chin' (p.5) and wearing a black suit, resembles the archetypal picture of a gangster. To densify the picture, Popeye is presented in silhouette, juxtaposed 'against the sunny silence' and endowed with a 'vicious depthless quality of stamped tin'. As in *The Hamlet*, Faulkner highlights evil or weakness or foolishness by juxtaposition with nature. To the aura of silence that surrounds Horace's looking and Popeye's standing there, Faulkner adds one further dimension, that of an isolation that is both expressed, 'a...silence which seemed to isolate the spot' and implied, 'the sound of an automobile passing along the road and dying away'.

Snatches of cryptic dialogue drive a cultural and moral wedge between the two men, so that, despite their having been implicitly mirror-matched

in the water of the stream, they are now, through the switch in the mode of telling from narration to direct speech, overtly polarised. For Popeye, bulges in people's pockets mean guns. Horace's pocket bulges with a book:

The other man stopped his hand. "It's a book."  
 "What book?" Popeye said.  
 "Just a book. The kind that people read. Some people do."  
 "Do you read books?" Popeye said. p.6

Popeye's reaction to the book and Horace's reaction to Popeye reveal the cultural differences. Where Horace feels he can try some mild irony, the book itself interests Popeye. He wants to know what kind of book it is. It is a book with words in it, not pictures. Horace intrigues Popeye. Indeed, Horace becomes 'a professor' (p.9), a discovery to be taken home and shown off: "'I found him at the spring'". People like Horace are not threatening for people like Popeye, and do not get shot, as Tommy's dog does. Nor are people like Horace contemptible, as Tommy is, who also gets shot. A kind of rapport is established between the two men:

Popeye...squatted, facing the man across the spring. That was about four o'clock on an afternoon in May. They squatted so...for two hours. Now and then the bird sang...as though it were worked by a clock... p.6

The implicit mirroring is re-enforced, the vaguely malevolent bird sings again and the two men become a paired, isolated unit. Once again, Faulkner creates a gap, a substantial one, since two hours is a long time to squat facing a stranger, unless one finds the company compelling. Since Horace knows that Popeye has a gun one imagines that he did find Popeye compelling, but nevertheless at the end of the period, Horace has clearly learned enough about Popeye to feel he can indulge in some more pointed irony:

"And of course you don't know the name of it...I don't suppose you'd know a bird at all, without it was singing in a cage in a hotel lounge, or cost four dollars on a plate." p.6



The fact of the conversation, and its tone, reinforces the mirroring; the cultural dichotomy restates the polarisation. Faulkner brings the scene to an end by invoking natural landscape to establish the two points that he has been making: the disparateness of the two men - Horace has come to drink from the water, but Popeye spits into it (p.7), and their isolated mutuality - 'On the invisible highroad another car passed, died, away. Between them and the sound of it the sun was almost gone' (p.7).

The strange, introductory landscape is quite whole in itself, basically very simple and serves, as I have indicated, to set the mood, to imply evil in ordinariness and to prefigure the major moral landscapes that follow out of the main plot and sub-plot. The apparently good man with his book and his tweed coat goes off with the apparently bad man towards a dark and menacing building, 'a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees' (p.8).

I do not intend to draw a sustained parallel between Horace Benbow and Popeye; I do not think Faulkner intended it that way. But the matched reflections are profoundly significant in specific ways best discussed at this point. To jump ahead to the rape of Temple Drake by Popeye and to Horace Benbow's sexual fascination with his step-daughter, it is perfectly feasible to see Popeye as a nightmare alter ego of Horace and the rape as a nightmarish extrapolation of Horace's desires regarding Little Belle. This reading works very well as far as it goes, which is no further than the cathartic scenes of Chapter 23, for the reason that at that point Horace makes a moral upturn, which Popeye never does. On a less Freudian scale of sexual unsavourinesses, Popeye's brutal and unnatural rape of Temple is very much more heinous than Horace's sexual appetite for Little Belle. But in view of the convoluted figuring of

language emanating from Horace in the passages dealing with his feelings for Little Belle, and in view of the self-excusing and the self-explaining that is going on in these passages, it is clear that Faulkner is not prepared to leave the matter at this simple moral level.

On a far more stringent moral plane therefore, both men are guilty, by proxy, of defiling women. Within that parameter, the difference between the two acts is one of technicality and degree: Horace Benbow is tarred with the same broad moral brush as Popeye; both are placed within the same order of corruption. This line of reasoning has its ramifications, for it places Horace Benbow fairly and squarely among tainted humanity, and it re-states and underscores the implications of the reflections in the stream, that incipient evil exists in all humanity. The great divide between the two men, of which Faulkner withholds confirmation until the final mitigatory chapter on Popeye, lies in each one's concepts of moral responsibility. For his part, Popeye does not and can not have any; he is five years old when the doctor says of him, "He will never be any older than he is now" (p.246). Horace Benbow, on the other hand, subscribes to a fair number of concepts. As a parent, or more accurately as a step-parent, he remonstrates with Little Belle about her unsuitable companions (p.14), and as a firm believer in justice, he says, "I cannot stand idly by and see injustice [done]" (p.95). He finds places for Ruby Goodwin to stay, and has an intense dislike of Clarence Snopes's moral brigandage (p.149).

The material discussed above derives, ultimately, from the mirror-matching of Horace and Popeye in the opening paragraphs and works at one of the deeper thematic levels. It represents the skeleton of Horace Benbow's mould of consciousness, and I have dwelt upon it here because I



am concerned to separate this from the many incidents and episodes that serve to illustrate it.

## Vivid Pictures 2

### Horace Benbow's Private Landscape

"I just wanted a hill to lie on for a while." Horace Benbow, p.16

Nobody but the reader has access to the landscape of sexual temptation that exists in Horace Benbow's mind. This runs in tandem with the events of the narrative present.

In the company of the bootleggers at the macabre Old Frenchman place, Horace gets drunk on moonshine whisky and starts to talk about his sexual attraction to Little Belle and his disillusionment with his marriage. His words give on to a landscape of mind so clouded with symbol that even Ruby Lamar, an ex-prostitute and his only listener, does not understand what he is talking about: 'He's crazy...The poor, scared fool' (p.16). Between Horace's drunkenness, the story that is told largely in symbols, and Ruby's non-comprehension of it, Faulkner simultaneously reveals and conserves the private nature of Horace's internal landscape. Horace's symbolized story permits him to hide the truth of what he is saying from himself, and to justify his thoughts by reason of what he calls 'that conspiracy between female flesh and female season' (p.13).

Conversely, Horace is quick to recognize another aspect of himself: "You see, I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it won't run" (p.16). This is not truth masquerading as drunken rambling, but, a conscious, if still drunk, attempt at self-appraisal or self-excuse, and it is said in the middle of Horace's running his fingers over Ruby's face and asking her why she chooses the lifestyle she does. Given that action, the tale he has just told, and his recent encounter with Popeye, the kind of courage he means could be sexual, or physical or moral. His response to Ruby's question, "Why did you leave your wife?", manifestly demonstrates lack of something. But if Horace's ten years of carrying Belle's shrimps home every Friday, and his epitaph-like vision of himself, "Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk" (p.17), looks like lack of courage to him, to the reader it smacks of thoroughgoing boredom and lethargy, and reason enough for him to want a hill to lie on for a while. Faulkner gives the reader a degree of insight into Horace Benbow, and then flings up one of the screens that pervade the novel by removing Horace from view for nine chapters. In stages, Faulkner moves towards a point, after the scene of the couple in the alley-mouth but before that in the bathroom, at which Horace finds himself forced to face and re-think his moral landscape.

Horace begins his symbolic tale thus:

"From my window I could see the grape arbour, and in the winter I could see the hammock too. But in winter it was just the hammock. That's why we know nature is a she; because of that conspiracy between female flesh and female season. So each spring I could watch the reaffirmation of the old ferment hiding the hammock; the green-snared promise of unease. What blossoms grapes have, this is. It's not much: a wild and waxlike bleeding less of bloom than leaf, hiding and hiding the hammock, until along late in May, in the twilight, her - Little Belle's - voice would be like the murmur of the wild grape itself." pp. 13-14



The grape arbour and the hammock, symbols of fruitfulness and procreation, are real enough, but they exist beyond the glass of Horace's window, or metaphorically, beyond the strictures of rule and reason. In winter, the season of no growth, he can see the hammock clearly enough, and is not disturbed by thoughts of its procreative purpose. With the coming of spring, and growth, he responds to the burgeoning of nature, to the signals of readiness to procreate, to the *wild and waxlike bleeding* of the grape. As a creature of the natural world, and profoundly sensitive to it, he finds himself responding, like *the old ferment...the green-snared promise of unease* to Little Belle's burgeoning sexuality.

There is another side to the story, however: Horace recounts his possibly jealous intrusions on Little Belle and her various callers: "'Horace, this is Louis or Paul or Whoever'" (p.14), at which point Faulkner shifts to the parent aspect of Horace, the unwanted parent: "'It's just Horace.' Just, you see;...the two of them all demure and quite alert and a little impatient." This is a clear enough demonstration, if also a picture of self-pity, of Horace's attempts, as a parent, to humour Little Belle out of unsuitable companions: "'Honey, if you found him on the train, he probably belongs to the railroad company...you don't bring them home, you know...you don't soil your slippers.'" The scene climaxes with Little Belle calling Horace a shrimp, then apologising, then making up to him, after a fashion. With Horace's discovery, in the mirrors, of her face, "'watching the back of my head in pure dissimulation'" (p.15), Faulkner pivots the she-nature-female cluster of images that he has been using in its primary association with burgeoning and procreation to a new angle. He employs the motif of women's face make-up for the purpose of illustrating another kind of dissimulation: a more man-made view this, the association of human females with duplicity and artfulness.

Horace proceeds with his tale by means of the nature versus Progress argument: "That's why nature is "she" and Progress is "he"; nature made the grape arbour, but Progress invented the mirror" (p.15). Man, that is, with his inventiveness and his ideas of progress, manages, in this case exemplified by Horace and the mirrors, to be one step ahead of, to extricate himself from the impulse of nature, from things female, from burgeoning women like Little Belle, and from the artifices associated with both. Reasoning man though he is, Horace is caught between his own sensitivity to nature, disenchantment with marriage, and disgust at the "flat and rich and foul" Delta country, "that the very winds seems to make money out of" (p.15). But even all this is not the root of his enmeshing and disenchantment, which like the straw that breaks the camel's back, lies in his wife's rouge smeared handkerchief. Nature and Progress have conspired against Horace's aesthetic consciousness. Progress improves on nature. Women paint their faces with one of man's inventions. There is willing complicity. The movement of the passage is from the particular, Horace's disturbed response to Little Belle, to the general, the rich, foul land, to the symbol, the rouged handkerchief; or from burgeoning, to ripeness, to the need for artifice to mask decay.

Through Faulkner's positioning of the passages in the introductory chapters, his couching of them in the guise of drunken truth, and his use of symbol as a mode of telling, the reader is offered a first, masked, aestheticized view of the private landscape of Horace Benbow. The view works not only as a layer of landscape upon which other layers will be superimposed, as also as a panel of reference for Horace's later actions.

The Little Belle problem develops in two further stages, each superimposed in turn upon the reader's existing impressions of Horace's



private landscape. Both these further stages are set in the Benbow house in Jefferson, both use the medium of Little Belle's photograph and both are triggered off by events concerning Temple Drake. Ruby Goodwin reveals Temple's presence at the Old Frenchman place in the company of the drunken Gowan Stevens, the same 'gentleman' who is Narcissa's escort and the subject of ironic remarks from Horace. Ruby's story, recounted by Horace to Miss Jenny in Narcissa's house, returns his thoughts to Little Belle, her boyfriends, their unsuitability, and her deviousness, at which point Miss Jenny reads what is going on in his mind: "'What is it that makes a man think that the female flesh he marries or begets might misbehave, but all he didn't marry or get is bound to?'" (p.132). At this moment, Horace is properly concerned: "'Scoundrel I can face, but to think of her [Little Belle] being exposed to any fool'", but back in the privacy of his own house, there is a transposition of mood from Horace the step-parent to Horace the sexually beset man (p.133). Faulkner retains the grape metaphor as medium for Horace's thoughts and uses the changing positions of Little Belle's photograph to work again on the idea of the two-sided nature of things female:

Upon the glazed surface, a highlight lay. He shifted the photograph until the face came clear. He stood before it, looking at the sweet, inscrutable face which looked in turn at something just beyond his shoulder, out of the dead cardboard. He was thinking of the grape arbour in Kinston, of summer twilight and the murmur of voices darkening into silence as he approached, who meant them, her, no harm: who meant her less than harm, good God; darkening into the pale whisper of her white dress, of the delicate and urgent mammalian whisper of that small curious flesh which he had not begot and in which appeared to be vatted delicately some seething sympathy with the blossoming grape.

He moved, suddenly...The image blurred into the highlight, like something familiar seen beneath disturbed through clear water; he looked at the familiar image with a kind of quiet horror and despair, at a face suddenly older in sin that he would ever be, a face more blurred than sweet, at eyes more secret than soft. In reaching for it, he knocked it flat; whereupon once more the face mused tenderly behind the rigid travesty of the painted mouth, contemplating something beyond his shoulder. p. 133

In the real life situation, Little Belle has been thoroughly off-handed with Horace, but here, at a distance, through the *darkening* silence of the

photograph, he can approach her. This time Horace well and truly thinks himself out of sexual complicity by making Little Belle responsible for his feelings, which are now not at all innocuous. *Urgent mammalian whisper indeed.* Faulkner's mis-related adjectives point up Horace's self-deception. *Curious flesh* Little Belle may have, but the curiosity is Horace's, and it is voyeuristic, however much he aestheticizes it. In reminding himself in the passing that *he had not begot* Little Belle, he grants himself an edge of permission for his thoughts, and by vatting his blossoming grapes *in* Little Belle's flesh, he gets close to a very unpleasant intrusiveness. What seething being done is done by Horace, and it is sexual in character. No wonder he *move[s], suddenly.*

A degree of sexual arousal is implied in this passage as is not in the earlier one. The changed position of the photograph works as a moment of mis-directed enlightenment for Horace. The mirror motif is used again, to reveal the other face of Little Belle, *older in sin than he would ever be.*

This concept of women being 'older in sin' than men, that is to say, more naturally a part of sin, less able to extricate themselves from it, unable to help themselves, and therefore not accountable, bothers Faulkner in his novels. It occurs in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and in *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's desire to save Caddy from the world suggests it. In *Sanctuary*, the idea works as a received principle in Horace Benbow's consciousness. Through it, he can and does not only absolve himself, but consign Little Belle, *with a kind of quiet horror and despair* to some woolly realm of moral non-responsibility. He is able to see that Little Belle has another face, but he attributes it to her being older in sin, and he is incapable of consciously accepting what the reader can see -



that she is a manipulative young woman who shows every sign of growing up to be as deceitful as her aunt and as over-painted as her mother. We might consider the sad and savage metaphor Horace uses of the face in the photograph, *the travesty of the painted mouth*. On the one hand, 'travesty' expresses Horace's sense of nature defiled, but on the other, the image connects with Belle's rouged handkerchief 'where she had wiped off the surplus paint' (p.15), and it will come to connect also with the description of Temple Drake in the trial scene.

The third superimposition on the reader's view of Horace's private landscape follows from Temple's account of events at the Old Frenchman Place in the room in Miss Reba's brothel. Temple's account is limited in that she does not say what happened, but also grossly embellished, and her demeanour is shocking: 'she was recounting the experience with actual pride ...looking from him to Miss Reba with quick, darting glances like a dog driving two cattle along a lane' (p.172). This is an extraordinary image in the context, for it renders Temple fully aware of the sensationalism extractable from her experience. More importantly as far as Horace Benbow is concerned, it is incapable of being cosmeticized.

As the mirror of Progress (p.15) forced Horace into awareness of Little Belle's deviousness, and the photograph forced him into conscious recognition of it, so Temple's story, fused with the photograph, forces him into conscious acceptance, not of Little Belle's corruption, but of his own. Horace is in a state of shock and self-confrontation as he leaves Miss Reba's:

Better for her if she [Temple] were dead tonight, Horace thought...For me too. He thought of her, Popeye, the woman, the child, Goodwin, all put into a single chamber, bare, lethal, immediate and profound: a single blotting instant between the

indignation and the surprise. And I too; thinking how that were the only solution. Removed, cauterized out of the old and tragic flank of the world. And I, too, now that we're all isolated: thinking of a gentle dark wind blowing in the long corridors of sleep; of lying beneath a low cosy roof under the long sound of the rain: the evil, the injustice, the tears. In an alley-mouth two figures stood, face to face, not touching; the man speaking in a low tone unprintable epithet after epithet in a caressing whisper, the woman motionless before him as though in a musing swoon of voluptuous ecstasy. Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realize, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die, he thought... p. 176

Of those to be *cauterized*, we note that Little Belle is not one, she having been set aside in Horace's moral limbo, along with Narcissa we assume, since Horace counts on her 'imperviousness'(p.95) instead of her deviousness. Removing and cauterizing the victims of corruption (which all these are), if Horace had pushed it that far, would get them no further than one of Quentin Compson's private hells, 'beyond the clean flame'<sup>9</sup>. But if Horace has suddenly found himself in a moral pit, he is not, like Quentin, suicidal. Horace's problem centres on that aspect of moral accountability concerned with guilt, recognition and then acceptance of guilt, followed by the need to make some kind of reparation and change. But he comes up against a somewhat universal difficulty in the passage: his ability to recognize the *logical pattern to evil*, and his self-inclusion in the *old and tragic flank of the world* is one thing, but extricating himself from his own private pattern to evil is another. Yet he does it, or rather, he is forced into it, between Temple's demeanour and the spectacle of the couple in the alley-mouth. Technically, at the end of the novel, no restitution is due to Little Belle because Horace has not harmed her. Some kind of restitution is due, however, to himself. We are not told, in the final lines of the penultimate chapter what it is that Horace wants to tell Little Belle when he phones her, only that she is too otherwise occupied to listen and so off-putting that he gives up. The likelihood is that, fussing somewhat, he merely wants to tell her that he is home again. But



following through the idea of guilt, reparation and change, and given the profound nature of Horace's self-confrontation, it seems nonsensical that he makes the phone call with some idea of taking up temptation where he left it off. Rather, there is a hint, if not of problems resolved, but at least of acceptance of them, in his quiet sitting by the phone in the summer night, and thinking, probably feeling 'old', "'Night is hard on old people...Summer nights are hard on them.'" (p.239).

There are shades of Quentin Compson's sanctuary among the grottoes and caverns of the sea in the coffin-like 'low cosy roof', and of Darl Bundren thinking under a roof, listening to the rain, in *As I Lay Dying*. It is a sanctuary of sorts, one that Horace does not entertain for long, and very different from the simple hill to lie on that he sought when he left Kinston; a sanctuary where all the evils of the world may be heard in the long sound of the rain, but neither seen nor touched. The rain in this passage refers to human miseries and human evils, but Faulkner seems to take it out of this narrow context in the final lines of the novel and allot to it a more hopeful place in his scheme of things, as a kind of seasonal asperging of a season's evils.

Immediately following the *long sound of the rain* sentence, Faulkner turns the sexual perspective through one hundred and eighty degrees, from self-confrontation and the act of change or amendment that should flow from it, but which has not quite yet done so, to the crude sexual action of the couple in the alley-mouth. This is neither a corrupted girl's story nor a photograph distanced from reality, but nature in the raw, and debased nature at that. It has been put to me that in this scene Horace is torn between disgust and envy of the couple's honesty. I do not think that there is much room for envy in Horace at this moment. Nor do I think one of Horace's aesthetic sensibility capable of contemplat-

ing the couple with envy. Rather, the couple represent another step in Horace's passage towards recognition of his own moral complicity, which a further look at the photograph, once he is back in Jefferson, completes.

The photograph sat on the dresser. He took it up, holding it in his hands. Enclosed by the narrow imprint of the missing frame Little Belle's face dreamed with that quality of sweet chiaroscuro. Communicated to the cardboard by some quality of the light or perhaps by some infinitesimal movement of his hands, his own breathing, the face appeared to breathe in his palms in a shallow bath of highlight, beneath the slow, smoke-like tongues of invisible honeysuckle. Almost palpable enough to be seen, the scent filled the room and the small face seemed to swoon in a voluptuous languor, blurring still more, fading, leaving upon his eye a soft and fading aftermath of invitation and voluptuous promise and secret affirmation like a scent itself. p. 177-8

The grape metaphors have gone, and with them the self-deception, replaced by a consistent Faulknerian metaphor for sexual enticement, honeysuckle. What Horace sees now is solicitation, and the language used of the face in the photograph leads straight back to the couple in the alley-mouth, implicitly linking them with Horace, and with Little Belle.

As the final scene of the chapter stands, unless one is determined, as the readers for whom Faulkner said he wrote<sup>10</sup> might have been, to push the *logical pattern* of sexual arousal to a logical conclusion, Horace's stance over the lavatory supposes more the expulsion of coffee from an already over-stimulated physiology, and the metaphoric ejection of the pattern to evil, than it does the ejaculation of spermatozoa.

He...plunged forward and stuck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs. Lying with her head lifted slightly, her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body. She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel, the blackness streaming in rigid threads overhead, a roar of iron wheels in her ears. The car shot bodily from the tunnel in a long upward slant, the darkness overhead now shredded with parallel attenuations of living fire, towards a crescendo like a held breath, an interval in which she would swing faintly and lazily in nothingness filled with pale, myriad points of light. Far beneath her she could hear the faint, furious uproar of the shucks.



To focus first on the physicalities of the scene, this is a realistic description of the process of vomiting. In response to signals from his stomach, Horace races for the lavatory pan. As he vomits, he hears a *terrific uproar* that resembles the sound made by a corn shuck mattress. He 'sees' *blackness streaming in rigid threads overhead*, hears more roaring as he vomits again, 'sees' *parallel attenuations of living fire*, and finally, the faint, furious uproar of the shucks dying away, feels as if he is *swinging faintly and lazily in nothingness*.

The need to vomit takes precedence over the shock of 'seeing' Little Belle in solicitation mode, and 'seeing' response in himself, yet this and other recent thought clusters remain in his mind and they transpose, becoming first self-incriminatory in nature and then cathartic. Out from his mind flows Temple's terrible, piteous image of herself 'in the coffin...look[ing] sweet... dead...crying...because they had put shucks in the coffin' (p.174). Horace re-forms that image from his own point of view, *her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body*. He presents Temple to himself as a sacrificial victim, *bound naked on her back on a flat car...a roar of iron wheels in her ears*. Since Horace himself is in bowed crucifix position over the lavatory pan, and suffering, and given the cosmic dimension of the scene, it does not seem too much to suggest that at this point he takes upon himself part of the universal responsibility for Temple's debasement. Little Belle is out of this particular image, but by resounding parallel with Temple, and in the light of Horace's appalling vision of himself and Little Belle in juxtaposition with the couple in the alley-mouth, she too is perceived as travelling toward the flat car and the iron wheels of sexual debasement.

On leaving Miss Reba's, Horace had thought, simplistically in retrospect, of a solution in terms of a *single chamber; bare, lethal, immediate and profound*. Now, like young Lucius Priest in *The Reivers*, he has to 'live with it...forever...for the rest of [his] life';<sup>11</sup> not with a boy's lies, but with a man's lusts. The sanctuary that Horace Benbow sought when he left Kinston, 'the hill to lie on' is not what he finds, either physically, mentally, emotionally or metaphorically. Instead it is composed of Narcissa's parlour, the Jefferson jail, the college at Oxford, Miss Reba's brothel in Memphis and finally the Jefferson courthouse; of covert deceit, murder, rape, dishonesty, distortion of justice, violence and defeat. That in the end, his aim of justice is abortive is not so much the point as that Horace does not give up trying. He returns home to the stucco house and Belle with her pink window shades and boxes of chocolate by the bed. The reader does not know whether he is the more relieved or sorry to be back, or whether he is at all interested, as he is in the original version, in the delights, 'the old unfailing oats'<sup>12</sup> that the pink nested Belle might have to offer.



## Footnotes for Chapter 4

1. André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.213.
2. Introduction to *Sanctuary*, Modern Library edition, 1932. Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p.359
3. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York), 1931; this ed. (Middlesex: Modern Penguin Classics, 1984), p.5. Further references to this text in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
4. Calvin S. Brown, *A Glossary of Faulkner's South*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), pp.233-234.
5. Introduction to *Sanctuary*, Modern Library edition, 1932, v, vi, vii, in Gerard Langford, *Faulkner's Revision of 'Sanctuary'* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1972).
6. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner eds., *Faulkner in the University* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p.90.
7. Gerald Langford, *Faulkner's Revision of 'Sanctuary'* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 10.
8. Introduction to *Sanctuary*, Modern Library edition, 1932. William Faulkner: American Writer, p.264.
9. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York) 1929; this ed. (London: Picador, 1989), p.100.
10. *William Faulkner: American Writer*, p.359.
11. William Faulkner, *The Reivers* first pub. Random House (New York), 1962; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p.252.
12. Noel Polk, ed., *William Faulkner: Sanctuary: the Original Text* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), p.282.

Chapter 5

*Light in August*

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i.	The Community of Jefferson	
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If the fall of Oedipus comes as the direct result of his terribly mistaken idea of who he is and his insistence on finding out, then the death of Christmas is a result of his insistence that he already knows who he is and his persistence in the demand for the right to be himself, to live on the terms of his own self-definition. To state the paradox in another way, the classic tragic protagonist, such as Oedipus, Othello, Hamlet or Macbeth, rejoices in an existence which allows him a superb scope of action in which to achieve self-realization, including knowledge, even though in this same drive toward self-fulfilment he destroys himself.<sup>1</sup>

In drawing a parallel between the Joe Christmas of Faulkner's *Light in August* and Oedipus, Hamlet and Macbeth, John L. Longley suggests Joe as a kind of king. By naming his character as he does, and by sketching a few faint resemblances to the King of the Jews, Faulkner suggests Joe as a kind of Christ. The parallels exist, and they enable the reader, finally, to place Joe Christmas on one of the levels in a Dantean cosmos of pity and tragedy. But to bring these notions into the forefront of *Light in August* is to distort the landscape of the novel, to make a grotesque of Joe Christmas, and to mock classic temporal and spiritual kingship. They work as flitting shadow forms behind the action.

Whereas in *Sanctuary* Faulkner focuses on a season's nightmares of evils in his small Mississippi town of Jefferson, in *Light in August* he makes the same small town represent the deeply ingrained, long established attitudes and ways of doing of the contemporary (1932) South. He gathers up the South, and exposes and focuses it in the plight of Joe Christmas, holding the South still for a moment, and dramatizing it. In reducing the South to stage size, as it were, Faulkner necessarily stylizes it, drawing in from recent decades aspects of Southern thinking, crystalizing these in single characters and groups, Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden, Gavin Stevens, Simon McEachern, Doc Hines, Percy Grimm, the chorus of the townspeople, and attitudinizing them. Into their ken for a moment in their time swims the wary, uncommunicative

central character, Joe Christmas. Only he, and 'the small man who will not see thirty again',<sup>2</sup> Byron Bunch, and Lena Grove move on this stage, he searching, Byron Bunch because he is not fixed in an attitude, and Lena Grove passing. For what Jefferson does to Joe Christmas, cosmic punishment is awarded:

The man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it...It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. p.350

The weight of attitudes dominates Faulkner's drama to an extent that the voice of the central character is little heard. When he speaks or thinks in his own voice, we tend to draw meaning from the attitudes of other characters. When he is described by the narrator or Byron Bunch, the picture is veiled, or coloured by imagery. Because we see little, we tend to assume that his view of himself complements society's view of his 'caste'. We think we should think that Joe Christmas sees himself as torn by his mixed blood, the man who looks white but must be negro because society says so. But judging by his self-containment, and conversely also from his aggression, it appears that Joe does not feel at all bound by what society thinks. He lives on his own terms. *"All I wanted was peace"*, he thinks to himself (p.86). 'One place was the same as another to him', the narrator tells us, 'But in none of them could he be quiet' (p.170). The 'all' that he wants is the kind of security embodied in four people playing cards of an evening on a lighted veranda (p.88). He has tried the only two social camps available, the black and the white, in search of them. If Joe once felt worried or inhibited by his mixed blood, that time is in the past when he arrives in Jefferson. If he feels dogged by a sense of nemesis, it derives from the vision of himself suggested by the narrator,



in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred. p. 170

He is again the social order because it would limit his freedom. By extension, it would also confine his manhood to a lifestyle determined by race. What Faulkner projects in Joe Christmas, implicitly, is the idea of the human man beyond race, for which notion we have a germ of affirmation in Chapters 19 and 20, and a distanced confirmation in the Christian intertext. Such a notion lurks as much in Joe Christmas's dreadful, lonely freedom as in his unassuageable search for somewhere in which to be 'quiet' (p.170) and have 'peace' (p.86). Until he reaches Mottstown, Joe Christmas never compromises his sense of who he is. At that point, he sacrifices his plain humanity on the altar of race. In another arena of the novel that works as a complex counterparting exercise, Gail Hightower sacrifices his human integrity on the altar of wilful selfishness.

I suggest that in the character of Joe Christmas Faulkner projects a mute story of a man who regards himself as human rather than black or white, who seeks a place in which to be human on his own terms, and who refuses to recognize that in the society of the South he has no hope of being the one and finding the other. In order to exist at all in a Southern novel of 1932, such a character would need to be hard to find. I suggest that as in *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner creates a key for the reader out of Benjy's mode of thinking, he does something of the sort in *Light in August*. The difference is that whereas with *The Sound and the Fury* the reader must use the key in order to make sense of the novel, with *Light in August* he can find a sense in the novel whether or not he uses the key. Without the key, the reader finds the pity and the tragedy of the man of mixed blood in the South. With the key he finds a man scornful of Southern race-casting, who would, despite and in face of it,

find himself a place in which to be himself. Faulkner creates a reader's key out of one of the major structural devices of the novel, the tendency of characters to misperceive. By tendency to misperceive I mean the characters' habit of 'seeing' what they want to see in the light of their pre-conceptions, or their being unwilling or unable to re-assess and re-perceive, or their augmenting what is there in terms of what they would like to think is there. For his part, the reader interprets the novel in the light of his received beliefs (if he thinks as the character of Gavin Stevens does), or in the light of his knowledge of Southern pre-conceptions, or, as I did in my early readings, unenhanced and unimpeded by detailed knowledge of the South. The reader is helped to read in the light of his particular proclivity through the narrator's presentation of some of the Joe Christmas scenes. For example, in Joe's evening walk round Jefferson, the narrator implies that Joe is 'lost' in the white section and that he subsequently 'found himself', at home as it were, in the negro Freedman Town. As I see it, impressed but not beguiled by the preceding black and white imagery in the passage, the narrative reality is that while Joe may be lonely, he is not lost, but merely passing the time before going to Joanna Burden's house, and he is so pre-occupied with his own thoughts that he does not realise he is in Freedman Town until the smell of it hits him. In a sense, the narrator draws the reader by way of the imagery through a distorted chronology, as though deliberately glossing over the mute story of the man beyond race that is determinable from his actions, and slimly verified in two late passages. The black and white imagery, for me, works as an implicit superimposition of society's viewpoint on Joe.



### The Impressionistic Landscape

Jefferson is the place at which both the traveller characters, Joe Christmas and Lena Grove, arrive, and the place from which they each depart. The reader learns the street geography of Jefferson, but does not enter the home of any indigenous Jeffersonian. The only buildings he does enter are the houses of Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden, the cabin in which Joe Christmas lives, Mrs Beard's hotel and the Presbyterian church. The Jefferson of *Light in August* is central to the action, but by virtue of the lightly sketched, three-states journey of Lena Grove, and the barely mentioned nation-wide wanderings of Joe Christmas, Faulkner places this Jefferson in a broader, still Southern, yet also country-wide landscape.

The time scheme for *Light in August* is broadly lateral and extends over two months, July and August of 1930. Within the broad laterality, however, time is disrupted by substantial digressions, and it appears to be further disrupted by the sequencing of characters' accounts of events. Faulkner cuts seven biographical chapters into Joe Christmas's walk between Jefferson town and Joanna Burden's house. Within these seven chapters lies Joanna Burden's biography. Byron Bunch's second hand account to Gail Hightower of the fire at the Burden place takes place before the reader's first hand view of the scene. Because of the entrenched viewpoint of the citizens of Jefferson, time in a sense stands still. Joanna Burden is forty seven years old and was born in Jefferson, yet she remains an outsider, as does Gail Hightower who has lived in the town for twenty-five years.

Society in the context of community in *Light in August* is less a number of individuals than a powerful, self-generating, yet abstract force. Townspeople are anonymously grouped rather than individually named: the crowd, the congregation, the national guardsmen, the sheriff and his deputies, sawmill workers, shop keepers. Despite their different occupations, the groups behave in similar ways, so that a strong community consciousness is evoked. Set slightly aside from the community consciousness for reasons that appear to be different, but which are ultimately not so, are the lawyer Gavin Stevens and the national guardsman, Percy Grimm. Society splits sharply into the insiders, citizens of Jefferson with long held, peculiarly Southern, Calvinistically based values and traditions, and the outsiders. By society, in this novel, Faulkner means white society; negro society, by the accretion of ideas in the novel, is a sub-culture. This point needs to be made because of the values and tenets held by the white society and because of the part these values and tenets play in the novel. Compositely, the outsiders consist of everyone and anyone whose values and conduct are different from Jefferson's.

The principal action and events involve the last three years of Joe Christmas's search for somewhere in which to be quiet, and have peace, that is to say, his period in Jefferson, and a community for whom the concept of place, whether physical, social or moral, is dependant on race. Exactly what is the story of *Light in August* depends upon what ideas the reader thinks Faulkner is projecting. If the reader considers that Faulkner describes, in Joe Christmas, a man alienated from both white and black society because he is unsure as to whether he is black or white, then the story is about what happens to him when society makes up its mind that not only is he black but that he has cheated it into thinking he is white. If the reader considers that Faulkner



describes a man who, at the point in his life at which the reader first encounters him, that is, on his arrival in Jefferson, has made up his mind that he is human before he is either black or white, and who seeks a particular kind of place, then the story is about the man's abortive search.

In *Light in August*, Faulkner works with several sets of values, the relative importance of which depends, again, on what the reader thinks Faulkner is saying in the novel. But howsoever the reader interprets the meaning of the novel, Faulkner invests in the white community a cluster of values made of up racial prejudice, Calvinistic bigotry, self-righteousness and arrogant insularity. From the point of view of the community itself, however, these values work as the ordinary precepts and traditions by which it lives and holds itself together. From the reader's point of view, they are negative values that find expression as an aggressive suspicion of whoever or whatever is different or strange. Community values are so ingrained that members of it instinctively classify everybody as either 'pure' white or else negro. By extension, therefore, but implicitly and beyond any overt suggestion made by Faulkner, for the community of Jefferson, the concept of a mankind not first and foremost labelled and assigned a place in society by the yardstick of his skin colour, does not exist. I push the point deliberately for the extension is a logical one that provides a clear objective perspective for the reader that Faulkner himself could not have offered directly. Even the well educated Gavin Stevens explains the actions of Joe Christmas in terms of the racist theory of blood seeking blood (p.337),<sup>3</sup> while less unexpectedly, the millworkers seize the opportunity, when Joanna Burden's house goes on fire, to re-inforce

their own, and their fathers' and grand-fathers' anti-Abolitionist sentiments,

'My pappy says he can remember how fifty years ago folks said it ought to be burned, and with a little human fat meat to start it good' p.39

At the first suggestion of negro blood in Joe Christmas, despite its being offered by a character disliked and distrusted by the community, a nigger-hunting posse forms. Enclosing the bigotries of the Jefferson community and the troubles of Joe Christmas, another set of values operates, invested in Lena Grove and made up of stalwartness and implacable serenity.

The vivid pictures adopted as centres of interest are: Byron Bunch's assessment of Joe Christmas (pp.25-27), and his homespun philosophizing (pp. 57); Joe Christmas's evening walk round Jefferson (pp.87-89); the five year old Joe saying, *"My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas"* (p.111); Joe's disillusionment regarding Bobbie Allen (p.164), and the 'street which was to run for fifteen years' (pp.168-170); Joe's rejecting of the idea of marriage to Joanna (p.199), and his beginning to fear Joanna, his sense of being 'sucked down into a bottomless morass' (pp. 195, 203); the gathering of the townspeople at the fire (p.216, 217, 221); Joe Christmas's approach to Mottstown (p.255); Gavin Stevens's explanation of Joe Christmas's behaviour (pp.333-337); Joe Christmas's death (p.249-350); Hightower's review of his life, and the image of the wheel of thinking (pp. 367-371). Two aspects of the landscape of Light in August will be discussed in Section 3: the Community of Jefferson and Joe Christmas.



### Technical Strategies

From the title and chaptering of *Light in August*, unlike the title and chaptering of *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader learns nothing that leads into the landscape of the novel. A glance at recurring names, however, is helpful, and that of Lena Grove in the first and last chapters might suggest a frame. In fact, there exists a broader frame, involving Lena Grove, Joe Christmas, Hightower and the community of Jefferson at the opening side, and the community, Joe Christmas, Hightower, and Lena Grove at the closing side. The inversion of Christmas and Hightower matters, for in the thematic areas of goal seeking and personal integrity, Hightower's inner landscape works as the counterpart for Joe Christmas.

Once within the text, the reader finds himself attending to Faulkner's slippery shiftings of his point of view, to his two and three times telling of the same story, to altered perspectives, and to, primarily and crucially, what exactly is the role of the narrator in this novel. The function of Byron Bunch as a kind of narrator's aide requires attention, as do Faulkner's masking devices and his part-paralleling of characters, and also the functions of the Christian intertext, the black and white imagery, and the implicit presence of a Southern allegorical content.

I consider the relationship between the narrator and Byron Bunch in detail at this point, for the reason that it prepares the way for my argument that the narrator sets up two paths for the reader, one of which leads to the story of Joe Christmas as a man divided within himself

by his mixed blood, while the other portrays Joe Christmas as a man for whom human manhood takes precedence over blood. With the opening words of Chapter 2, the narrator abruptly thrusts Byron Bunch into the telling position, 'Byron Bunch knows this:' (p.25), and quickly affirms him in what is, for the society and times in which he lives, an unimpeachable testimonial: he is a womanless 'small man who will not see thirty again, who has spent six days of every week for seven years at the planing mill' (p.37). The placing of the character reference here is an important structural move on Faulkner's part, for it opens up a kind of alliance between Byron Bunch and the narrator. Also, in a novel where truth, half-truth and imagined truth are crucial but highly unstable elements, the reader needs to know whose thinking is not dyed or bent. Byron's thinking is neither, and in his oscillating efforts to appraise Joe Christmas fairly, he demonstrates an ability markedly absent in the millworkers and most of the other characters, the ability to re-assess and to re-perceive. Nevertheless, as his extensions of his own thinking demonstrate, he can project his thoughts in some fanciful and somewhat suspect directions. Consider, for example, Byron's thoughts about 'a man's name...be[ing] somehow an augur...[a] warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle' (p.27), or his highly fanciful notion of Hightower's body smell as 'the odour of goodness' (p.224). Byron's imaginative extensions create later, useful echoes in the reader's mind, but like the black and white imagery and the Christian references, their application is limited and needs to be treated with caution. As far as the reader is concerned, Byron Bunch is honest, and reliable up to a point. Byron's mere seven years in Jefferson disbars him from membership of the community - although his blameless lifestyle has won him its tolerance - but it does validate his competence to comment on the habits and attitudes of Jeffersonians.



The alliance between the narrator and Byron Bunch works in two important ways: it plots a course between the twisted perceptions, and it established a moral reference point. Faulkner effects the alliance by a frequent pairing of the two, and a kind of dovetailing of the tone of the narrator's reporting with Byron's plodding, processed, conscious thinking. Where the community opinions, sentiments and belief are relayed through Byron Bunch's memory, they are subject to re-processing in accordance with the dictates of Byron's consciousness, so that in the nature of Byron's re-processing, there exists, implicitly, an element of moral judgement. The sometimes exaggerated or fabricated matter of the townspeople's stories is counterbalanced by the alike, reasoned and reasoning tone of the narrating voices. For example, in Chapter 3, the narrator reports what it was that the townspeople told Byron about Hightower when Byron first came to Jefferson. The narrator's tone remains calm and even throughout. Neither his tone nor his language reflect the gossipy excitement inherent in the matter of the tale, and the reader is constantly reminded, by phrases like 'and they told Byron how...' that it is report. The narrator's tone is so calm and his mode of telling so protractedly simple that it both prepares for and matches the careful, ameliatory, homespun philosophising of Byron's re-processing:

they told Byron...how [Hightower] had made his wife go bad and commit suicide because he was not a natural husband, a natural man, and that the negro woman was the reason. And that's all it took; all that was lacking. Byron listened quietly, thinking to himself how people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names. p.55

Information is sifted through Byron Bunch's mind, and a meeting point emerges between the results of his siftings and the consciousness of the reader. Where the citizens of Jefferson are concerned, the implicit moral collusion between the narrator and Byron Bunch serves as an

objective, judicial structure. No such structure exists elsewhere in Faulkner; in *The Hamlet*, Flem's progress is monitored and commented upon through the periodic visits of V.K. Ratliff to Frenchman's Bend; in *The Town* and *The Mansion* an internal judicial structure exists in the three fallible narrators; in the immediately preceding *Sanctuary*, whatever adjudications and judgements are implied or sought, do so outwith the text, at the whim or not of the reader.

On his own without Byron Bunch around, in certain scenes relating to Joe Christmas, such as his evening walk around Jefferson, the narrator plays a more ambivalent role. By using the pre-conceptions of many readers regarding traditional white Southern thinking on matters of race, he beckons this reader, by means of the black and white imagery, towards the reading of the novel that makes of Joe Christmas a man uncertain of himself, racially, and inhibited by that uncertainty. The reader less knowledgeable about Southern habits of thought, or less beguiled by the racial imagery and less willing to presume self-uncertainty in Joe Christmas on account of his mixed blood, sees at the stage of the novel in which the scene of the evening walk appears, a character rendered strong by virtue of his surly self-containment, capable of physical violence (pp.79, 81), aggression (pp. 82, 83) and rough pity (pp.83, 84), and one deeply distressed for undelineated reasons, but which include an absence of 'peace' (p.86).

In the first paragraph of the scene, the narrator enhances his description of Joe walking along a street with racially emotive blacks and whites, which must surely evoke a response from the reader in keeping with his understanding of Southern racial precepts. In effect, Faulkner places this reader in exactly the same potential position as the people of Jefferson regarding, for example, Hightower and the dead Joanna



Burden. Jefferson 'sees' unnatural behaviour in Hightower by virtue of the presence of first a female and then a male negro cook in his house, and Jefferson 'sees' every fearful negro myth realised in Joanna's body. By the same token, the very presence of black and white imagery in the walk scene invites the reader familiar with the traditional white Southern viewpoint (whether or not he subscribes to it) to milk metaphoric meaning out of it. This reader, sensing that he is on Faulkner's track, adds his understanding of the Southern myth of the man of mixed blood to the racial divisions implied by the black and white imagery, and finds an interpretation of the novel that is moving and satisfactory, except for the fact that the Hightower material does not fit tidily. Not that this reader is wrong, any more than the people of Jefferson are wrong about Hightower's evils before some of them start to 'invent more...in [his] name' (p.55) and come up with co-habitation with negroes, or wrong about the macabre fascination of the death of Joanna Burden before they add double rape 'not by a negro but by Negro' (p. 216). He has merely not seen all that is there. In the scene of the evening walk the narrator appears to invest in Joe a number of society's concepts which, from the sum of Joe's actions and demeanour, do not exist in him: that if he is half black and half white, the black half will overcome the white half, and that his natural home, so to speak, is among negroes. I suggest that there is no evidence that Joe subscribes to these concepts.

Through a detailed examination of the four paragraphs of the evening walk, I aim to show my reader that the possibility of another view of Joe Christmas exists. The argument for the existence of another pathway depends on my reader's agreeing that anybody's pre-conceptions can, if not necessarily do, form a kind of strait-jacket for thinking. The argument derives from the narrator's use of the words 'black' and 'white', and

from his sequencing of words, sentences and paragraphs in the four paragraphs.

The street, a quiet one at all times, was deserted at this hour...he had the street to himself. He went on, passing still between the homes of white people, from street lamp to street lamp, the heavy shadows of the oak and maple leaves sliding like scraps of black velvet across his white shirt. Nothing can look so lonely as a big man going along an empty street. Yet though he was not large, not tall, he contrived somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadowbrooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost.

p.87

That Joe is wasting time before undertaking a mission of some sort has been implied in the preceding, afternoon scene: 'He read...like a man walking along a street might count the cracks in the pavement, to the last and final page, the last and final word' (p.86). In that scene, the narrator focused closely and directly on what Joe actually thought and did, and the simile of the man *walking along a street* worked simply, vividly and undivisively as an underliner of Joe's composed, self-contained period of waiting. Now, as he walks along a real street, the narrator widens the focus so that Joe becomes a figure in the landscape rather than the figure of which the landscape is composed, landscape which consists of a lone man in a residential street. I stress the basic subject matter of the paragraph because the superimposed imagery influences the reader's perception of Joe Christmas.

To look at the blacks and whites from a strictly realistic point of view, given the season and the darkness and the streetlights, the shadows cast by the trees would be *heavy*, and would appear to *slide* over Joe's figure. They would, however, slide over all of it, even if we can see only half of the shadow, for the *heavy shadows* that are projected on to Joe's white shirt must slide over the black trousers as well, just as surely as they would slide over his 'parchment-colour flesh' if he were



naked. The *heavy shadows* function organically as foreshadowing and despoiling images linked to the knife that Joe carries, to his daytime pre-meditation and to his imminent fatal encounter with Joanna Burden, and on a psychological level, they densify the sense of nemesis that dogs him. Throughout the novel Faulkner makes a blatant emblem for Joe's racial duality out of the white shirt and black trousers, so that for him to stress here, and then stress again, especially with language that has about it an insidious, encroaching quality, *sliding like scraps of black velvet*, the shadow on the white part of Joe is to invite the reader to see that white part in a state of eclipse. The reader predisposed to home in on racial imagery absorbs the racial implication of these and all the other blacks and whites, and he eventually arrives at Gavin Stevens's elucidatory panegyric on Joe Christmas, at which point he either subscribes to the thesis of black blood overtaking white, or he does not. Precisely because the blacks and whites in the passage work so vividly in racial terms, the temptation is to concentrate on them, and to render the second set of images concerning Joe's appearance of loneliness and lostness in their light. If we look at these images of loneliness and lostness in conjunction with other similar images in the novel, we find that they set up a picture of Joe so self-contained, so strong in determination and so despairing as to destroy the notion of Joe as a man in any way uncertain or inhibited. That he should be so is society's perspective, but not Joe's.

The images of loneliness look to a later passage concerned with Joe, with a street and with loneliness (p.170). That passage, however, is chronologically retrospective; it describes Joe's state of mind before he arrived in Jefferson. If Faulkner had placed the textually later, but chronologically earlier passage before the evening walk, the reader would know just how very lonely Joe came to feel in 'the street

that was to run for fifteen years' (p.168) before he got to Joanna Burden's house, he would know that Joe, in the three years acquaintance with Joanna Burden, would think often enough about 'blow[ing]', but in reality would do no more than *stand in the kitchen door and look out...and see the street*, and finally, the reader would recognize the narrator's ascription of *savage and lonely* to the *street that [had] run for fifteen years* as a straightforward metaphor for the former quality of loneliness in Joe's life. But since the reader has not yet come to that passage, he does not know about the depths of Joe's loneliness, and because he does not, he is encouraged by the racially emotive quality inherent in black and white imagery, to link race to loneliness and invest them both in Joe; in which case he is liable to see Joe Christmas as a man made lonely as a result of his racial duality. Between failing, on the one hand, to quantify the aura of loneliness that surrounds and emanates from Joe in the first paragraph, and applying dense racial imagery on the other, the narrator sets up conditions to which the racially aware reader responds. The less aware reader sees dense and racially directed black and white imagery, but does not inevitably link it to the loneliness.

Then he found himself. Without his being aware the street had begun to slope and before he knew it he was in Freedman Town, surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his. As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague kerosenelit, so that the street lamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing had compounded the substance of breath so that not only voices but moving bodies and light itself must become fluid and accrete slowly from particle to particle, of and with the now ponderable night inseparable and one.

He was standing still now, breathing quite hard, glaring this way and that. About him the cabins were shaped blackly out of blackness by the faint, sultry glow of kerosene lamps. On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecundmellow voices of negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female. He began to run, glaring, his teeth glaring, his inbreath cold on his dry teeth and lips, toward the next street lamp. Beneath it a narrow and rutted lane turned and mounted to the parallel street, out of the black hollow. He turned into it running and plunged up the sharp ascent,



his heart hammering, and into the higher street. He stopped here, panting, glaring, his heart thudding as if it could not or would not yet believe that the air now was the cold hard air of white people. p.87-8

Again on a strictly realistic level, the images of lostness are misleading. Joe is not lost. He is walking about wasting time before going to Joanna Burden's house. Of course he might well look like a *phantom*, but for the narrator to enhance that image with the phrase *strayed out of its own world* while Joe is in the process of *passing between the homes of white people* is to foist on to Joe a point of view that is society's but not necessarily Joe's, and to augment what the reader later discovers is the truth of the loneliness with the fantasy of lostness. The narrator is presenting to the reader ideas beyond the facts in the same way that some of the citizens of Jefferson augment the facts. The narrator goes further. For him to follow up, by means of one of his bald announcements, 'Then he found himself', images of lostness in the particular place in which Joe is supposed to be lost, with images of finding in the particular place where Joe is supposed to find himself, *in Freedman Town, surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes*, is to invent a point of view for Joe.

Then there are the images of encroachment, all of which are rendered in terms of blackness. Those attached to Joe's shirt are dense and pointedly accentuated, and they imply an overtaking of white by black. But the next set of images in the following paragraph has nothing to do with the notion lurking in them that Joe resists being a negro. These images of encroachment derive directly, realistically and compellingly from the lifestyle of the negroes, and they attach to the sense of claustrophobia that Joe feels when among them. Because information about Joe's point of view is withheld, the reader is tempted to adopt what is being offered, which again is a social perspective. Had Faulkner offered

a strictly chronological account of Joe Christmas's life, we would know that in one of his avatars he had

tried to breathe into himself the dark odour, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes...And all the while his nostrils at the odour which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial. p.170

Presumably Joe liked the woman with whom he lived 'as man and wife' well enough to try to adopt her lifestyle, but the *dark odour* drove him away, and presumably he has been avoiding places like Freedman Town ever since, since the realistic and non-racial implication in his finding himself there is not that he found himself at home, but that he would not have walked there had he not been too pre-occupied with his own thoughts to notice where he was going. The negro lifestyle, if humanly warm, is too close and too female, even if he has given it a good try in his efforts to find somewhere in which to be quiet and have peace.

Then he became cool. The negro smell, the negro voices, were behind and below him now...To the right the street lamps marched on, spaced, intermittent with bitten and unstirring branches. He went on, slowly again...passing again between the houses of white people. There were people on these porches too, and in chairs upon the lawns; but he could walk quiet here. Now and then he could see them: heads in silhouette, a white blurred garmented shape; on a lighted veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the women glaring smooth and white above the trivial cards. "That's all I wanted," he thought. "That dont seem like a whole lot to ask." p.87-88

Joe flees *the black life* of Freedman Town and returns to the *higher street*, at which point the narrator Faulkner closes the passage with language that suggests Joe prefers to be white: *He stopped... his heart thudding as if it could not...believe that the air now was the cold hard air of white people.* To be realistic in the semantic sense, the extended simile is not needed in the context of recovery from claustrophobia. To be pedantic, nor should any simile overpower the root to which it is attached, which is, here, Joe Christmas's heart. And to be thoroughly



pedantic, Joe Christmas's physical heart, which is specifically and exclusively what Faulkner is talking about, is not capable of believing anything. So an overpowering simile is attached to an inert root; there is a structural and semantic weakness in the sentence, and although Faulkner is occasionally capable of weaknesses of this sort, it is also well within his artistic imagination, and highly appropriate in this novel of half truths and suppositions to construct one. The construction is effective for the purpose of investing society's point of view in Joe Christmas, but it also helps confirm the sense of contrivance that runs through the whole scene. A further point from the paragraph is that *cold hard air* is not the prerogative of white people. Even if we feel from the tenor of the sentence that we might like to think that Joe Christmas wants to be - to live, to be among, be part of the society of - where the white people are, we cannot read any more into *the cold hard air of white people* than the fact that the white people live further up the hill where the air is colder. That Joe's concept of *what [he] wanted*, which I come to in a minute, happens to be located in a place where white people are, is not to the point under discussion. In any case, Joe shuns white society. In its presence he wears an 'air of cold and quiet contempt' (p.26).

Neither white nor black society will do for Joe. But what will do is the image we come to in the new paragraph, *of people...in chairs upon the lawns...on a lighted veranda* (p.88). This is the great *all [he] wanted*, which, as he himself says in his own vernacular and without any 'help' from Faulkner's contriving narrator, "dont seem like a whole lot to ask" (p.88). It is a place, and it embodies both peace and quiet, and it is a right and reasonable wish for any man. Joe Christmas cannot have the *all* he wanted not because of whatever colour he is or is not, but because he will not sacrifice his sense of who he is, his Joe

Christmasness, to get it. Nor does he realise, until, perhaps, he is on that cart approaching Mottstown, that his concept of Joe Christmas is as irreconcilable with his concept of the *all* that he wants as is, to use Faulkner's imagery, black with white.

I have tried to show that through his use of imagery and sentence structures the narrator heads away from the idea of the man beyond race, and encourages the reader to see Joe Christmas from society's point of view. In the absence of specific indication of what is Joe's point of view, the reader has no option but to keep an open mind, and to deduce what Joe thinks from his actions, until such time as what limited confirmation there is of his point of view appears in Chapters 19 and 20.

To move from the structure of the ambivalent narrator to, briefly, a dimension of the same structure related to characters, we find a range of partly formed perceptions, misperceptions and altered perceptions. The five year old Joe Christmas in the orphanage, for example, misperceives the dietician's motive in offering the coin. She attempts to bribe him. He is morally affronted since he expects punishment, not reward, for an act that he knows is wrong. The mature Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden misperceive tales told them long ago and they live out their lives in the shadow of their misperceptions. At a simpler level helpful to the reader, Byron Bunch vacillates through a series of contradictory perceptions in attempting to give himself an objective appraisal of the newly arrived Joe Christmas. All of the vacillating or faulty perceptions of characters warn the reader that in reading the novel he needs to be alive to the potential constrictions of his own conceptions.



Faulkner's masking devices, another major technical structure, operate in many different ways. I comment on one such device here since it is relevant to the reader's perception of the way in which Byron Bunch tries to assess Joe Christmas. At the point in his life at which Joe Christmas arrives in Jefferson, he knows how to look after himself, and what he is looking for. Faulkner masks Joe's aggressive distancing of himself from the community by, firstly, showing the community's aggressive attitudes towards him and secondly, by dwelling on the details of Byron Bunch's thinking. On Joe's first appearance, in Chapter 2, the narrator projects, first, what is a fair-minded effort at appraising Joe Christmas by Byron Bunch, which he follows up with Byron's flight of imagination about names as augurs and augurs like flowers and rattlesnakes. The effect of the follow up is to bemuse and sidetrack the reader. The mill workers, for their part, take such crude exception to Joe's demeanour that the reader is again sidetracked, this time by the aggressive language: "'We ought to run him through the planer,'" the foreman said. "Maybe that will take that look of his face." (p.26). Take away Byron's and the millworkers' remarks, and we see Joe in the hard man pose he has learned from Max, 'a cigarette in one side of his mouth'. But this is a mask as well. Lose this mask, and we are left with 'his whole air of cold and quiet contempt' (p.26). This is as far as the unmasking process goes at this point. Byron Bunch senses something more, his inability to define it more closely than a vague sympathy reflected in the cadencing of his thoughts, 'there was...something rootless...as though no town nor city was his, no street, not walls, no square of earth his home' (p.25). Only the reader will be shown, at a later stage, something of the despair below the air of cold and quiet contempt: 'he might have seen himself...in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair' (p.170). The air of cold and quiet contempt is the mask of despair, but it does not

suggest a man torn apart by uncertainty as to whether he is black or white, nor does it suggest a man at the mercy of some mythological encroachment of black blood. This is society's perspective. Joe Christmas is supremely aware of who he is, but his 'corridor' (p.91) of life has taught him, in the first place, frustration and despair of ever finding a place in which to be 'what [he] chose to be' (p.199), and in the second, to wear on his face an air of cold and quiet contempt. He goes on wearing it for three years, the meanwhile using Jefferson's amenities (like the barbershop), and making money out of the town, during which time he considers his relationship with Joanna Burden and the possibilities for peace and being what he chose to be that might lie within it. In order to see Joe Christmas's stance towards Jefferson, and the despair with which he regards it from behind the mask, the reader needs to take Jefferson as quietly as the narrator and Byron Bunch do, and as quietly, in his own 'dark and contemptuously still' way (p.25), as Joe Christmas does.

Faulkner's narratorial structures, his shifting viewpoints and his telling and re-telling lead the reader forward. At the same time, biographical digressions interrupt the flow of the narrative and change the reader's perspective. Many parallels emerge, that run more or less briefly in consonance and then diverge. Joe Christmas and Lena Grove never meet, for example, yet there are biographical parallels and oppositions between them. Both have a sense of human selfness, and both are wanderers, but the perspective that each of them has of the same continental and human landscape is very different: to Joe Christmas, the prospect before him, whatever it is, is not what he seeks; to Lena Grove, every prospect is a happy, exciting adventure. On another, regional, Southern level, Joe Christmas, Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden form a group whose life histories contain truncated parallels that link



them together. The group of characters can be read as representing aspects of Southern society, negroes, Civil War fanatics, and Abolitionists that, from the point of view of the nuclear society of Jefferson, impinge upon it. Joanna Burden cannot correct her misperceptions, Gail Hightower finally does, and Joe Christmas comes to the limits of his very, very nearly unassailable quest for peace and quiet in Mottstown. Faulkner withholds self-enlightenment from his community: racial prejudice, twisted Calvinism, self-protective insularity and complacency blind them; new or relatively new strangers like Byron Bunch and Lena Grove and Joe Christmas fall prey to any unallocated suspicion, and long term dissenting strangers like Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower are ostracised. On the periphery of the long established community, but of the same cast of consciousness, there are the extremists - Joe McEachern, Doc Hines, Percy Grimm - whose actions both highlight and ameliorate (their behaviour is worse than that of the community at large) the general moral demeanour of the community.

The last of the technical structures to which I refer concerns the implications of the pattern of Christian reference that runs through the novel. To draw close parallels between Joe Christmas and Jefferson and Christ and Jerusalem is out of place, principally because Faulkner does not do it. Truncated parallels exist, however, and a pastiche of the Christian story is discernible. Firstly, the broad outline of the life of Christ - birth, life-span, mission and death - underlies the story of Joe Christmas. Secondly, both Christ and Joe Christmas lived the lives they chose, in face of great odds and with a persistence that is extraordinary. Thirdly, the Christian story operates as part one of a two part system of values that, somewhat like a mended bone deliberately offset, joins Christian values, as they function, pervertedly, in

Yoknapatawpha, Mississippi, with other, different values that attach to an older, pre-Christian, part-mythological system. The correlatives for the two parts are the characters of Joe Christmas and Lena Grove. Faulkner's appropriation of Christianity self-truncates, like the broken bone, with the blood flowing from Joe Christmas. The 'redemption' or change that Faulkner seems to propose involves the new blood of Lena Grove's child, and leaps an ideological chasm from a Christian to a pre-Arcadian world. In the narrative structure of the novel, the leap is modulated through Mrs Hines's confused linking of babies born thirty-five years apart, and through Lena's confusion, consequent on Mrs Hines's.

## 3

## Vivid Pictures 1

## The Community of Jefferson

And they told Byron how...and told how...and told how... p.47

She supplied them...with an emotional barbecue...better than...the shelves and the counters...[and] the musty offices... p.217

The town of Jefferson, so central to the action of *Light in August*, begins as no more than the name of the place that might, and surely should, mark the end of Lena Grove's journey. Lena's first sight of the town is also the reader's, 'across the valley...on the opposite ridge'. Because it is the kind of place that is visible from a distance, it appears as a goal to which every walked step or every turn of the wagon wheel brings the traveller nearer, added to which Lena Grove's excited



anticipation makes the town seem special. Faulkner creates a mild dramatic elevation in the prospect of Jefferson. It is a false elevation, and it serves to create the gap that develops between the reader's anticipation and the narrative reality.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, the narrator thrusts Byron Bunch before the reader, and it is through his eyes that we first see an aspect of Jefferson at close range, the aggressively male, planing-mill scene. Based on paired dialogue, the scene serves to indicate community attitudes as they operate in one sector of it, that of the white, redneck working men. Because it is a scene recalling a past event, it exacerbates the cosy intransigence with which Jefferson clings to its attitudes:

"We ought to run him through the planer," the foreman said. "Maybe that will take that look off his face."

..."Except that's a pretty risky look for a man to wear on his face in public," one said: "He might forget it and use it somewhere where somebody won't like it."  
p.26.

The men refer to the newly arrived Joe Christmas. Even as jest, this is aggressive talk, but it is mild stuff compared with the remarks, quoted here on page 132, aroused by the next item of interest to the men, the fire at the Bundren place. The dialogue reveals deep-rooted and still volatile, generations old, shared prejudices, to which a dimension of the macabre is added through the tones of comfortable camaraderie.

Faulkner begins his evocation of the landscape of Jefferson by means of contrasting moods and demeanours, and through sets of dialogue between locals. In Chapter 3, he continues to draw up social and moral Jefferson, but he does it by focusing on one of the long term outsider characters, Gail Hightower, and by making the two reliable tellers, the narrator and Byron Bunch, share the tale of Hightower between them. Each narrator (the narrator proper, p.46; Byron Bunch, p.47-55) retells a

townsperson's version of Hightower's story. The townspeople are collectivized in the narrator's version as 'folks' and in Byron's as 'the town', thus endowing them with a single composite conscience and at the same time separating the community from both tellers. The narrator's account of what 'folks' say about Hightower is preceded by his cameo of Hightower at home (something that the townspeople have never witnessed) and Byron's version of the same story is followed by Byron's first hand account of an event in Hightower's life that he knows about, but the town does not. Both town versions of Hightower's failings are stacked together, making as it were, a brilliant centrepiece, alongside which a different Hightower emerges, a man willing, on the one hand, to share what little money he has with 'an institution for delinquent girls in Memphis' (p.45) and on the other, to turn out at night to help a negro woman in labour (p.57). Not until the penultimate chapter will the reader find out, from Hightower himself, that neither the narrator's and Byron Bunch's story in Chapter 3, nor the townspeople's, is the whole truth.

Byron Bunch rationalises the story of the town versus Hightower as

a lot of people performing a play and that now and at last they had all played out the parts which had been allotted them and now they could live quietly with one another. p.56

Then as a further thought, he considers that the notion of Jefferson living quietly only works in practice where Jefferson knows all about all that goes on in it and approves of all that goes on. Byron can come to terms with Jefferson and so, apparently, can Hightower: "They are good people. They believe what they must believe" (p.58). Like Joe Christmas, Hightower knows his people because he, too, is of them. But unlike Joe Christmas, Hightower and the people of Jefferson are bound and trapped by what they must believe: Hightower by tales told him of the warfaring



Confederate grandfather he never met, and the people of Jefferson by their wilful reluctance to let go of their institutions and their traditions. In contrast, Joe Christmas's sense of being 'the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe' (p.210) is not the same kind of binding and trapping, it being one of the 'somethings' by which from time to time Joe Christmas feels beset. Joe feels beset, and discountenanced, by his continuing failure to find peace and quiet, but neither Hightower, until his dying moments, nor the townspeople at any time, unless those who watch Joe Christmas die, are discountenanced by the *what* in which they must believe. Because of his wider experiences and the wish implied by those experiences to fix on goals that are beyond the pale of Southern society, Joe Christmas is a lot farther along the road to moral self-awareness than either Hightower or the people of Jefferson. By emphasizing Jefferson's shortcomings beyond their clear exposition in the double recount by Byron Bunch and the narrator, Faulkner implies a degree of disenchantment with the town, and a degree of disassociation. At the same time, by precisely this double recount, Faulkner has added what emerges, from Hightower's self-examination in the penultimate chapter, as valid criticism of him by Jefferson.

With the scene of the discovery of the body of Joanna Burden, the reader sees from the point of view of the community what has hitherto been hearsay. Although parts of the scene are given a comic cast redolent of early cinema, ultimately, it is a savage and scourging comedy. Faulkner also scourges Jefferson in *Intruder in the Dust*, but in that novel, the scourging is done from within the community by a committed member of it and it is conducted with articulate scorn. Here the scourging is done by a narrator who, up to this point, has allowed Jefferson to condemn itself by simply recounting (himself or through Byron Bunch) what it thinks and says, who now prepares the reader for a

comedy in which local characters play themselves. With the scene set at the Burden place, the narrator describes the influx, 'out of thin air' of 'parties and groups' and 'racing and blatting cars' come to look at the body and the fire 'with that same dull and static amazement which they had brought down from the old fetid caves where knowing began' (p.216). The suggestion of the gaping troglodyte is unmistakable. The narrator describes the fire engine and its gold-coloured bell in particular, by hyperbole, its tone 'serene, arrogant and proud' and its operations by bathos, 'it had mechanical ladders that sprang to prodigious heights...like opera hats; only there was now nothing for them to spring to' (p.216). Of the firemen, 'even including the one who ground the siren', he remarks sardonically, 'They...were shown several different places where the sheet had lain, and some of them with pistols already in their pockets began to canvas about for somebody to crucify' (p.217). Moving among the crowd, with their vague, unattributable comments, his phrases, within sentences, mix tones and modulate between moods:

She had lived such a quiet life, attended so to her own affairs, that she bequeathed to the town in which she had been born and lived and died a foreigner, an outlander, a kind of heritage of astonishment and outrage, for which, even though she had supplied them at last with an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost, they would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet. p.217

The sentence follows on from the harsh meaning and the hissing sibilants of the phrase *somebody to crucify*. Its enfolding tone, deriving from the quiet used to open and close it, and the elegiac dignity and flow of its language, make a contrast powerful enough to challenge and to subdue into ironic comedy the barbaric *emotional barbecue* in the middle of it. But the narrator's irony at the expense of the crowd at the fire is merely a warm up for a savage attack on Jefferson as a whole.

By means of one stereotype, the highly emotive racial stereotype of the oversexed nigger, the narrator exposes what is also another, what the



narrator of *The Hamlet* calls 'the light precarious balance, the actual overlapping of Protestant religious and sexual excitement'.<sup>4</sup> In *The Hamlet*, the reference is to the juvenile version; this is an adult version at its extreme, powered by release from small town boredom, and racial hatred: 'Because the other made nice believing' (p.217). Moving by way of negatives, he excludes from their emotions forgiveness, pity and pity for the dead. From a platform of *the other notion*, that is to say the other ideas that *[make] nice believing* for Jefferson, of Joanna raped and murdered, and raped again, he tells precisely how and why this prospect makes nice believing. It is 'better than' run of the mill cheating, lying and sexual malaise with which Jefferson occupies its not very exciting days. If there looks like a hint of an excuse for Jefferson in the boredom inherent in the passage, not only the moral impropriety of boredom validating enjoyment of rape and murder, but the salaciousness in the *nice* annihilates it. Faulkner smears the whole community with this particular *nice* in the passage, shopkeepers, professionals and women alike. If we want to look for a moral antidote in the novel, we find one in Lena Grove, for whom sex attaches naturally to motherhood, and if not in the event to marriage, then companionable partnership.

For the final scene, the mass return to town, the narrator reverts to his mock heroic stance, from which, centred on the word 'dust', he delivers a last, loaded, undercurrent of mockery:

So when the caravan reached town it had something of that arrogant decorum of a procession behind a catafalque, the sheriff's car in the lead, the other cars honking and blatting behind in the sheriff's and their own compounded dust. p. 221

The physical dust that Faulkner makes use of in so many of his novels becomes a metaphor for Jefferson's mean spirit and closed mind. The reader now knows how Jefferson thinks and the kind of things that set it agog, but there is to be one other major crowd scene, ten days later,

again occasioned by an exciting if less dramatic event, the indictment of Joe Christmas for the murder of Joanna Burden. This scene comes in the third last chapter (Chapter 19) of the book, the chapter in which Faulkner completes his exposition of Jefferson before moving on to Hightower in the penultimate chapter and to Lena Grove in the final one, and it is placed after Gavin Stevens's view of Joe Christmas's death. The injection of Gavin Stevens's summary before the final crowd scene is structurally and thematically important for the reader's view of that scene.

Chapter 19 follows Byron Bunch's settling of accounts with Lucas Burch, from which setting Byron returns to learn of the excitement he has missed: 'That nigger, Christmas. They killed him' (p.333). This announcement is also the reader's first intimation. The reader, however, knows now that Jefferson thinks of negro murderers as good killing meat, and if he has been taught by the narrator to cool his reaction to Jefferson's conduct, he nevertheless notes that in the intimation to Byron, racial identity comes before individualizing name. As the narrator leads into the well educated Gavin Stevens's rationalizing of Joe Christmas's death, his tone lulls the reader into some sense of normality returned. It is all very civilized: 'About the suppertables on that Monday night, what the town wondered was...' (p.333). But the *that* in the sentence puts a minute wedge between the narrator and the subjects of his narration. Had he missed it out, he, and we, would have been about the suppertables too. Charmed by the tone, the reader goes along with all the wondering about Joe Christmas's last actions, even if there is a blank in the speculations where, in another society, Hightower's 'poor man' (p.77) might find a place. The narrator introduces Gavin Stevens in his customary bald way, 'Gavin Stevens though had a different theory' (p.333). Since we know the narrator to be reliable, and since he has thrust Byron Bunch before the reader with a



similar arbitrary announcement, and proceeded to champion him, and since Byron Bunch has turned out to be sincere and reliable, we are entitled to think that, firstly, the narrator is championing Gavin Stevens and secondly, that what Gavin Stevens says is sincere and reliable. But this is an ironic championing, and unfortunately Gavin Stevens is sincere and reliable, but only to a fellow Southerner, which his visiting professor friend is, could he expound (and have swallowed wholesale) what is an intellectually sophisticated version of a basic - and racist - Southern belief.

Gavin Stevens believes his own argument, and were it not for the evidence of a change of heart in *Intruder in the Dust*, he could probably be relied upon to go on believing it with typical Jeffersonian tenacity. The argument looks innocuous enough. The reader joins Gavin Stevens's version of events (that he himself has apparently not witnessed) at his point of recapitulation. It is a reasoned account, feasibly projected first from Mrs Hines's point of view and then from Joe Christmas's, and pointedly distanced from Doc Hines's rag end of the scale of anti-negro attitudes. But with its full complement of the group of verbs that are highly suspect in this novel - knowing, thinking and believing - it is as speculative as the rest of Jefferson's speculations. When I first read Gavin Stevens's tale of Joe Christmas's black and white blood, I was struck by its vivid pictorial qualities. It sounded more fanciful than realistic, and it took me back to an overheard playground argument when I was about seven, and to the question taken home, "Is there really black blood in people, Mummy?" The tale jarred, although I could see that it was intended to be Gavin Stevens's version of Gail Hightower's 'poor man', but it was not until I stopped reading *Light in August* as a tale of racial ambivalence and began to read it as one of man beyond race that I could place Gavin Stevens and his argument among the rest of the

characters in the novel, except Hightower, for whom the concept of the man beyond race does not exist.

From Gavin Stevens at home about his suppertable, Faulkner moves out to Percy Grimm and the final crowd scene, and thence to the closing, and enclosed, scene of Joe Christmas's death in Hightower's kitchen. The crowd in front of the jail is passive, but by using a cow simile instead of his more usual *sheep*, Faulkner manages to suggest a passivity of stupid complicity rather than a passivity of peacefulness\*. Jefferson is all the more bovine here because of the contrast made of it with the young, intelligent local extremist, Percy Grimm, who has missed out on wars and exciting things, who has to settle for playing a federal role and toting a federal gun. Percy Grimm is brought on to the stage of the novel with an enormous narratorial distance that is signified by the suddenly formal arrangement of the language: 'In the town on that day lived a young man named Percy Grimm' (p.338). Again through the language, Faulkner sets up the crowd scene in the Square in near-epic proportions, and includes the pervasive, stormtrooper-like presence of Percy Grimm's group:

And so the next morning, Monday, when the first country cars and wagons began to gather, the platoon was...intact. And now they wore uniforms. It was their faces. Most of them were of an age, a generation, an experience. But it was more than that. They now had a profound and bleak gravity as they stood where the crowds milled, grave, austere, detached, looking with blank, bleak eyes at the slow throngs who...drifted before them, slowing, staring... p.344

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For a direct comparison of passages, see, in addition to *Light in August* (edition, London: Picador Classics, 1991), p.344, *Sanctuary* (edition, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984) pp.88-89 and *Intruder in the Dust*, (edition, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984) p.178.



Percy Grimm's chase of Joe Christmas is described with the drama of a film or a schoolboy game. But in the course of it Percy Grimm forgets that he is the upholder of law and order and becomes the upholder of racial retribution. In the enclosed 'arena' of Hightower's kitchen, he is at once a frightening and ridiculous figure:

"Jesus Christ!" Grimm cried, his young voice clear and outraged like that of a young priest. "Has every preacher and old maid in Jefferson taken their pants down to the yellowbellied son of a bitch?" p.349

Not until the point of view switches to 'the others' (Percy Grimm's cohorts), and to what they see, which is Percy Grimm in the act of castrating Joe Christmas, is there a shift out of the mood of exultation and 'shameless savageness' (p.348).

This passage, along with one from Chapter 20, forms the basis of my argument from the text for Joe Christmas as a man beyond race, and for this reason it is quoted in the following section rather than here. By maintaining the point of view as that of *the others*, and by adopting a cosmic stance, the narrator heightens not only the savagery of the act itself, but also the fearsome recognition of their savagery by the others. Blackness and horror and *the man* fuse, powerfully and impressionistically, to 'rise soaring into their memories forever and ever' (p.349). We might have thought, given that Gavin Stevens has just obliquely justified Jefferson by failing to condemn it, that there would be an eventual return to shameless savageness for these men, but from the unequivocal denial, *they are not to lose it*, backed up by awesomely confirmatory lyricism, this is explicitly not to be so. There is an implied hiatus between the antithesis of *old disasters and newer hopes*, in the word *contemplate*, that is easily passed over, but this is underlined if, from the phrase *in the mirroring faces of whatever children*, we read reflection

of the memories of the parents and not echoing of the parents' conduct in the children. The tenor of the passage militates against the latter reading, and such a reading, moreover, would leave Faulkner and reader, let alone the South, no further forward.

Since Percy Grimm is a young man, he is still on the periphery of the established Jefferson community, so that his excesses can not be read as representing its mind, while Doc Hines is so madly racist as to be given no credence by the Mottstown community. Characters like these two help to normalize Jefferson, but this is no thanks to Gavin Stevens, and in the novel's range of universal values beyond Jefferson's, Percy Grimm's arbitrary myth of law and order is finally overtaken by a much stronger, inherited myth of companionship and sexual love, in Lena Grove and Byron Bunch.

## Vivid Pictures 2

### Joe Christmas

*All I wanted was peace.* p.86

*'That's all I wanted...That dont seem like a whole lot to ask.'* p.88

To speculate briefly, if Joe Christmas is a man troubled about his racial identity, there must exist in him a core of uncertainty that, in a society that instinctively racecasts everybody, renders him vulnerable both to its precepts and to himself. Unless we argue that Joe's aggressiveness is of a defensive nature, and we read the many ambivalent things that he says, or is purported by the narrator to think about



himself in this light, there is no evidence that he feels uncertain, let alone troubled, about who he is racially. Untroubled, he is beyond uncertainty. But he remains vulnerable to Jefferson's anti-negro practices if and when he chooses - as he does - to suggest that he is part negro. The aggression in his demeanour towards whites, for example in the planing mill scene, becomes more like disdainful suspicion than self-defence, and the aggression towards, specifically, the negroes in the church, near the end of his story, looks more like wild frustration than what is otherwise an unattributable act of violence. Joe spent the first half of his life among ideological hard liners not very dissimilar from the types found in Jefferson. He knows these people. He spent another fifteen years as,

in turn, labourer, miner, prospector, gambling tout; he enlisted in the army, served four months and deserted and was never caught. And always, sooner or later, the street ran through cities, through an identical and wellnigh interchangeable section of cities without remembered names, where beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them he was a negro. p. 169

This straightforward factual information does not indicate a man beset by qualms as to his racial identity, but it might indicate the behaviour of a frustrated man, one unable to find something that he wants, and it seems that there are two things that Joe Christmas wants, and has despaired of finding, the settled company of a woman, and a 'place...[in which to] be quiet' (p.170). The negro woman with whom he lives 'as man and wife' appears to suit him and he tries, with very great effort, to 'breath into himself' a negro lifestyle and a negro identity. Two things abort his struggle, the claustrophobic 'odour which he was trying to make his own' and the probably psychosomatically connected 'spiritual denial' of his white Southern upbringing.

Affirmation of Faulkner's portrayal of Joe as a man beyond race is, as it can only be given the South of 1932, tenuous. I use the final

scenes involving Joe and Gail Hightower, and the links between these scenes, along with more circumstantial support from the narrative structures and from the narrator's use of blacks and whites.

They saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. But the man on the floor had not moved....For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. p. 349-350

With the sentence, *they saw that the man was not dead yet*, they have stopped being Gavin Stevens's 'Thing' that 'burned or hacked or dragged dead' (p.335), and the man has stopped being the nigger hunted like an beast through the streets of Jefferson. All of them, including Joe Christmas, become plain ordinary men, one of whom vomits and another takes his last breath. The oscillating pity that Byron Bunch has felt and passed on to the reader reaches out to encompass not only Joe Christmas, but all of the suddenly uncoloured human men. The shift reduces Percy Grimm, turns Joe Christmas from a nigger into a human man, and leaves the others vulnerable before him. In becoming the man, a gesture of recognition of manhood is implicitly made by a small section of society, and sealed in the cosmic narrator's promise of their never forgetting.

As a frozen moment, the scene of Joe Christmas's death resembles the death of Old Ben in *Go Down, Moses*. As that scene gathers up thematic strands and pivots in new directions, so does this. Flowing forward to the frozen moment is the picture of Jefferson's brief and violent wave of



bloodlust that comes with it to a full stop, and the protracted landscape of Joe Christmas's search for a place in which to be what [he] chose to be, that fades away in the 'long moment [in which] he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes'(p.349). Through the three adjectives attached to the eyes of Joe Christmas, the themes that Faulkner has been explicating across the narrative by various complex technical means are partly resolved. Joe has peace. He has been very difficult for the reader to *fathom*, and he has been endowed with *something unfathomable*. And for the men who have hunted and killed him, and who specifically, will never forget him, his eyes are, justly, *unbearable*. But in the moment of his death, his human manhood, regardless of his race, has been granted. This moment in Faulkner works as a small voice speaking against generations of hysterical Southern myths denying the negro manhood, from Thomas Jefferson's allegation that negroes themselves 'judg[ed] in favour whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black woman over those of his own species',<sup>5</sup> through what Eric Sundquist, speaking of turn of the century supremacists such as Charles Carroll, calls a 'bizarre and scandalous effort to justify white supremacy by evicting the Negro altogether from the human species',<sup>6</sup> to Theodore Bilbo, Governor of Mississippi, who declared in 1947 that he 'would rather see his race and civilisation blotted out with the atomic bomb than to see it slowly but surely destroyed in the maelstrom of miscegenation, interbreeding and mongrelisation'.<sup>7</sup>

In *Go Down, Moses*, the re-orientation following the frozen moment is quite gentle and in keeping with the movement of the narrative, but in *Light in August*, the narrative shift from the death of Joe Christmas to the Hightower who, when last seen in Chapter 17 was wallowing between self-pity and self-renewal, is disjunctive, and might seem unaccountable.

In order to locate Faulkner's perspective in Chapter 20, and to prepare for the biographical exercise that reveals Hightower as a kind of inverse counterpart of Joe Christmas, the reader needs to recognize the scene of Joe's death in Chapter 19 as a frozen moment from which change flows, and to proceed from the matter of Chapter 19 to the matter of Chapter 20 by way of the only points of consonance that Faulkner provides, the musing tone and the word *memories*. Chapter 19 ends with the watchers' memory, not now of the nigger Joe Christmas, but of the man: *It [the memory] will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant.* Chapter 20 opens into Hightower's memories, but Hightower is designated only by 'he', and by the setting that the reader knows attaches to Hightower. The effect of the unallocated pronoun is to connect two characters in their capacity as plain human men, rather than named individuals to whom is attached a distinguishing train of history and action, and to connect them impressionistically, through an image cluster of manhood, memories and musing tone.

Narratively, Hightower leads back to Joe Christmas, Joe Christmas leads forward to Hightower. The whole spectrum of Hightower, his life in Jefferson, the life before Jefferson revealed in his rememberings and his final efforts at self-examination, works as counterpart for the Joe Christmas who, in terms of blind perseverance and loyalty to two irreconcilable aims, has conducted himself with impeccability. I use the word 'impeccability' advisedly, for it looks towards the pattern of Christian reference on the one hand, and on the other it describes what Hightower's conduct has not been. As Jefferson's ethical starting point has been human blackness or whiteness, so Hightower's life in Jefferson has begun from a position of moral compromise. Gail Hightower achieved his 'place' in life through



demagoguery...abasement..small lying that had its reverberation in other small lies and ultimate threats in the form of requests and suggestions among the hierarchate of the Church, p.362

as a result of which 'he received the call to Jefferson', whereupon 'he forgot how he had got it for the time'. *Forgot how* declares one time conscious knowledge; *for the time* declares future remembering. In effect, in the moral spectrum concerning Hightower and Christmas, the front stage drama of what Jefferson does to anybody who gets its back up fades out of sight. Jefferson becomes merely an explicatory tool in the counterparting exercise in which episodes in Hightower's life finds echoes and correlations in Joe Christmas's, and the character of Hightower finally finds a coherent place in the overall structural scheme. To a lesser degree, in *Sanctuary*, the front stage drama of Temple Drake and the corncob fades and becomes one of the tools in the moral scenario of Horace Benbow and his private sexual problems.

To look more closely these points, in different chronological times, (a strategy that looks forward to *The Wild Palms*), both Joe Christmas and Hightower are driven men. In Joe Christmas's case, *something*, a sense of nemesis, some sort of *fatality in which he believed that he did not believe* of which he felt himself to be a *volitionless servant* connects with his unassuageable determination to find a place in which to be what he chose to be, a plain uncoloured human man. If that *something* is a sense of failure, he had more to contend with than society. He resists Joanna Burden's offer of a negro education, which would compromise his human manhood. In face of and because of this variously expressed sense of a destiny, he is *driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair*. Again, there is a subdued parallel here with the life of Christ. In Hightower's case, and in a slightly wider moral arena, Jefferson's, he is driven by what Byron Bunch, fumbling around for an answer after having had

his questions parried by Hightower, calls 'the dead folks...that lay quiet in one place...that [a man] cant escape from' (p.58).

Byron Bunch's fumbblings are helpful up to a point, but Byron Bunch does not know all that much about Hightower. He never finds out, as the reader does, that Hightower's being driven derives from stories told him by a servant and from his fascination, at eight years of age, with a patched Civil War greatcoat worn by his grandfather, and Byron Bunch never finds out that Hightower has constructed a mythology for himself out of 'this phantom' of which he and Cinthy talked and 'never tired: the child with rapt, wide half dread and half delight, and the old woman with musing and savage sorrow and pride' (p.358). Byron Bunch knows nothing about the child Hightower's 'peaceful shuddering of delight' and his 'no terror in the knowledge that his grandfather...had killed men "by the hundreds"', nor anything about Hightower's feeling of 'pride' (p.353) in that knowledge. Hightower's myth commands his life to the extent that he thinks that his 'only salvation must be to return to the place [Jefferson] to die where [his] life had already ceased before it began' (p.359). He cheats and lies his way into that place, whereupon his myth becomes a sick thing, orgiastic and faintly orgasmic. His sedentary and self-pitying state of being twenty-five years after his act of moral compromise rests side by side with Joe's twenty-five years of uncompromised and uncompromising manhood; years that began for Joe on the day when, at the same age as Hightower shook with a ghastly 'peaceful shuddering of delight' (p.358), 'as a boy of eight', 'in...rigid abnegation of all compromise', Joe gained a moral victory over his foster father, Simon McEachern: '*On this day I became a man*' (p.111).

To whatever degree Hightower is guilty of wilful folly, he compromises his human integrity by his lying and cheating, and through his



sick myth he destroys not only his wife but deprives Jefferson of one man, himself, who is capable, exceptionally in that society, of Christianly ministering to white and black alike. To whatever extent it may be argued that Joe Christmas wilfully destroys his own chance of finding a place, he never compromises his human integrity. Faulkner masks Hightower not only by balancing the part-truth of what Jefferson says about him with the incomplete truth of what the narrator and Byron Bunch between them say about him, but by withholding Hightower's biography until after the exposition of Joe Christmas is complete, and at that point, further masking Hightower by means of a story in which there are complexly shifting time sequences, in which, in turn, there lies a feasible Freudian explanation for his conduct. With the masks off, the reader can please himself whether he considers Hightower the victim of a psychosis or whether he thinks that Hightower could and should have recognized his wilful folly long before his supposedly dying moments.

This passage from Hightower's self-examination affirms recognition of Joe as a 'man':

This face [Joe Christmas's] alone is not clear. It is confused more than any other, as though in the now peaceful throes of a more recent, a more inextricable, compositeness. Then he can see that it is two faces which seem to strive (but not of themselves striving or desiring it: he knows that, but because of the motion and desire of the wheel itself) in turn to free themselves one from the other, then fade and blend again. But he has seen now, the other face, the one that is not Christmas. "Why, it's..." he thinks. "I have seen it, recently...Why, it's that...boy...who fired the..."  
p.370

To explicate first the phrase that is crucial to my argument, *the motion and desire of the wheel itself*, the image of the wheel comes from the early stages of Hightower's self-examination, of which the above passage is part of the culmination. Faulkner's first use of the wheel image refers to the speed of Hightower's thinking, 'begin[ning] to run slow now...like a wheel beginning to run in sand'. His second use refers to

the pictures in Hightower's mind, which take the form of a wheel, or several wheels. Thereafter, Faulkner employs both usages, and changes both; the speed of the wheel of thinking increases, and the sets of pictures that take the form of a wheel show Hightower picturing himself both inside and outside of it: 'He seems to watch himself among faces...He sees the faces which surround him mirror astonishment, puzzlement, then outrage...He seems to watch himself, alert, patient, skilful, playing his cards well' (pp. 367-369). Hightower is simultaneously representing both himself and the community as figures in a pastoral and communal wheel, and this communal wheel possesses *motion and desire*. In the passage quoted above, it is the *motion and desire of the wheel itself*, the will of the community in other words, that would force *the two faces [of Joe Christmas]...to free themselves one from the other*; would force Joe Christmas to be either black or white, would preclude his being a one human face. Explicitly, in Hightower's mind, *the two faces [of Joe]...seem...[to be] not of themselves striving or desiring...to free themselves one from the other*; they wish to be one face, the face that is Joe Christmas. John L. Longley Jr. considers that the two faces in Hightower's mind are those of Joe Christmas and 'gunman, mutilator, avenging fury, lyncher extraordinary'<sup>8</sup>, Percy Grimm, but from the movement of the passage, in which Hightower sees a procession of faces, 'the other face, the one that is not Christmas', is a new, final face. Hightower's mind has been full of Joe Christmas before Percy Grimm appeared on the scene. Because of Joe Christmas, he has been called upon to re-engage himself in human affairs. Hightower knows about Joe's mixed blood and has expressed dread for the outcome of the community's finding out. It is appropriate that in Hightower's mind Joe's two faces should appear to free each from the other, and become one again. In the whole spectrum of community vilification of both Joe Christmas and Hightower, Percy Grimm is no more than the actual agent of expressed hopes and ambitions. Even his



role as murderer seems less to justify quite the studied intermixing with Joe Christmas as does the intermixing of the two faces, black and the white, of Joe Christmas.

The passage of Joe Christmas through the novel, if diagramized, would show a short line, a large irregular circle, and another short line; Joe in the narrative present, Joe's history and Joe in the narrative present again. The seven consecutive chapters that comprise the history depart from and return to the present; that is, to the day of the fire at the Burden place, to the town of Jefferson and to Lena Grove's arrival there. At each edge of the life history, like an inner frame, are the hours leading up to the killing of Joanna. Within that frame, the 'corridor' of Joe's life opens out into enclosed and room-like episodes of experience and stages of maturation: the orphanage, the McEacherns, Max's and Mame's house, the fifteen years of wandering, the association with Joanna Burden. Joe plays games with his racial ambivalence in his attempts to find a place in which to be quiet and have peace. He distrusts women, especially those who want to give him money. He is blind to what the reader can see, that if he is going to insist on looking for a place in which to be a man on his own terms, he will not succeed in the South.

Joe's sense of himself, his Joe Christmasness, develops early, at five, when he leaves the orphanage: *'My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas'* (p.111). He will go on trying out his name, his putative negroness and his putative whiteness across the landscape of his life and he will eventually say to Joanna Burden, "If I'm not [a negro], damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time" (p.192); wasted all that time, that is, that he spent among the negroes trying to find a *place* where he could be *what [he] chose to be*: himself, that is Joe Christmas. This has

nothing to do with his being black or being white, but with the fact that his only choices are where white people are or where black people are. Joe is theoretically more spoiled for choice than anyone else in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha humanity. That he seeks a place where he can be himself, that is, at least in a Southern context, a very highly particularized place indeed, is very much his problem, and it is one that he, finally, despairs of ever resolving. It is not even that no opportunity to have the veranda and what goes with it presents itself. He could have married Joanna Burden, after all, and he comes close to it:

Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this thinking, 'No', if I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be'.  
p.199

The first frame section gives way to the seven chapters on Joe's experiences in the orphanage, the McEacherns, the years of wandering and the period with Joanna Burden. Joe's experiences open up a psychological prospect that serves, as far as the reader is concerned, to rationalize his patterns of behaviour. From the orphanage, he takes with him, above all, 'the name', as Byron Bunch puts it, 'which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is' (p.27), and second to that, a vague impression that he has some negro blood in him. Joe grows up as a white youth. Training for manhood, McEachern style, teaches him detestation of organized religion in general and praying in particular. But McEachern also teaches him the value of work, and from that teaching, Joe will find employment wherever he goes, for as long as he wants it. Mrs McEachern, for Joe but not for the reader, is like the dietitian in the orphanage: he can not, or does not, distinguish between Mrs McEachern's pressing of money on him from her poor little secret hoard and the dietitian's secret bribing of him. From his point of view, two women have betrayed his



sense of rightness; from the reader's, one of them has loved him deeply. Mrs McEachern also, like the negro girl with whom Joe starts off to try out sex, is an abased creature, and this abasement offends in him what Faulkner does not quantify any more than he quantifies Joe's resistance to having his humanity classified and his sense of human dignity affronted. Faulkner does not say that Joe reacts violently to abasement; he tacks it on to femaleness. By the same token, he does not say that Joe objects to race-casting; he tacks that on to the social imperatives of blackness or whiteness. Faulkner is covertly investing in Joe Christmas one of his vague *some things* in *Light in August*, a nebulous quality of human dignity and human equality that ignores both sex and race. At this level, the Christian intertext strikes home.

At eighteen, with Bobbie Allen, Joe learns about female biology, falls in love, and suffers a betrayal that, in sum, leaves him homeless. Bobbie Allen offers no objections to sex with Joe after she knows about the possible negro blood, yet from Joe's point of view, and in accordance with the peculiar brand of rigid honesty taught him by McEachern, she deceives him when she finally expresses her real feelings, "'Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man'" (p.164). In his fifteen year 'street' (p.168) he treats those with whom he comes in contact with a perverse honesty, which is normally returned:

he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them that he was a negro....Usually all he risked was a cursing from the woman and the matron of the house. (p.169)

When he meets a woman who, from the similarity of dialogue, reminds him of Bobbie's 'dishonesty' he nearly kills her. The two women reveal a like train of thought. To Joe's, "'You noticed my skin, my hair'", Bobbie replies, "'Yes. I thought maybe you were a foreigner. That you never

come from around here". (p.148). To his announcement to the other woman that he is a negro, she says, "'You are? I thought that maybe you were just another wop or something'" (p.169). In her time, Joanna Burden, too, will also deceive him.

In the fifteen years of wandering, Joe plays antagonistic games with his parchment coloured skin, and out of that period there emerges a Joe Christmas who, like Thomas Sutpen,

discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, 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.<sup>9</sup>

Sutpen pursues his goal for that which 'all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on', but Joe, as it were without antecedents, creates his own image. He chooses what he wants to be, the man who is Joe Christmas; and where he wants to be, where he does not have to knock around any more, somewhere that embodies the kind of civilized security that he thinks is embodied in the image of people sitting on a veranda. From his demeanour he has learned to distrust white societies like Jefferson's, he suffers claustrophobia in black societies, and he has despaired of ever finding the all and the peace that he seeks. The violence is the violence of despair, turned as much against himself as his environment.

To begin to bring together Faulkner's silent landscape of the man beyond race, I look at the scene of Joe's approach to Mottstown. This is the last scene in which the reader enters Joe's mind. Where Gavin Stevens's summary is explicitly speculative, and the scene of Joe's death comes from the narrator in cosmic stance, this one reaches back to the beguiling black and white imagery:



Looking, he can see the smoke low on the sky, beyond an imperceptible corner; he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled further than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle. "And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years," he thinks. "But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo," he thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves. p.255

On the narrative level, Mottstown is about to come into sight. Joe is seated on a wagon, looking at the shoes he is wearing and thinking about the past seven days, and about his life since he left the orphanage. He has been off the street literally and metaphorically for three years. Now he is entering it again, presumably with the same sense of 'foreboding and premonition' (p.194) with which he had regarded it from Joanna Burden's door. But instead of looking like a 'corridor', the street now looks like a *circle*. As a *corridor*, howsoever tedious it eventually became, it at least went somewhere. As a *circle* it becomes more like a treadmill. So it now appears to him that he has spent thirty years going round and round and getting nowhere: *he has never broken out of the ring of what [he has] already done and cannot ever undo*. Faulkner changes the metaphor at this point, but on a simple narrative level, the train of association in Joe's mind (if not in some readers') is clear. He sees his shoes. They smell of negro. They are dirty and so are his legs. (He has been 'disregarding hill and valley and bog'.) He notices the mark on his legs, and it catches his attention: *that mark*. The remainder of this sentence is highly wrought; the images of encroachment as powerful as those of the claustrophobic Freedman Town scene. If, as it has, the mud line has turned into a *gauge* in his mind, and the mud itself into a *black tide*, then the seeming *black tide* is to unstopability as the mud line become gauge is to *ineradicability*. Faulkner does not specify that this is an image of fast closing options and final despair, but as with

much else in this novel, we would wait in vain for him to be explicit. We have to read it as so from the closing phrase, *as death moves*.

To credit Faulkner with presenting, in the passage, a set of images that does no more than ally itself - and that clumsily, and at the expense of narrative and descriptive coherence - with Gavin Stevens's summary, which Faulkner undercuts, we accuse him of mediocrity. Nevertheless, Faulkner does explicitly ally the scene of the approach to Mottstown with Gavin Stevens's summary through the black imagery, with *blood* replacing *tide*, but where the *black tide* works as descriptive enhancement of the narrative and therefore contains its own technical validity, the *black tide* in the voice of the educated Southerner and representative of law and order merely smacks of racist rhetoric. The *creeping black tide* creeps in the same way that death creeps, and from the association, we might argue that, from the point of Joe's capture to his death at the hands of Percy Grimm, Jefferson is more right than it knows: 'It was as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide' (p.333).



## Footnotes for Chapter 5

1. John L. Longley, Jr., 'Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World', in *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Robert Penn Warren (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), 1966), pp.166; John L. Longley, *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).
2. William Faulkner, *Light in August*, first pub. Smith and Haas (New York), 1932; this ed. (London: Picador Classics, 1991), p.37. Further references to this text in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
3. see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, first pub. 1944; this ed. Twentieth Anniversary ed. (New York and London: Harper Row, 1962), Ch. 4.2. pp. 84-85.
4. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1940; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.128.
5. Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p.86; *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 193, 186-7.
6. Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided*, p.80.
7. Theodore Bilbo, *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelisation* (Poplarville, Miss: Dream House Publishing Co., 1947); quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided*, p.146 fn.
8. John J. Longley, Jr., "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World", in *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Robert Penn Warren (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p.172; John J. Longley, Jr., *The Tragic Mask* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), pp.192-205.
9. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1936; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), p.181.

Chapter 6

*The Wild Palms*

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Until the publication in 1975 of Meta Carpenter Wilde's account of her relationship with Faulkner, the background to *The Wild Palms* was undecipherable, the only clues being Faulkner's enigmatic remark about staving off heartbreak,<sup>1</sup> and a letter to his publisher, in which he says:

I have lived for the last six months in such a peculiar state of family complications and back complications that I still am not able to tell if the novel is all right or absolute drivel. To me, it was written just as if I had sat on the one side of a wall and the paper was on the other and my hand with the pen thrust through the wall and writing not only on invisible paper but in pitch darkness, took, so that I could not even know if the pen still wrote on paper or not.<sup>2</sup>

These troubled words seem to reach towards the title Faulkner would have preferred for the novel, "If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem", from Psalm 137, in which the Jews, captive in Babylon, long for Jerusalem. Although as Frederick Karl points out, and Meta Carpenter herself acknowledges, some inconsistencies and inaccuracies are present in her account,<sup>3</sup> the book sheds light on Faulkner's (and Meta's) experience of heartbreak, and it augments what is known from other sources, notably Faulkner's two biographers, about the incompatible, difficult aspects of his and Estelle's marriage. Perhaps also, in the light of Ms Wilde's book and the pain Faulkner must have been working through, we can account for the sense of deliberate subversion in *The Wild Palms*. The ultimate plane on which the story of Harry Carpenter rests, '*between grief and nothing, I will take grief*',<sup>4</sup> is philosophically profound, but it is a joyless consolation, and it is underscored, at least in the manuscript of the novel if not in the published text, by the tall convict's final, cynical comment on the subject of women, "'Shit'".

If, as John L. Longley suggests, the shadows of the tragic heroes of literature flit faintly behind Joe Christmas,<sup>5</sup> the shadow of Faulkner himself lies behind Harry Wilbourne and the tall convict. *The Wild Palms*

works as a projection of a private dilemma transposed to new ground and located in fictional characters. Since there was no divorce between William and Estelle Faulkner, it represents a road surveyed in the imagination, and not taken, and whatever kind of Jerusalem Faulkner invested in Meta Carpenter was eventually consigned to the realm of memory.

## 1

### The Impressionistic Landscape

In establishing the impressionistic landscape of this novel some difficulties arise out of Faulkner's interleaving of his two disparate stories. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader assimilates four blocks of narrative material, in layers, one block at a time. In *The Wild Palms* the reader also assimilates the narrative units in layers, but the landscape here consists of only two layers, and these are presented to the reader piece by piece in alternating chapters, without numeration or any other signifier other than the repeated name of the narrative unit: "Wild Palms", "Old Man", "Wild Palms", and so on. Unlike the four units of *The Sound and the Fury*, no narrative contact exists between the two units of *The Wild Palms*. The characters in the world of "Wild Palms" do not know of the existence of the world or of the characters of "Old Man", even if, from the reader's point of view, they 'live' side by side in the text and possess a contrapuntal relationship one to the other. The overall landscape of the novel that forms in the reader's mind must do so, therefore, on new ground, a chapter of "Wild Palms" mentally put down and overlaid by a chapter of "Old Man". Where in *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader builds his landscape on what is, literally, Compson



ground, in *The Wild Palms*, he clears a tract in his mind, confronts the ever changing backdrops and comes to see the figures in the landscape as in concatenated juxtaposition with each other; the postures adopted by the tall convict anticipate those adopted by Charlotte and Harry, those adopted by Charlotte and Harry reflect and anticipate those of the tall convict. In *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner will use a variation of the same concatenation movement.

The size and grandeur of the physical environments in which the characters find themselves is impressive. The floodwaters of the Mississippi, the Wisconsin woods, the Utah mountains and the Louisiana swamplands take on social, moral, spiritual, mythic and cosmic dimensions. A deified nature teaches, tests, rewards and punishes, and brilliant seasonal landscapes of summer, autumn and winter work as influences upon and correlatives for the characters' states of mind. Physical distances imply, and are found to belie, freedom. Specific locations serve as stages of self-discovery, and the two physical journeys of exit and return parallel a movement out of kinds of captivity, to kinds of freedom, and back to captivity. In part because the physical settings are so immense and powerful a factor, but also because the protagonists are presented as attempting to create life patterns for themselves that are idiosyncratic and in opposition to surrounding patterns, the figures in the landscape of "Wild Palms" appear somehow more static than in motion, and often smaller rather than larger. Specifically, the tall convict in "Old Man" imagines himself as 'no more than the water bug upon the surface of the pond' (p.266). Despite the physical distances involved in Harry Wilbourne's and Charlotte Rittenmeyer's journey, they seem to be merely placed in one environment after another, where they go through a series of interactions with and

responses to and withdrawals from the environments. There seems to be a kind of mechanicalizing and dwarfing of the characters. One feels that Faulkner does not love either Harry Wilbourne or Charlotte Rittenmeyer, does not bend sympathetically towards them as he does to nearly all of his others, even the raging Jason and the wretched Popeye. He isolates Harry and Charlotte in huge physical spaces and prods them as children prod insects, as if knowing full well that he is going to kill them, literally or figuratively, in the end. Such a notion, if perhaps fanciful, begins to define Faulkner's somewhat peculiar stance towards his characters, and it works in the context of the author projecting an imagined life path and despoiling, in a cruel cathartic exercise, love.

Along with the elliptical shape of the journey, the time setting and time scale of one of the two unrelated stories, "Old Man", functions as a kind of pre-figuring mould for the other story, "Wild Palms", for the whole of the tall convict's seven week experience of freedom in May and June of 1927 underkeys the contemporaneous narrative present of Harry Wilbourne's year long experience of another kind of freedom in 1937. Faulkner's setting back of the tall convict's story by ten years, together with the comic cast given parts of the story, has the effect of making of it an experience mellowed by time. For all the immediacy of the telling, and for all its terrors, the story emerges finally as a retrospective thing, an adventure to be looked back on, to be told and retold from a position comfortably 'jackknifed' (p.331) in whatever chair or bunk, in whatever home called prison, or prison called home. This does nothing to ameliorate the pain and tragedy of Harry Wilbourne's final situation, but it does create a faintly comforting perspective, and a philosophical nuance not too far distant from Mr Compson's observation to the troubled Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, 'People cannot do



anything that dreadful...they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today'.<sup>6</sup>

The element of society in the impressionistic landscape consists of the limited, private, unconventional society of the protagonists of the two stories, of wider societies like those from which the three main characters come, and of natural elements endowed with mythic social connotation, the woods, mountains and swamplands. For Harry Wilbourne in "Wild Palms", society composes Charlotte Rittenmeyer and the relationship they create between them. They repudiate their 'home' societies, Harry's 'barracks-like room furnished with steel army cots' in the hospital (p.33), and Charlotte's 'comfortable apartment in an irreproachable neighbourhood' of conventional, Catholic New Orleans. In the course of their private journey, society at large functions as a force with which they are always in awkward juxtaposition and from which, to somewhere else, they always move. For the tall convict, prison and the society of prison is the 'home, the place where he had lived almost since childhood' (p.165) from which he is parted by forces outwith his control, the home from which, 'temporarily lost in peace and hope' in 'the strange rich desert' (p.261), he is tempted to stay away for ever, and to which he voluntarily returns.

Partly because of the episodic nature of events in the "Wild Palms" story, and partly because Harry Wilbourne is periodically jerked out of lethargy by Charlotte, the action of these sections of the novel is a curiously clumsy, stop-go affair. This serves to underscore the failure of the course of love to run smoothly. Stage by stage, environment by environment, Harry and Charlotte try their too abstract and too unrealistic idea of love, and are defeated by it. Love turns to tragedy and, on Charlotte's part to bitterness, disillusion and death.

Harry finds himself back in New Orleans a year after he left it, not in the prison-like intern's quarters but in the real jail, on a charge of manslaughter. Faulkner's treatment of the tall convict is rather different. Unlike Harry Wilbourne, the tall convict perceives himself as a captive, and on the only occasion upon which he makes a unilateral decision, the forces of fate in the form of the cosmic joker slap him down. Because he accepts captivity as part of the status quo, he never has to learn from scratch what is implicitly projected as Harry Wilbourne's lesson, that freedom is a myth. Faulkner renders the character of the tall convict with a humour, sympathy and a kind of warmth quite absent from his evocation of Harry Wilbourne.

In the thematic systems, Faulkner deals with, on the one hand, love and freedom, and on the other, with the price of love and with kinds of captivity. Perhaps because of the need to work out some kind of solution to his private dilemma of love, there is a certain harshness in Faulkner's treatment of the two protagonists of "Wild Palms" that distorts the element of pity in their tragic story. For this reason it is with some reluctance that I concur with Cleanth Brooks invocation of the chivalric ideals of love on behalf of Harry and Charlotte.<sup>7</sup> Even if Charlotte 'makes her demand upon love with transparent sincerity' and we agree to see it as 'a brave but hopeless resolution', it is hard to reconcile this with Faulkner's sporadic undercutting of the characters. Not to deduct from human integrity inherent in their *transparent sincerity*, or the determination of both characters to make love work, I prefer to leave Harry and Charlotte pitched against not so much a constricting society as against a mankind that has long ago found out how best to order itself, and pitched against, on Harry's part at least, his own conscience.



Faulkner's broad intercutting of scenes stretches the reader's field of vision to its limits, and tests his ability to re-orientate related ideas from vastly different physical situations on to a new landscape of his own making. Because the pictorial linkages do not run, as it were, laterally back and forth across the text, but rather, jump diagonally in zig-zag fashion, and because the linkages are presented to the reader as discrete ideological dimensions rather than as structural devices, I find it almost impossible to proceed from the impressionistic landscape through the technical strategies to an analysis of the novel based on the idea of vivid pictures as centres of exposition. The critical method is adjusted slightly for this novel. From the novel's many vivid pictures of barrenness, waste, passivity and inertia, I construct one aspect of the landscape, and from the pictures of illusory freedoms, another.

## 2

### Technical Strategies

Faulkner's version of his structuring of the novel was given many years later, in his interview with Jean Stein:

I did not know it would be two separate stories until after I had started the book. When I reached the end of what is now the first section of *The Wild Palms*, I realized suddenly that something was missing, it needed emphasis, something to lift it like counterpoint in music. So I wrote the "Old Man" story until the "Wild Palms" story rose back to pitch. Then I stopped the "Old Man" story at what is now its first section, and took up the "Wild Palms" story until it began to sag. Then I raised it to pitch again with another section of its antithesis, which is the story of a man who got his love and spent the rest of the book fleeing from it, even to the extent of voluntarily going back to jail where he would be safe. They are only two stories by chance, perhaps necessity. The story is that of Charlotte and Wilbourne.<sup>8</sup>

The reader who is aware of Faulkner's method of construction comes to the text prepared for it. For others, a single flip across the text reveals no more than a simple binary pattern of five "Wild Palms" chapters alternated with five "Old Man Chapters". A scan through the first chapter, "Wild Palms" (1) (my numeral), is not particularly helpful; the Pascaguola beach scene appears to be, and is in fact, not the beginning of the story, but very nearly the ending. Once beyond "Wild Palms" (1), however, Faulkner makes it perfectly clear, from the opening sentences of every chapter, that the two narratives, leap-frogging each other, flow laterally forward. For example, the first section of "Old Man" ends with news of the break in the levee and the command to the prisoners to get out, and the second "Old Man" section, frog-leaping "Wild Palms" (2), opens with the convicts crossing the flooded land in a truck.

A not dissimilar device attaches to the ends of chapters where, in the face of utterly different narrative circumstances, Faulkner carefully attaches to the final sentences linkages between the two separate stories. For example, at the end of "Old Man" (1) and the end of "Wild Palms" (2), at which stage of the novel both stories have begun to lead laterally forward, Faulkner breaks each at the same stage of different scenarios that are new and momentous for the two protagonists: the tall convict, along with the other convicts, has been thinking about the approaching Mississippi floodwaters; the prison deputy's command, "'Get up out of it!'" (p.30), is mandatory because, firstly, he is the prison deputy and secondly, because of the cause of the command, 'The levee went out at Mount's Landing an hour ago'. Harry Wilbourne has been contemplating the business of love-making for the first time in his life. Charlotte Rittenmeyer's 'command' to him is gestural, 'she stepped out of the dress and came and began to unknot his tie, pushing aside his own suddenly clumsy fingers' (p.60), but her command is as mandatory as the deputy's because



she is the sexually beckoning figure in front of Harry and he is flooded with desire for her. When the scene breaks both characters are on the point of responding to their respective commands. Underlining the similarities more closely, the points of view at the end of the chapters are those of the tall convict and Harry Wilbourne. Both points of view are passive; the tall convict is being sent by the deputy, Harry Wilbourne is being beckoned by Charlotte. Each is under the control of a force greater than himself or, to turn the idea round, passivity is the predominant characteristic of each character at the beginnings of their stories.

The dominating characteristic changes, however: at the ends of "Old Man" (3) and "Wild Palms" (4), the tall convict hears 'the infant's first mewling cry' (p.177), and Harry Wilbourne hears Charlotte say (apathetically) of her two children, "'They were all right.'" (p.228). The ostensible link between the two endings is children. But at this stage of the novel, the reader realizes that the emphasis is not on children as such, but on children as the results of pregnancy, and pregnancy as the hopefully avoided result of love-making. The two pregnant women have been made exemplars of what amounts to an anti-abortion and a pro-abortion argument, but the whole narrative focus at the end of these two chapters rests on the situation in which the two men, as opposed to the two women, find themselves. What each thinks and does about his situation in the next two chapters will serve as the dramatic climaxes of the novel, out of which fall their separate 'philosophical' resolutions. In "Wild Palms" (2), Harry's resemblance to the tall convict is revealed only in so far as he also constitutes, in himself, a barren landscape, and he also is about to embark on a new experience. Although further similarities will be developed across the central sections, centred on betrayal - betrayal by their own sexual

natures, betrayal by the women to whom they are attracted - the root similarity of a tragic sexual attraction will be withheld until the vivid counterpointing of the two men in the final sections.

Technically, the chapter beginnings work as linkages in the area of narrative structure, and the chapter endings as linkages in the value systems. As the reader learns to use the linking devices, particularly those related to the value systems, he finds, within himself this time, another device through which he assimilates the narrative material: he becomes aware of a sense of *déjà vu*. This derives, in the first instance, from Faulkner's paralleling of experiences that are of the same order, if of a totally different kind. Also, the descriptive and metaphoric language attached to the narrative matter of one chapter creates resonances that echo in the following one. Precisely because the physical and social backgrounds are so very different, the reader does not even begin to think about comparisons and contrasts between them, so that his mind is free to recognize the moral and confrontational linkages. Harry Wilbourne is twenty-six in 1937, the tall convict the same age in 1927, so that while their stories are told in interleaved simultaneity, Harry's developing experiences in 1937 are underkeyed, as I have said, by the entirety of the tall convict's 1927 experiences.\*

The reader's sense of *déjà vu* develops strongly, for example, in "Old Man" (3) out of Harry Wilbourne's posture and the imagery attached to it in "Wild Palms" (2). In "Wild Palms" (2), Harry

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\* The Mississippi actually flooded on April 22, 1927. Faulkner moves the break in the levee to May 3.  
 Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer*, (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p.296n.



waked and looked down his body towards his foreshortened feet and it seemed to him that he saw the twenty-seven irrevocable years diminished and foreshortened beyond them in turn, as if his life were to lie passively on his back as though he floated effortless and without volition upon an unreturning stream. pp. 33-34

Harry is literally flat on his back. Figuratively, from the point of view of the reader observing him and his thinking, he is either in a boat or he pictures himself as a boat. Either way, by extension, from his flat position, the reader can see, which Harry can not, that he is unable to either see where he is going or control his direction. In "Old Man" (3), the tall convict gets into a real boat and paddles off to pick flood victims from a very real and watery landscape. Unlike the supine Harry on the morning of his twenty-seventh birthday, the tall convict has been on his feet for some time, and he is contemplating the prospect of the Mississippi in flood first 'in quiet and amazed surmise' (p.73), and later with 'intense sobriety' (p.75). He, no more than Harry Wilbourne, has any idea of what lies before him, but he, unlike Harry, has been looking well beyond his feet, and in the paddle that he holds he has a means of balancing and steering himself along. The literal boat looks back to the figurative one, and the tall convict's attempt at looking ahead prefigures Harry's failure to do so.

In addition to the various structural means of creating linkages, Faulkner's working title, 'provides one of those Christian allegories that seems here the better absorbed and distributed into the text as this title was cancelled'.<sup>9</sup> As Francois Pitavy shows, the ideas lying in Psalm 137, of captivity, of longing for home, of promises of faithfulness under pain of punishment weave in and out of the text as a kind of 'ironical chart'. Harry and Charlotte leave the 'Jerusalems' that they perceive as dull for another that does not exist. The tall convict is held captive in 'a strange land'. For him 'Jerusalem' is Parchman Prison, 'home, the

place where he had lived almost since childhood' (p.164), with company, work, comfort, and 'most of all...his good name' (p.165). Harry Wilbourne's ultimate Jerusalem is emptier and more desolate than the one he set out from, and not at all like the Jerusalem for which the Jews longed and wept by the waters of Babylon.

Finally in this section on technical strategy, Faulkner's imagery strongly supports the ideas of passivity, barrenness, captivity, change and a mocking fate. All of these states run counter to the energy and excitement inherent in the idea of running away for love. They recur across the whole novel with so devastating a consistency as to reach beyond the controlled, literary strategy of undercutting; as if, to suggest a motive, the author seeks not only to work through the pain of heartbreak, but to do so with a quite savage and even punitive aggression.

### 3

## Vivid Images 1

### Wasteland

The first layer of the new landscape that the reader must lay down in his mind is full of pictures of waste, imprisonment, lethargy, boredom and constriction. By the end of the novel, some of these pictures will acquire the status of a longed for 'Jerusalem'.



What is a sense of hopelessness and stasis deriving from the description of the background and the demeanour of the characters in "Wild Palms" (1) becomes real captivity in "Old Man" (1). Images that become symbols of change in each separate story begin to create links between them: the wind that is 'invisible' (p.16), 'black' (p.18) and 'strong' (p.16) causes the 'invisible palm fronds' (p.13) to 'clash'; the invisible floodwaters approach the prison day by day, in the newspapers read out to the convicts. The palms and the newspapers are animated, as it were, by forces of nature outwith their control: forces of nature will animate Harry and the tall convict; forces of fate will destroy them.

Because Faulkner begins the story of Harry and Charlotte nearer to its end than its beginning and uses the closed and puritanical consciousness of the little doctor as his medium, the reader comes to their flight from New Orleans with an awakened sense of tragedy. Harry is identified merely as 'the man called Harry' (p.13), seen 'walking barefoot along the beach at tide edge, returning with a faggot of drift-wood' (p.5), and Charlotte is a 'dark-haired young woman with queer hard yellow eyes....who sat all day...not doing anything' (p.5). A sense of barrenness accrues from the description of the little doctor's beach cottage: 'the doctor was descending the stairs...down the brown-stained stair-well and into the brown-stained tongue-and-groove box of the lower hall (p.3). Contained, physical barrenness prefigures the doctor's mental and moral horizons; he wore a nightshirt...not pyjamas, for the same reason that he smoked the pipe...because his father [had told him] that cigarettes and pyjamas were for dudes and women' p.3; he is 'the provincial protestant, the Baptist born' (p.9). The natural world of 'the taste and the smell and the feel of the wind' comes to him through the 'closed and locked doors and shutters' (p.3).

In such a condition of mind, wilfully shut off from life, the little doctor opens his door to Harry Wilbourne and the wind of reality, and metaphorically, of change. When the narrative returns to the beach in the final "Wild Palms" section, only thirty minutes later in time, Faulkner is to personify the wind and to densify its imagistic force by echoing Eliot's *The Wasteland*, with its own echo from Marvell:

He and the black steady wind were like two creatures trying to use the same single entrance. *Only it don't really want to come in...It's just interfering for the fun, for the hell of it.* He could feel it on the door when he touched the knob, then, close, he could hear it too, a sibilance, a whisper. It was risible, it was almost a chuckling, leaning its weight on the door...just risible and chuckling. p.281-2

and Eliot:

The wind crosses the brown land, unheard...  
But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
The rattle of bones and chuckle spread from ear to ear. 'The Fire Sermon'

Faulkner's dark and risible wind, like Eliot's, comes to symbolize change and the arbitrary, care-less forces of fate.

As the brown-stained tongue-and-groove box of a cottage emphasizes the little doctor's narrow-minded, 'respectable' world, so the empty beach isolates Harry and Charlotte and emphasizes their appearance of apathy and inertia; and as the beach forms the setting for the last stage of Harry's and Charlotte's tragic journey, so Parchman Penitentiary cotton plantation and the barren lifestyle therein forms the setting for the first and final stages of the tall convict's journey, for,

even though the levees broke...they would have to return to the fields to work. . the land they farmed belonged neither to them nor to those who forced them at guns' point...it could have been pebbles they put into the ground... p.30

In "Old Man" (1), the background landscape consists of a description of prison life, in which the portrait of the tall convict works as



the first stage of a concatenating movement that reaches into the portraits of Harry and Charlotte. Faulkner withholds from the portrait of the tall convict, however, until the penultimate page of the novel, at which point it binds Harry and the tall convict together, the nature of the 'something else that [the tall convict] could not tell them at [his] trial [for attempted train robbery], did not know how to tell them' (p.25). This is the girl with the 'ripe breasts and...heavy mouth and dull eyes like ripe muscadines' who so bemused him that he tried to rob a train in order to augment the contents of her 'baking-powder can almost full of ear-rings and brooches and rings bought (or presented from) ten-cent stores' (p.338). As the tall convict, on account of a woman, robbed himself of his life's freedom, so also does Harry Wilbourne, or alternatively, as the tall convict got caught in the trap of his own sexual nature, so did Harry Wilbourne. Either way, both ideas prefigure the final observation of the novel, tall convict's 'Women [shit]'. It is an exceptional and probably telling stance for Faulkner to take up, I think, since before *The Wild Palms* his women tend to be residuals of the Old Order, who seem to mystify Faulkner rather than anything else, and after *The Wild Palms* his modern women are much more self-determined, if also implicitly bossy like Chick Mallison's mother, Margaret, or avant garde like Linda Snopes. The price of the tall convict's passion and crime is a twenty-five year prison sentence. Love is always heavily underwritten by its cost in this novel, literally in Harry Wilbourne's case, for he counts up his money on bits of paper, and counts up the tins of food in his mind that he is afraid to go and look at in fact.

Yet another dimension of barrenness derives from Harry's limited physical surroundings, the 'barracks-like room' in the interns' quarters, along with 'others who like him had no private means' (p.33). In turn, this kind of barrenness is complemented by Harry's inexperience of life:

'the empty years in which his youth had vanished - the years for wild oats and daring'. Harry envisions himself as nearly 'a middle-aged eunuch' who has 'repudiated money and hence love' (p.34). Faulkner's exceptional and perhaps sardonic authorial intrusion at this point, emphasized by the parenthesis, serves to underscore Harry's lack of an experiential base from which to judge his first meeting with Charlotte:

his destiny or luck (or ill-luck, since otherwise he might have discovered that love no more exists just at one spot and in one moment and in one body out of all the earth...than sunlight does), brought him no more second-hand invitations. p.43

As his name, Wilbourne, might suggest, there is not a great deal of substance to the landscape that is Harry at this point. Charlotte Rittenmeyer, however, presents a different and more subtly barren picture. She lives 'in an irreproachable neighbourhood' (p.42). Even at home, her husband dresses in a 'dark obviously expensive double-breasted suit', and he questions Harry about his work in a formal manner. Charlotte is surrounded by respectability, but bored: 'she...lay on the sofa smoking while Rittenmeyer continued to ask Wilbourne questions'. For the naive and inexperienced Harry, her 'yellow stare' makes of her an overpowering landscape; she becomes, as Harry recognises later, an eclipsing moon to his sun: "'I was in eclipse...I was outside of time'" (p.137).

The reader's sense of *déjà vu* clicks into warning operation during Charlotte's explaining of her options to Harry. Divorce is impossible in a Catholic community. She could stay and put up with her feelings of unfulfilment but, "'it seems I cant do that'" (p.48). The choice between Harry and her children has been "'settled...a long time ago'" in favour of Harry on the grounds that "'the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself'". The option with which she is immediately concerned relates to money. With enough of it she will go with Harry, without enough she



will not. Her first and third choices are straightforward, but the second is suspect not only because of the romantic rhetoric, but also on account of the disastrous actions taken by the tall convict on the strength of what he, like Charlotte, 'had read in books'. With the portrait of the tall convict in "Old Man" (1), the reader can see that the tall convict knows, at the cost of his freedom, that he has been conned, but in this early portrait of Charlotte in "Wild Palms" (2), the reader deduces that she believes utterly in her plan. The tall convict acts out of passion and naivety and general failure to think his plan through, but Charlotte's course of action, although it is based on her 'feminine' reading matter, is backed up, as we discover, by the 'masculine' code of honour learned in the all-male household of her childhood. Charlotte believes in the 'free shots' (p.53) of college games, and in doing the 'decent' thing. She claims a free shot when she tells her husband about Harry. Being 'decent' includes having enough money and not consummating love in a 'back-alley' hotel. The loss of her children satisfies her idea of not betting love 'cheap'. Charlotte is blindly dedicated to her own ideal of love, much as Thomas Sutpen is to his idea of dynasty in *Absalom, Absalom!*. One of the first stages of Harry's journey towards enlightenment will come with his realisation that he is a sort of adjunct to that ideal: "'It's not me you believe in, put trust in; it's love'" (p.83).

Thus far, through his settings, character situations and imagery, Faulkner has evoked different kinds of inertia, passivity, unfulfilment, waste and barrenness. Through the biography of the tall convict, he has up hazy parallels between the convict's naivety and Harry's, and between the convict's gullibility and Charlotte's. Thirty minutes of time elapses between the little doctor's entry into the beach house where Charlotte lies dying and Harry's departure for prison in New Orleans but

these events are separated by the whole body of the text. Between them, the first and last sections of "Wild Palms" tell the final part of the story of Harry and Charlotte. As Charlotte fails to follow through the natural consequences of love-making, so she is cast out by nature, and as Harry causes Charlotte's death, so he is imprisoned by society. As the mischievous chance of Charlotte's pregnancy delivers both Harry and Charlotte, in different ways, out of freedom and into captivity, so also mischievous chance, of a different kind, convinces the tall convict that freedom is not for him.

Against the backdrop of the beach, the hospital and the prison, Faulkner draws together the strands of Harry Wilbourne's wasted life. With the exception of the opening paragraphs, which are shown from the little doctor's point of view, the narratorial focus remains closely trained on Harry's actions and his thinking; the former acting as correlative for the latter, and the settings, especially the prison setting, helping to mark the stages of his accommodation to Charlotte's death, and to his own lifelong imprisonment.

The room where Charlotte lies forms the centre of the quite short hospital scene. Faulkner handles Harry's brief contemplation of the dead Charlotte by using hospital routine as control. Hands, arms and minimal voices coolly yet humanely shepherd Harry into and out of the room. Only the customary switching off of the fan is allowed to verify the fact of death. Outside the room, before and after Harry sees Charlotte, two minor incidents objectify Harry: in failing to bother to remember his name, the deputy sheriff strips Harry of his personal identity; in explicitly recognising him as 'Doctor', the surgeon accords to him what Harry himself thinks of in the beach cottage as '*that part of my life which I threw away*' (p.283). Charlotte dies, and fails in her



monumental quest for love. She is hoist by her own petard of worthiness, "if you are not good enough...love...just leaves you", and trapped by her own image of love as "like the ocean: if you're no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die" (p.83). Charlotte's love included hunger and hardship and faith but as it denies nature, nature denies her. Her own *ocean* metaphor works as a synecdoche, for she is expelled in a manner rather horribly close to her graphic picture of nature's rejected ones, "urped up on to a strip of dead beach and...dried away by the sun into a little foul smear". Yet Charlotte has 'marked' (p.133) Harry, as in another way, she has wasted him. Awaiting trial for manslaughter, Harry struggles towards turning this marking into a viable philosophy for his 'dead' life in prison.

Throughout the tall convict's telling about his adventures to the other convicts, Faulkner accompanies the telling with a serialized cameo of his appearance, actions and demeanour. The cameo serves to underscore not only the tall convict's manifestly relaxed demeanour but also his enjoyment of being the big fish in the small pool. We contrast this with the full scale portrait of Harry, two pages long, in which his hands shake so badly that he spills tobacco and burns his mouth, underscoring not only his grieving pain but also the terrifying and solitary moral journey that he makes towards reconciliation and some kind of enlightenment. Harry's solitariness takes us back to his conversation with McCord and the *instant of virginity* passage (p.137) in which Harry, "afraid", as he tells McCord, likens life to the instant of losing virginity and that instant to a "dark precipice" (p.137) over which man must go "in solitude". The philosophy that Harry works out so tortuously in Chicago, that so appals McCord, is called into practice now; to 'stand' (p.316), as Faulkner puts it. As the convict's mental

and moral landscape is summed up by the physical prison, Harry Wilbourne comes to find a brave if joyless landscape of memory beyond its walls.

In the Parchman Prison scene in the final section of "Old Man", the questions of the tall convict's fellow prisoners reveal their pre-occupation with women and sex, but the tall convict's lack of enthusiasm indicates his different view of women. His experiences, before prison and on the flood, betoken betrayal and grossness and 'millstone'. He has longed to 'turn his back...on all pregnant and female flesh forever and return to that monastic existence of shotguns and shackles where he would be secure from it' (p.153). Back in prison after his adventures, he is able to assume the cool demeanour of the man of experience and self-assurance: 'grave and clean, the cigar burning smoothly and richly in his clean steady hand, the smoke wreathing upward across his face, saturnine, humorless and calm' (p.339). For the tall convict, explicitly, prison is 'home' (p.165).

## Vivid Pictures 2

### Subversion of Love

Harry and Charlotte set off to live in an incorporeal realm of love in Chicago. Faulkner begins his subversion of their quest by dwelling on the different and the like ways in which they respond to their new physical environment, by attaching separate image clusters to each, and by creating links to this section from the preceding and succeeding "Old Man" sections.



On their second morning in Chicago, Harry is still in bed when Charlotte returns from searching for an apartment. She, at this point and for some time to come, is his whole environment. Were Harry not in a state of 'eclipse' as he later puts it, one feels, to return to the nature of Harry's thoughts for a moment, that he might object to some of those foisted upon him by his creator:

and now he mused indeed on that efficiency of women in the mechanics, the domiciling, of cohabitation. Not thrift, not husbandry, something far beyond that, who (the entire race of them) employed with infallible instinct, a completely uncerebrated rapport for the type and nature of male partner and situation...absolutely without regard for the intrinsic value of the medium which they saved or squandered...using both the presence and absence of the jewel or checking account as pawns in a chess game whose prize was not security at all but respectability within the milieu in which they lived, even the love nest under the rose to follow a rule and a pattern.  
p.81-82

These are strange musings from the mind of a meek, hard-working young man who associates love with trust, who has no experience whatsoever of women, let alone such experience as could engender so sweeping and cynical an appraisal. It is very unlike Faulkner to make errors of psychological judgement with his characters, so that we must deduce, I think, that either the novel's anti-feminist content is a deliberate construct or that it is part of the business of writing with his hand through the wall and not knowing what he wrote.\* Not that there is not also considerable undercutting of Harry Wilbourne, for at times Faulkner comes dangerously close to portraying his character as a fool. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, Faulkner does not bend sympathetically towards his characters. Whatever the truth of the matter, Harry's musings take a strange path. These are easily passed over, however, as the narrator focuses somewhat unflatteringly on Charlotte, in the Chicago

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\* Frederick Karl maintains that Faulkner displays distinct hostility towards women in *The Wild Palms*. Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer*, (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p.601.

apartment, imparting her views on love to the half-asleep Harry.

Charlotte has earlier announced, in a slightly comic mixture of schoolboy codes and melodrama, her rules for the conduct of their relationship (enough money, no back-alley sex), and she has entertained the notion that 'any time you get [love] cheap you have cheated yourself' (p.48). Now she produces the metaphor-laden philosophy of love itself, to which I have referred earlier from the point of view of waste and barrenness:

They say love dies between two people. That's wrong. It doesn't die. It just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn't die; you're the one that dies. It's like the ocean: if you're no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die. You die anyway, but I had rather drown in the ocean than be urped up on to a strip of dead beach and be dried away by the sun into a little foul smear with no name to it, just *This Was* for an epitaph.  
p.83.

To the reader, if he adopts the bitter stance that Faulkner seems to be adopting, Charlotte's horrid mixture of schoolboy honour, Victorian morality, pulp melodrama and pseudo-Shakespearian rhetoric may strike the reader as comic. Viewed through a purer glass, Charlotte's is a very simple, idealistic view of love. Either way, the passage looks back to the tall convict and his magazines, and as importantly, it invites the reader to beware of her maxims. Rhetoric aside, however, the passage carries prescient imagery, for the ocean metaphor looks back to a scene and a passage from "Old Man" (2), in which water, floodwater, constitutes the matter of, and not merely the metaphor for, the scene. That scene works in its own right as an expression of the mighty and destructive power of nature, but also it sets up resonances and distanced parallels for the actions and situation of Harry and Charlotte. The convicts, from their truck, observe the floodwaters:



It was perfectly motionless, perfectly flat. It looked, not innocent, but bland. It looked almost demure. It looked as if you could walk on it. It looked so still that they did not realise it possessed motion until they came to the first bridge...(It's running backward', one convict said quietly)...It was as if the water itself were in three strata, separate and distinct, the bland and unhurried surface bearing a frothy scum and a miniature flotsam of twigs and screening as though by vicious calculation the rush and fury of the flood itself, and beneath this in turn the original stream, trickle, murmuring along in the opposite direction, following undisturbed and unaware its appointed course... p.62

As this landscape appears to be *flat, bland, almost demure and still*, so also is the landscape before Harry and Charlotte all these things because they, like the convicts, have not experienced it; and as the convicts discover that the water possesses not only movement but also direction, so will Harry and Charlotte discover that society, and beyond society, nature, possesses will and direction. Manifestly, to reader and convicts alike, the flood is more powerful than they are; Harry and Charlotte are yet to discover the power in society and nature. Like the flood and the flotsam that flow backwards, Charlotte and Harry contravene the *original stream* of human and natural law, and as the backward-running water must eventually return to its *appointed course*, so also must Charlotte and Harry conform in the end, with nature and society. Another set of watery parallels emerges from a slightly later point in the tall convict's story, when he is sent out on the floodwaters in the skiff. As he cannot swim and therefore depends on the skiff, so Harry has no experience of love and depends on Charlotte, and as the skiff is borne by the flood, so Charlotte is carried away by her dream of ideal love. As the landing points offer the convict experiences that put him off freedom, so Chicago, Wisconsin and Utah offer experiences that bring Harry out of the eclipse of passion, and as the convict holds on to his skiff long after he is dependent upon it, so Harry cares for Charlotte physically long after he needs her emotionally. But Faulkner goes beyond these parallels: Harry has a human responsibility to and for Charlotte, which he assumes and out of which he makes his 'grief or nothing' choice at the end of the novel.

To Charlotte, Faulkner sometimes attaches speech that seems to detract from her character. The imagery that Faulkner attaches to Harry, however, changes with the stages of his 'eclipse'. In the beginning, he *drowns* in her 'yellow stare', then he is like a non-swimmer:

*'Maybe I'm not embracing her but clinging to her because there is something in me that won't admit it can't swim or can't believe it can. "It's all right," he said. "It's fine. Nothing can beat us now."* p.84

This is still confused thinking but, firstly, it contains an element of logic, and secondly, it demonstrates Harry's conscious recognition of his dependence on Charlotte. The first of a series of mechanical motion metaphors appears at this point, "'I'm still freewheeling. But I'll get back into gear soon'" (p.86), but the series is not developed until such time as Harry finds himself not merely *into gear* but 'in drive again'. Like a recalcitrant engine, Harry needs to be jerked, and Charlotte is the agent of the jerking. The *soon* of the getting back into gear, however, is some months away, not until after, as their friend McCord puts it, Harry has 'served [his] apprenticeship to destitution' (p.101) in the Wisconsin woods. In the small passage above, Faulkner's juxtaposing of a *something* in the first sentence with a *nothing* in the following one, although the two are not directly related, opens up yet another new dimension. By implication, if *nothing* can beat them *now*, then *something*, in Harry's mind, nebulous and undefined, could have beaten them before. Harry's - and Charlotte's - fear of something does not disappear; it grows into, on his part, an obsession with counting money on paper and tins of food in his mind, and on Charlotte's with making charms and fetishes to ward off bad luck. The reader, more worldly wise than Harry, is not so sure about nothing being able to beat them. But one wonders whether Faulkner, in the savage frame of mind he appears to be in this section of the book, and knowing full well that he intends to subvert his characters' quest, is not playing the avenging god.



In the summer in Chicago, their inability to earn enough money puts Charlotte's ideal of love under siege: Harry, 'knowing that this was a form of masturbation' (p.94) sits on a park bench juggling with figures that represent money, and Charlotte falls back on charm making and superstitious placatory gestures. Their friend McCord becomes their deliverer, they move to his cabin in Wisconsin, and the reader sees Harry and Charlotte against a backdrop in which their relationship enters a curious phase of hiatus and change:

September had gone, the nights and morning were definitely chilly...But the days themselves were unchanged - the same stationary recapitulation of golden intervals between dawn and sunset, the long quiet identical days, the immaculate monotonous hierarchy of noons filled with the sun's hot honey, through which the waning year drifted in red-and-yellow retrograde of hardwood leaves sourceless and going nowhere. pp. 110-1

The mood and the language of the passage emphasizes the edenic quality of their lives. But as the days are golden and the sun like *hot honey*, so they are also *stationary* and *monotonous*. Harry is not only 'Adam', but pre-Adam - he exists in a 'drowsy and foetus-like state, passive...in the womb of solitude and peace' (p.110). Like the drifting leaves, he is *sourceless and going nowhere*. Even Charlotte becomes for him an 'aura', which she inhabits from time to time, 'as she might re-enter a garment' (p.112).

Harry used to keep in some kind of touch with reality through his ritualistic accounting. But if money on paper can be juggled with, money represented by food can not:

He would tell himself how it used to be he would have to steal away to a park bench and take out the wallet and produce a piece of paper and subtract numbers from one another, while now, all he would have to do would be to glance at the row of cans on a shelf...but he would not even look into the closet. p.112

In Chicago, Harry worried; now he worries about not worrying. Physically, in Wisconsin, Harry is foetus-like; psychologically, he buries stress with

more stress. But the major difference between Chicago and Wisconsin is the existence in the one location of the opportunity for useful, gainful work, and the absence of it in the other. Harry's psyche is just as geared to the work ethic as his body is to sex. Sex is where Charlotte is, but the opportunity for work lies not with her and not in Wisconsin: *'I am bored. I am bored to extinction. There is nothing here that I am needed for'* (p. 112). Harry's recognition of his own boredom works as a pre-rumbling of the shock wave that is to follow, and Faulkner signifies this in the text by a slight pause in the pattern of his narration: *'One day he asked her to divide the colors and pad with him'* (p.113).

The reader, if not Harry himself, can see that he is behaving like a latter-day primitive man. As primitive man learned to bring order to his world through necessity and chance, so Harry begins to bring order to his through boredom and chance: *'one day he decided to make a calendar'* (p.82). He uses the dates of Charlotte's periods to verify his count of the days, discovers that he has a six week month and realizes that he is in mid-November with winter coming and the food stocks lower than he had reckoned. Now, as when Charlotte's 'masculine' rough-handling of Harry in the apartment jerked his mind into motion (pp.82-83), an exclusively feminine attribute jerks his mind again. His response reverberates not only in his own mind but in the thematic issues also:

he seemed to see the row of cans on the shelf half a mile away...which up to now had merely dropped one by one...into that stagnant time which did not advance and which would somehow find for its two victims food as it found them breath, now in reverse to time, time now the mover, advancing slow and irresistible, blotting the cans one by one in steady progression as a moving cloud a shadow blots. Yes he thought. *It's the Indian summer that did it. I have been seduced to an imbecile's paradise by an old whore; I have been throttled and sapped of strength and volition by the old weary Lileth of the year.* pp. 114-5

Harry thinks in terms of food supplies, but the reader recognizes, in the stagnant time that does not advance, something of Harry's relationship



with Charlotte. In this passage too, Harry's idea of being *seduced to an imbecile's* paradise might seem to begin to fall into line, in the somewhat distorted way that Faulkner encourages in this novel, with the notion of the 'efficiency of women in the mechanics...of cohabitation'.

The incident of the calendar jerks Harry's mind. His proposal that he stay on while Charlotte goes back to Chicago where there is work for her is forcefully and almost hysterically challenged, but in Harry's response to Charlotte's challenge, 'He held her, his arms rigid...God, he thought. *God help her. God help her*' (p.119), there exists the germ of change - change out of subjection to Charlotte, towards independent thinking and towards, ultimately, active responsibility for her. The scene sharply separates them from their environment and begins a movement for the reader in which his attention focuses on stages of the relationship. To this extent, the backdrops, for all their size and might, seem to become one, any, anonymous backdrop, against which Harry and Charlotte, from the Olympian point of view that Faulkner seems to be offering the reader, act out the postures and scenes of a tale predestined to end in tragedy.

With Harry and Charlotte back in Chicago, the narrator describes the city preparing for Christmas, the store in which Charlotte works in the evenings, Harry's story-writing and their social life. Faulkner uses contrasting tones and descriptive language to evoke a cumulative picture of the materialistic, weird, sordid and surfacey world at the behest of which Harry and Charlotte earn enough money to make them relatively comfortable; the very comfort which, in their minds, begins to turn Harry into a 'husband', and edges them towards the dreaded and despised 'respectability'. The scenes form the background to which Harry refers as he explains to McCord in the concluding passages of the section his reasons for leaving the city. Preceding these passages however, a small,

intimate scene centred on Charlotte pulls Harry right out of eclipse, into his most positive action yet, and supports the early stages of his modulation towards responsibility for her.

As she wraps Christmas presents for her two daughters - the human price she was willing to pay, six months before, for love - only the merest of oblique references reveals Charlotte's feelings: 'the hands otherwise and at nearly every other human action unhesitating and swift' (p. 125). Nonetheless, the narrator's preceding remarks implicitly but substantially enhance the action of the unsteady hands: 'She unwrapped and rewrapped them on the bed...the work-bench of the child's unwitting begetting become the altar for the Child's service'. Charlotte launches into a bitter little tirade about Christmas and the 'ruthless piracy of children' that indicates, for the first time, something of the disillusion and pain that she associates with the world of home-making and mothering. For the first time also, we see Charlotte as a normal human being rather than as a forcefield. Typically for her short outbursts, her final remark, "'They are going to keep me on at the store'" (p.125) is unrelated to what has gone before, and as typically it jerks Harry's mind, but this time he is jerked into a direct and unequivocal response: "'No...we are going to leave Chicago'". Although there are several turning points in the novel, for the reason that in the main Faulkner concentrates on Harry's point of view, this has to be the principal one. A long pause in the narrative ensues after this scene, during which Harry works through his new found philosophy of life, in his own words, to McCord, and in the other world of the novel, the tall convict engages the river and the pregnant woman.

Harry talks to McCord in Chicago Central Station at three o'clock in the morning. Faulkner frames the discourse passages with two constructs,



with, on the one side, a recall of McCord's cynical remarks about Christmas as 'an orgy of unbridled sentimental obeisance to the fairy tale which conquered the Western world' (p.130) and on the other, a description of the train shed's

cavernous gloom in which the constant electricity which knew no day from night burned wanly on...among wisps of steam, in which the long motionless lines of darkened Pullmans seemed to stand knee-deep, bedded and fixed forever in concrete. p.140

Following on from Harry's cheerful and positive philosophizing, the paradox of the Pullmans that are inherently made for motion *fixed forever* in concrete works as a darkly prescient image. For as Harry's energies become more and more positive, so the forces of fate fix both him and Charlotte in different kinds of concrete.

Harry announces to McCord that Charlotte has 'marked' him with the belief that "'there is nothing better...nothing else in all this world but to live for the short time you are loaned breath, to be alive and know it'" (p.133). While in eclipse, Harry's worries related to both money and to Charlotte, Out of eclipse, his obsession with money goes, "'Damn money. I can make all the money we will need'" (p.136), and so does his sense of drowning in love. Harry's mental shackles fall away, but in the other landscape, the tall convict, 'marked' by the flood with both freedom and responsibility, returns to prison. Charlotte has awakened Harry to 'the wisdom to concentrate on fleshly pleasures - eating and evacuating and fornication and sitting in the sun' (p.133). In Harry's dimension of freedom, life and love become short and precious. Because it is so, he is "'afraid'", "'because it [love] can't last. There is no place for it in the world today, not even in Utah'" (p.136). But to him, Utah is a better bet than Chicago. Expanding his philosophy for McCord, Harry explains life in terms of the "'instant of virginity...that does not actually exist except during the instant you know you are losing it'"

(p.137). That instant, like life, is peculiar to the individual. No one else can lose his virginity for him any more than one man can live life for another. Conversely, the moment of losing virginity is also a moment "outside of time" and "in eclipse" (p.137), a moment to be subtracted from "the three score and ten they have credited you with" (p.139). The "eight months" "moment" (p.139) of Harry's eclipse is something to be knocked off the total allowed him. Now he is awake and watchful for "Them", for agents of fate, for the tall convict's cosmic joker:

"Then I waked up and rectified the money and I thought I had beat Them until that night when I found They had used respectability on me and that it was harder to beat than money. So I am vulnerable in neither money nor respectability now and so They will have to find something else to force us to conform to the pattern of human life which has now evolved to do without love - to conform, or die...So I am afraid. Because They are smart, shrewd...Of course we can't beat Them...that's why I am afraid. And not for me".  
p.140

As McCord had earlier likened Harry and Charlotte to an old lady and a policeman crossing the road, the policeman protecting the old lady, now Harry recognises the danger to Charlotte. The cluster of metaphors switches from cities, roads, policemen and old ladies to natural landscape - air, falcons and sparrows - as Harry proposes a different order of dangers and relative safeties: "sparrows get shot out of trees or drowned by floods...but not hawks. And maybe I can be the consort of a falcon, even if I am a sparrow" (p.141). McCord has asked "Why go to Utah?". In the 'cavernous gloom' of the train shed, Harry has tried to give him an answer. Harry has been borne, as it were, upstream by a surging river. He has been knocked about a bit, but now he knows which way to go.

In "Old Man" (3), Faulkner maintains his comic tone and his tall-tale mode of telling, and in the immediate term these serve to relieve



the heavy philosophizing of the final passages of "Wild Palms" (3). Despite vast differences between Harry's and the tall convict's physical and social environments, through their adventures, hazy, theme-extending parallels become visible: Faulkner's sharp handling of the confusion of physical detail in the tall convict's journey provides a concrete correlative for Harry's essentially abstract, but equally mazey, psychological journey. At the same time, the tall convict considers and assesses what he is getting into in a way that Harry does not. Alongside that, Faulkner's clear, early exposition of the tall convict's aims and intentions, and his clear marking of the elliptical shape of the convict's journey - the crazily random execution of it notwithstanding - serve as early indicators of one crucial difference between Harry and the tall convict, and one similarity: both will complete physical journeys of exit and return, but the tall convict will decide, consciously, to return to his prison; like McCord and Chicago, he likes his physical and psychological cocoon. But Harry Wilbourne sees physical life as but a moment in time. From Charlotte he has learned about seizing life and living it and from McCord perhaps how to live it on his own terms.

The tall convict cannot paddle a skiff and he has never seen much more than a pond of water before, let alone a major river in flood. He has been seen to gaze 'first at the skiff and then at the water with intense sobriety' (p.75). Quite clearly, he has put the two together and he sees that the impending situation is not only new for him, but also hazardous. To that extent, he knows what he is in for. Far away in New Orleans, ten years later, Harry Wilbourne sees no hazards, but simply drowns in Charlotte's 'yellow stare' (p.39). Nevertheless, the new situation in which the tall convict finds himself is more hazardous than he imagined, 'things...moved too fast for him' (p.143), and like Harry, 'he had not been warned' (p.143). The convict loses direction and perspective - much

as Harry Wilbourne does - in a non-stop series of minor incidents rendered funny by the narrator's comic tone and the vivid imagery. The description of the surrounding landscape at once concretizes the totality of his lost perspective and at the same time turns towards one of the major juxtapositions of the section, the smallness of man with the enormity of the water:

He paddled on, helping the current, steadily and strongly...towards what he believed was downstream, towns, people, something to stand on...It was raining steadily now...the sky, the day itself dissolving without grief; the skiff moved in a nimbus, an aura of grey gauze which merged almost without demarcation with the roiling spittle-frothed debris-choked water...So he stepped up his stroke a beat or so, not from alarm but on the contrary, since he too had received that lift from the mere presence of a known stream, a river known by its ineradicable name to generations of men who had been drawn to live beside it as man always has been drawn to dwell beside water, even before he had a name for fire and water...So he was not alarmed. He paddled on, upstream without knowing it, unaware that all the water which...had been pouring through the levee...was somewhere ahead of him...on its way back to the River. p.154

The striving and the triviality inherent in the action of *paddling* reduces and isolates the man within a landscape of natural elements described in terms of the illimitable: *raining, sky, nimbus; aura, ineradicable, generations of man, destiny*. The passage and the preceding paragraphs are so immediate, detailed and comic that a similarity of dimension is not readily apparent, between these and Harry Wilbourne's philosophy of the momentariness and the solitariness of life - life that for Harry is minutely sandwiched in the endless "'dust'" of "'before you were'", and the equally endless "'seething worms'" of "'after you are not'" (p.138). Later passages will confirm the sense of small man in a vast landscape and, as Harry is seen to work out his philosophy, will make firm thematic webs.

The convict picks up the pregnant woman and Faulkner re-states, both in the language and explicitly, the pulp-fiction motif:



he had continued...to consume the impossible pulp-printed fables...and who to say what Helen...he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragoned keep. p.149

The convict's response to the woman is wryly comic: *'This, out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with'* (pp.149-50), but thematic notes resound in it and lead from it. With sex out of it, and with their lives at the mercy of the whimsical floodwaters and an equally whimsical fate, the convict and the woman are forced into a working partnership until such time as the convict has discharged his responsibility for her by getting her to land. Harry Wilbourne passes through a much broader spectrum of moral responsibility: he begins without any, being merely the old lady to Charlotte's policeman (p.104; 140); he aspires to equality, *"And maybe I can be the consort of a falcon"* (p.141), and finally, he finds himself required to assume all of it, without choice and in circumstances as mischievous, if very different, as those of the tall convict. The *female meat* the tall convict refers to has specifically sexual connotations. Harry will also refer to meat in prison, as the veil to enlightenment and decision falls away, but his meat subsumes the tall convict's and refers to life itself. Within the terms of Harry's philosophy, without *'the old meat, the old frail ineradicable meat for memory to titillate'* (p.316), there is no before and no after.

From the landscape of the flooded Mississippi in "Old Man" (3), from the inherently life-giving properties of the water, and from the scene of new life, Faulkner moves to the inherently life-denying, frozen landscape of winter Utah, and to Harry's destruction of life. In this section, a new, mighty, natural backdrop enhances one of the novel's major oppositions: in the 'strange rich desert' (p.261) of Atchafayala, the tall

convict, 'temporarily lost in peace and hope' and overtly recognizing 'how good it is to work'(p.264), approaches and then withdraws from what in Harry's terminology would be 'the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude' (p.138) of life; among the mountains of Utah, Harry experiences a kind of cold 'which left an ineffaceable and unforgettable mark somewhere on the spirit and memory' (p.182), and his glimpse of life-saving work is compromised by the life-denying abortion of the Bruckner baby and the calamity of Charlotte's pregnancy. The tall convict returns to sit comfortably 'jack-knifed' (p.339) in Parchman, but Harry Wilbourne presses on through in the practice of his philosophy, through darkness and falling to the thunderous solitude of his life in prison. Faulkner's magnificent and consummate ironies begin to resound behind the action of these sections.

Harry's decision to take work as the doctor at the Utah mine marks his re-emergence into positive thinking and decisive action. He cannot complain (and does not) as the tall convict does, about not being 'warned' about conditions: 'McCord [had] snarled..."that guy [the mine owner] is poison...He's wildcat"' (p.131). In the terms of his philosophy, Harry returns from eclipse, from 'the one single fluxive Yes...in which you surrender volition, hope all' (p.138) and resumes the challenge of life,

the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude, the shock, the death, the moment when...you yet feel all your life rush out of you into the pervading immemorial blind receptive matrix, the hot fluid blind foundation - grave-womb or womb-grave'. p.138

This is the formidable landscape that has horrified McCord, who would rather 'curse' Harry with his own city-bound philosophy than give his 'blessing' to a journey through so cold, philosophically speaking, a land. The harsh practicalities of Harry's and Charlotte's life in Utah are at once caused by and underlined by the physical landscape. It is a severe, black and white landscape, a cold hell, and the mine chamber itself 'like



something out of an Eisenstein Dante' (p.187). An intrinsic part of the landscape is the cold itself, and the quality of stasis held in the physical landscape and the freezing cold serves as a contrasting backdrop for the physicality and warmth of the action; at once a frozen wasteland and a crucible of life. It is the farthest point of Harry's and Charlotte's journey and the point of their richest experiences: the 'grimaced giant' folds Charlotte's coat about her 'with almost a woman's gentleness' (p.181); the Bruckners make love violently beside them; Harry aborts the Bruckner baby; they establish a sympathetic rapport with the kind, poverty-ridden Poles; and Charlotte, contrary to and outwith her particular and straitened concept of love, becomes pregnant.

From this point in Harry's and Charlotte's experiences, the direction is morally downhill and physically south. Harry moves from adamant refusal to terrified coercion in the aborting of their child. Charlotte moves from determined coercion of Harry to mental apathy and life-sapping toxaemia. They go from Wisconsin to Texas to New Orleans in increasingly sordid attempts to abort the baby 'naturally'. The root of Charlotte's refusal to have the baby looks back to the present-wrapping scene in Chicago. Now she articulates in words the pain shown then only in her unsteady hands:

"Damn pain...I don't mind that. I said they hurt too much. Too damned much." Then he understood, knew what she meant; he thought quietly, as he had thought before, that she had already and scarcely knowing him given up more than he would ever possess to relinquish, remembering the old tried true incontrovertible words: *Bone of my bone, blood and flesh and even memory of my blood and flesh and memory*. You don't beat it, he told himself. You don't beat it that easy. He was about to say, "But this will be ours," when he realized that this was it, this was exactly it. p.217

Faulkner's explication of Harry's train of thought shifts in a few lines from direct narration to interior monologue to unspoken direct speech, with the cumulatively powerful effect of focussing on the paraphrase from Genesis: 'And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my

flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man' (Gen.2.23). Harry's moment of insight jerks his dilemma of conscience to crisis point, out of which he lets Charlotte manoeuvre him into a promise to abort. With Harry's hands shaking and Charlotte encouraging him explicitly, in the manner she always has done implicitly, "'It's all right. We know how'" (p.221), the text shifts abruptly to Audubon Park, New Orleans, and one final Harry-sitting-on-a-park-bench scene. Charlotte returns to New Orleans a year after she left with foetal toxemia, Harry with Francis Rittenmeyer's cheque for Charlotte's return fare intact. Faulkner completes this layer of the landscape with Charlotte's apathetic response to Harry's question about her children, "They were all right".

With the switch to "Old Man" (4), the narrative recoups, obliquely, on Harry's and Charlotte's experiences and explicates, directly, another version of the tale of the man and the pregnant woman. But the two remaining "Old Man" sections do more than this. Through the brilliant pictures they contain, through the narrator's sustained leading towards the tall convict's point of rebellion and defeat by forces within and outwith himself, and through the correlations with the traumatic decisions of Harry Wilbourne in his agonising world, the sections take clear form as the pre-figuring mould and backdrop against which Harry and Charlotte act out the destruction of their love. In earlier "Old Man" sections, the narrator's comic tone over the character's terror and exasperation determined the mood of the tale. Now, in "Old Man" (4), the comic tone is still present in the narrator's voice but it is to become more sombre, and lyrically poetic, especially at the point of the tall convict's farthest and richest experience, as it never is in any of the "Wild Palms" sections. It serves to underscore what he rejects, the savage, fecund beauty of the swampland and the wealth of possibility for a good life; and it stands in grand opposition to the frozen wasteland of circumstances in Utah. An



even grander irony tops the grand opposition; for in the realm of human choices, no matter what the cast of thinking of the chooser, characters, landscapes and lifestyles all, are projected as subject, finally, to the will and whim of the tall convict's 'cosmic joker' (p.264).

The tall convict's increasing frustration is allowed to come to the forefront of the narrative; so also is his unquestioned, if not unquestioning, sense of completing the given task. In this respect, the tall convict possesses a complete sense of moral responsibility, which Harry Wilbourne does not, and has to acquire by force of circumstances. But central to this section is the movement towards and away from the point of decision. The tall convict's point of decision is not as morally excruciating as Harry's because the tall convict does not think on the lonely planes of freedom that Harry does. He is essentially cocooned, socially and mentally, in captivity. Harry Wilbourne's concept of life and freedom is not for him. The tall convict not merely does not like the unfamiliar, or open spaces, or nebulous challenges but, as we find out in this section, he does not like being a small fish in a large pond either. Through the narrator's omniscient mode of telling and the flash-forward reminders, the reader is aware that the tall convict's recount to his fellow prisoners is selective. In gearing his account more and more to what they want to hear, he masks both his physical fortitude and his moral trepidity.

With great patience and seething frustration, the tall convict tends the woman with her new infant. Overcast skies, mud and creeping life forms are rendered explicitly and tonally biblical:

When he returned...evening had definitely come, as though darkness too had taken refuge upon that quarter-acre mound, that earthen Ark out of Genesis, that dim wet cypress-choked life-teeming constricted desolation...and had now with the setting of the sun crept forth again to spread upon the waters. p.232

In this landscape, the tall convict, like Harry as an 'Adam' of the Wisconsin woods, becomes creative. But where Harry made his calendar out of boredom and idleness, the tall convict fashions his paddle out of frustration and necessity. At the tall convict's point of departure from the mound, Faulkner again emphasizes the setting landscape, this time enhancing it with a Homeric touch: 'When once more the pale and heatless wafer disc of the early sun stared down at the skiff...in its nimbus of fine cotton batting' (p.237). Faulkner moves away from his comic mode of telling at this point. He becomes more calm, more epic in mood (although not, apart from the occasional extended metaphor, in the style of the language). With the finding of the steamboat in the mist, the critical point of the convict's struggle for physical survival passes. But the given task of returning the woman to the point from which he set out remains, and his moment of temptation to freedom is yet to come. A short dialogue between the tall convict and the doctor on the steamer underscores, in a way that is ultimately poignant, the convict's dourly independent cast of character:

[The doctor's] hand emerged from his pocket...with a bill in it.

"No," the convict said.

"Come, come; I don't like to be disputed either."

"No," the convict said. "I ain't got any way to pay it back."

"Did I ask you to pay it back?"

"No," the convict said. "I never asked to borrow it either." p.249

The landscape in which the convict and the woman are put down is formidable indeed, and made more so by the description of the departing steamboat:

crawl[ing] onward up the platter-like reach of vacant water...its trailing smoke roiling in slow copper-edged gouts, thinning out along the water, fading, stinking away across the vast serene desolation, the boat growing smaller and smaller until it did not seem to crawl at all but to hang stationary in the airy substanceless sunset, dissolving into nothing like a pellet of floating mud. p.250



Yet the tall convict looks at and assesses what he sees: 'a terrain flat as a waffle...spreading away without undulation...broken...by thick humps of arsenical green...and by writhen veins of the colour of ink' (p.251). The *writhen veins* become paths and waterways and the 'tall grasses' fill up his whole visual landscape so that when he arrives at the Cajan's stilt house, he seems to have entered another world. The tall convict's nine days on the Cajan's stilt house in the swamps is the point of richest experience and greatest harmony for him. In the re-telling to the other convicts, however, his vastly understated account of this part of his experience masks both his dalliance with the option of freedom and the caprices of his cosmic joker. The tall convict's cosmic joker, a mixture of pagan superstition and Calvinist religion, stands in the same relation to the tall convict as Charlotte does to Harry (Charlotte also, through the eclipse imagery, is endowed with pagan qualities). Like the tall convict, Harry, although dallying with quite another option and influenced by quite another force, is nevertheless manoeuvred by a force outside himself into making a decision, with the consequences of which he, like the tall convict, must live.

As isolated and lost from civilisation as snow-bound Utah, Atchafalaya is a

*flat fecund waste neither earth nor water, where even the senses doubted which was which, which rich and massy air and which mazy and impalpable vegetation.* p.252

The convict's intention to fulfil his mission and get back to Parchman is as firm at this point as it has been all along. In preparation for the time when he can leave, he puts his newly washed prison clothes aside for the journey and in the meantime, he embarks on two adventures; firstly, the 'money'-earning one of alligator hunting and secondly, the moral one of the 'temptation' to embrace freedom. Faulkner leads into both with an

overwhelming image of the new world in which the tall convict finds himself:

It [the alligator hide] was the reason, the explanation for the little lost spider-legged house...set in that teeming and myriad desolation, enclosed and lost within the furious embrace of flowing mare earth and stallion sun, [he] divining through pure rapport of kind for kind, hill-billy and bayou rat, the two one and identical because of the same grudging dispensation and niggard fate of hard and unceasing travail not to gain future security...but just permission to endure and endure to buy air to feel and sun to drink for each's little while...  
p.255.

Like the *three strands* passage (p.47) at the beginning of the tall convict's journey, this one, at its farthest point and its moral climax, works several ways. Coming as it does in the middle of a passage that modulates from 'a business agreement' that pre-empts with consummate simplicity - 'halvers' - the wheeling and dealing of business arrangements to the reward and excitement of the work itself, the magnificence and poetic qualities of the lines bestow a kind of blessing on both. Within the passage itself, the language is that of coherence and harmony, *enclosed, flowing, embrace, divining, rapport, identical, same*; the whole becomes an apotheosis of man's affinity with nature and his peace of mind in work. Ironically, this is what the tall convict will step back from and ironically again, it is what eludes Harry Wilbourne. The passage echoes Harry's monumental (for him) recognition of the wisdom of concentrating on fleshly pleasures (p.133).

At the beginning of the tall convict's adventures, water had replaced land as the element upon which the tall convict was given a job to do. Now it replaces land as the element out of which he must provide food for himself and the woman. At the penal farm, 'the land they farmed and the substance they produced from it belonged neither to them who worked it nor to those who forced them (p.30). Now, free from that kind of motivelessness, and as it were, baptised into new life, he remembers 'how good it is to work' (p.264). The narrator's comic tone returns for his



description of the tall convict learning how to hunt alligators, and the reader sees that the comic tone, as it did when used of the convict's first hours on the water, supports and sustains carefully drawn pictures of man in his fundamentally free state; and that far from detracting from man's natural dignity, the comedy immeasurably enhances it.

By the narrator, although not explicitly by the tall convict, the stilt house is described as 'home'. The convict's firm idea of moving on, *'All this durn foolishness will stop and I can get on back'* (p.261), is tampered with by the landscape, 'the strange rich desert...in which he was temporarily lost in peace and hope' and he comes, mentally, to a pause: *'I reckon I had done forgot how good making money was. Being let make it.'* (p.262). The tall convict becomes a gladiator among the primitive Cajans, and his host applauds his prowess by cooking his food. The narrator's language takes on a tone of elevation in long, poetic cadences. At nights, alone, before performing the ritual of looking at his clean prison clothes, the tall convict sits on his heels and the narrator's voice surmises his thoughts:

after a while the crude boards themselves must have dissolved away and let his blank unseeing gaze go on and on unhampered, through the rich oblivious darkness, beyond it even perhaps,...even perhaps beyond the seven wasted years during which, so he had just realised, he had been permitted to toil but not to work. p.264

The tall convict, like the subjects of some Renaissance paintings, looks from an interior out on to an ideal landscape and like the subjects of others, his back, finally, is turned to it. As the bundle of prison clothing is his symbol and reminder of 'home' and security, so the cosmic joker is his re-enforcement agent. As the prison guards kept order with loaded guns, now the cosmic joker brings the tall convict into line with a full volley. He who never needed to be threatened in prison, is disgusted, and also outraged to the point of rebellion:

What he declined to accept was the fact that a power...should with all the wealth of cosmic violence and disaster to draw from, have been so barren of invention and artistry and craftsmanship, as to repeat itself twice...The cosmic joker, foiled twice, had stooped in its vindictive concentration to the employing of dynamite.  
p.264

The cosmic joker brings him back into line, and his hasty rearrangement of his priorities betrays the measure of deviation, 'thinking (this is a flash too...) that though his life had been cast here...yet it was not his life' (p. 266). In the same breath, he falls back, by implication, on what is, for him, one of the major virtues of prison: 'he...would [in Atchafalaya] ever be no more than the water bug upon the surface of the pond'. This is not a moment of enlightenment for the tall convict, of the order of Harry Wilbourne's moments of enlightenment, but a simple, abrupt and in some ways cowardly, about-face on the gladiatorial role. The gladiatorial role offers the same opportunity that prison does - to be a big fish in a little pool. It is just that, when choosing in theory looks like becoming a practical option, the cosmic joker discharges his gun, in this case dynamite - and the tall convict bows to the superior will.

Nevertheless, the tall convict has come sufficiently far along the freedom road to try rebellion. This takes the form of mere prevarication at first. He pretends not to understand the Cajan's graphic pantomime of the imminent dynamiting of the levee. He adopts a defiant little philosophy of his own: 'trimming...at the paddle...with no more haste than on any other night, serene in his belief that when the time came for him to know whatever it was, that would take care of itself' (p.267), and out of his little philosophy, there emerges a practical and overtly rebellious idea: '*I reckon as long as I can catch them I won't have no big trouble finding whoever it is that will buy them*' (p.268). He trades with the Cajan for ownership of the stilt-house. These passages are being told by means of objective, close-focus narration, with minute attention to a



whole spectrum of detail, as well as through the tall convict's conscious and unconscious thinking. At the same time, the narrator guesses at, re-articulates and vivifies through extended simile, much of his thinking, so that the reader has before him a very complex and intimate picture.

The tall convict's rebellion has been confirmed in his act of barter for the ownership of the stilt-house and it is as owner that he sets off alone to begin the complementary work of provending. The oppositeness of the direction he takes from that of the fleeing Cajan 'establish[es] and affirm[s]', the narrator proposes, 'the final irrevocability of his refusal [to leave]' (p.269). But in going off on the lonely and necessary business of provending, he leaves his 'citadel' exposed. The narrator articulates his moment of intuition through the awesome image of the 'silence and solitude and emptiness' that 'roared down on him in a jeering bellow' (p.269). Enormous pathos is carried in the simple phrase, 'he the betrayed' (p.270) and the cosmic quality of the jeering solitude above him is matched by the diminishing expanse of water across which he paddles 'in a dream-like state in which there seemed to be no progress...seeming to watch the skiff creep infinitesimally' (p.270). He becomes indeed the bug on the surface of the water. Literally shackled into final submission by the evacuation patrol, the tall convict gives up his rebellion and sets meekly off back to the levee from which he set out. In the old mode of thinking to which he now returns, the skiff, like the woman and the child, becomes part of the mission which, as a captive, he was ordered to execute and which he now sets out to complete. The comic tone with which the section closes is not funnily, but sadly ironic. Freedom and love alike, for both the tall convict and Harry Wilbourne, are myths.

## Footnotes for Chapter 6

1. Ed. Joseph P. Blotner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (London: The Scolar Press, 1977), p.338. Letter of 1952 to Joan Williams.
2. Ibid, p.106.
3. Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 590;  
Meta Carpenter Wilde and Orin Bernstein, *A Loving Gentleman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), Foreward, p.10.
4. William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1938; this ed. (Vintage Books, no date) p.324. Further references to this edition in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
5. John L. Longley, Jr., "Joe Christmas: The Hero in the Modern World", in *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Robert Penn Warren, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), pp.163-174.
6. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York) 1929; this ed. (London: Picador Classics, 1989), p.68.
7. Cleanth Brooks, *Towards Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp.214-216.
8. *Lion in the Garden*, edited by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp.247-8.
9. Francois Pitavy, "An Ironical Chart for *The Wild Palms*, in *Intertextuality in Faulkner*, edited by Michel Gresset and Noel Polk (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), pp.114-127.



Chapter 7

*The Hamlet*

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More than any other novel of Faulkner's, *The Hamlet* introduces us to a strange and special world.<sup>1</sup>

Faulkner has here made out of fairly barren material - casting himself adrift from the incest and guilts of odd families, the rich associations and dark hints of the aristocratic past - a world which engages the reader in a way that is more than thematic, imageric, characteristic, or simply novelistic. His interest extends to what is going on beyond just the efficient completion of a structural design or the neat embodiment of thematic meaning...There is a feeling of an easy, inexhaustible supply of men, manners, motion, love, deals, an abundance or plenitude of what's going on.<sup>2</sup>

Faulkner began the story upon which *The Hamlet* is based sometime in late 1926 or early 1927.<sup>3</sup> In working up the "Father Abraham" material for publication in 1940 he incorporated four previously published short stories,<sup>4</sup> along with other unpublished and newly written matter. With *The Hamlet* Faulkner broke new Yoknapatawpha ground, at least in the political sense, this novel being his first full length sortie into the Redneck territory to which he would return with *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). Both in narrative matter and technical approach, it marks 'a fresh start in Faulkner's fiction.'<sup>5</sup>

# 1

## The Impressionistic Landscape

Faulkner opens *The Hamlet* with a cinematographic overview that leads gradually and calmly through the geography and history of the area to its social and economic centre. As Conrad does in *Nostromo*, Faulkner closes the focus in stages, and comes to dwell eventually on the chief character, Flem Snopes. There is a sense of the settled land and the peaceful, self-sustaining, community:



Frenchman's Bend was a section of rich river-bottom country lying twenty miles southeast of Jefferson. Hill-cradled and remote, definite yet without boundaries, straddling into two counties and owing allegiance to neither, it had been the original grant and site of a tremendous pre-Civil War plantation.<sup>6</sup>

Physical place and human society are closely intertwined elements of the landscape, for Frenchman's Bend represents the local centre for surrounding subsistence farmers. Its amenities consist of Will Varner's store and cotton gin, the blacksmith's shop, Mrs Littlejohn's boarding house, the church and the school. Will Varner, at sixty in 1904, is the 'chief man of the country' (p.5). As well as owning the store and the cotton gin, he built the school and the church, and he says who is to be the teacher and the preacher. He farms more land than anybody else, holds the mortgages to other land and rents to share-croppers. He is the local 'usurer' and veterinarian (p.5). Flem Snopes is the ambitious member of a family of share-croppers who, as we know from *The Unvanquished* (1938), lived in Yoknapatawpha before Civil War days, during which Ab Snopes made use of whichever side would yield him hard cash. When Flem Snopes leaves Frenchman's Bend, he is heading up-county, socially and financially, to Jefferson. Will Varner's daughter Eula, becomes a pawn in the game of acquisition that Flem Snopes plays. Another character, the sewing machine salesman V.K. Ratliff, by virtue of the itinerant nature of his occupation, is both inside and outside the community. There are no deeply rendered characterisations in *The Hamlet*. Most characters reveal themselves by what they do and say rather than what they think, and they are seen, in general, in reaction and retreat mode rather than in anticipation and advance.

Narrative present time begins with the appearance of Flem Snopes in Frenchman's Bend in April of 1904, and end with his departure in September of 1908.<sup>7</sup> Within these limits, Faulkner marks off time by year, season

and month, but these demarcations are swung backwards and forwards from the fulcrum of V.K. Ratliff's five or six monthly, or yearly, visits to Frenchman's Bend, so that there is a sometimes confusing set of progressions and regressions. Despite the non-sequential time, and the presence of inset stories that are only marginally linked to the main narrative, there are interludes of passionate intensity in *The Hamlet*, and an impressive evenness of pace that reflects both the vulnerability of the inhabitants and Flem's silent, destructive, unstoppable advance.

The main theme of *The Hamlet* concerns greed and its counterpart, gullibility. Although the focus rests principally on Flem Snopes and his encroachments on village livelihoods, his movements are articulated through the reactions of the village characters. These reactions are passive, sometimes naive, occasionally very foolish and often indecisive. A balance of moods sympathetic to the villagers and antipathetic to Flem Snopes emerges. Substantiating these moods and at the same time rationalizing the thinking of the villages, the character of V.K. Ratliff, by virtue of his itinerant occupation and prolonged absences from Frenchman's Bend, serves as a periodic moral evaluator. The rights and wrongs of Will Varner's seigniorship are not at issue in the novel; rather, Will Varner's familiar and accepted practices, which benefit as well as enthrall the community, serve as a foil for the different practices of Flem Snopes. The novel's subsidiary system of values is based on kinds of love and stems, in the narrative, from the bartering of Eula Varner to Flem Snopes. This value system offers several examples of love rather than an integrated exposition of it. If we want to read a structural meaning into Faulkner's perhaps awkward tacking on of the stories of Labove and Houston and Ike Snopes, we could argue that the awkwardness reflects the disjunction of love in the stories. We might also like to consider that in 1938, at the time of writing *The Hamlet*,



Faulkner had been trying, not long before 'to stave off what [he] thought was heartbreak'<sup>8</sup> by means of *The Wild Palms*. Significantly, too, none of the love stories is drawn from pre-published material,<sup>9</sup> so that it looks as if Faulkner has indeed added on the love element, and done it in such a way - awkwardly - as to underline his disjunctive portrayal of love. There is not even disenchantment in the love stories of *The Hamlet*, merely a pragmatic interruption in or failure of their progress.

The novel's vivid pictures comprise Will Varner 'sitting in the home-made chair on the jungle-choked lawn of the Old Frenchman's homesite (p.6), Jody Varner's approach to the Snopeses farmstead (p.19), the progressive descriptions of Flem Snopes, (pp. 19, 22, 51, 57), Ike and the cow in the rain (p.184), the arrival and the sale of the wild ponies (p.271, 285-296), Henry Armstid digging up the old Frenchman Place (p.365). I discuss four aspects of the landscape in the following pages: The Pre-Snopes Landscape of Frenchman's Bend, Flem in the Landscape, Frenchman's Bend in Thrall to Flem and Faulkner's Pictures of Love.

## 2

### Technical Strategies

In this novel, as in the two following novels of the Snopes trilogy, *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959), the title describes the physical and social locale. From the textual layout of *The Hamlet*, the reader learns more than he does from the plain textual arrangements of novels like *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. A turn of the pages reveals four Books, titled, the Books in turn chaptered, sectioned by number and sub-sectioned by spaces. A passage of italic text catches the eye, and

dialect, but there are no signs of lengthy paragraphs or punctuational oddities. The text looks, and in many ways is, ordinary. Yet Faulkner's sectioning of his text into Books implies both containment and continuum, and his titles pair off into the specific and sparsely singular, 'Flem', 'Eula', and the conceivably linked and general, 'The Long Summer', 'The Peasants'. The characters of Flem Snopes and Eula Varner fill up the landscapes in the first two Books, after which Faulkner removes them for a year. During Flem's absence, the community of Frenchman's Bend becomes visible, and focus rests upon figures and events within it.

*The Hamlet* is one of Faulkner's most accessible novels, with an exceptionally easy entry, and a narrator who sets his scene clearly, tells his story humorously, and draws his characters vividly. There is a minor tease, to be sure, in that the story looks as if it is going to be about Jody Varner and Ab Snopes, and is not; rather, the early exchanges between Jody Varner and Ab and Flem Snopes work as a first example of Snopesian predatory tactics. The narrator makes his point about Snopeses and Snopesism by way of calculated comic irony and repeated, understated juxtapositions of Flem Snopes with his victims, but in so far as he does not know what goes on in Flem Snopes's mind, he is not fully omniscient, although neither is he fallible. Narrator, reader, V.K. Ratliff and the people of Frenchman's Bend occupy common perspectival ground in being unable to anticipate Flem's movements; albeit that only the people of Frenchman's Bend do not also possess either the objectivity or enough of the moral drive needed to counter Flem. The mode of narration employed in *The Hamlet* points in the direction of that used for *The Town*, in which the three fallible narrators guess and reason their way through the business of anticipating Flem Snopes.



Faulkner introduces into his strange and special rural landscape, somewhat in the manner of a fairy-tale, an ogre and a princess, Flem Snopes and Eula Varner. In their different ways these two, like the ordinary citizens of Frenchman's Bend, are passive figures: Flem is inscrutable and Eula explicitly lazy. At the same time, they are forces: Flem is unstoppable and Eula is devastating (at least to all the men). In evoking Flem Snopes and Eula Varner, Faulkner augments and simultaneously reduces Flem by stylizing him, and he enlarges the already considerable figure of Eula by likening her to mythological female paragons. He juxtaposes Flem and Eula with the community, and in the gap of non-communication that exists between these two and the community he creates his tensions and his myths, most of which are transmitted through the character of V.K. Ratliff. In some ways, Ratliff resembles Byron Bunch in *Light in August*, but Ratliff is no quiet minder of his own business in a recalcitrant community; rather he is a caring and objective commentator on (and manipulator of) a community whose soil-bound life style renders them vulnerable to Flem Snopes's greed; a kind of, as Cleanth Brooks puts it, 'countrified St George'.<sup>10</sup>

Ratliff's visits to Frenchman's Bend work as a means of building up the particular ambience of Frenchman's Bend and of setting up V.K. Ratliff as chief Snopes watcher, but they operate, too, as a major narrative structure in so far as they mark the stages of Flem's advance on the community. Things happen in Frenchman's Bend when V.K. Ratliff is not there: his being brought up to date and his subsequent commentaries intensify the two complementary perspectives that the reader sees, of the robot-like advance of Flem Snopes and of the impotent, passive relinquishment of their livelihoods by the villagers. Unlike *The Sound and the Fury*, where the overall movement is centripetal, or *The Wild Palms*, where it is elliptical, the movement in *The Hamlet*, is broad fronted and

inexorable, and the forces of 'good' spearheaded by V.K. Ratliff engage in slow retrograde action with the forces of 'evil' in the shape of Flem and his 'grazing' (p.70) activities. V.K. Ratliff notwithstanding, in some ways the mood of the novel can be summed up in one of the lesser Snopeses' chortle: "'By God...you cant beat him'" (p.317).

Faulkner frequently intersperses small descriptions of natural environment with ongoing activities and dialogue. These descriptions function as a kind of commentary and criterion against which man's actions, implicitly, may be measured. Some of these juxtapositions are brief and apparently incidental, but amid often fraught or startling scenes, they are vivid, and they serve to return the reader from his involvement with the community to his objective stance.

### 3

#### Vivid Pictures 1

##### The Pre-Snopes Landscape of Frenchman's Bend

They brought no slaves and no Phyfe and Chippendale highboys; indeed, what they did bring most of them could (and did) carry in their hands...Their descendants...supported their own churches and schools, they married and committed infrequent adulteries and more frequent homicides among themselves and were their own courts judges and executioners. *The Hamlet*, p.4

Faulkner's narrator opens *The Hamlet* rather as Conrad does in *Nostromo*, with a description of the physical land, and a social and historical overview that comes to focus on 'our man' of the pre-Snopes Frenchman's Bend world, Will Varner. The language of these introductory passages is straightforward, clear and lively, so that together with the



narrator's even transition from topography through history to the current (1904) social milieu and then to the figure of Will Varner, the reader gains an immediate sense of Frenchman's Bend as a good land and a settled community; the land that is 'rich' and 'hill-cradled', that is 'without boundaries' and owns 'no allegiance (p.3) is like its people, at once protected, vulnerable and independent. Frenchman's Bend is a 'country', with a 'chief man'. The principal land-mark is a 'tremendous pre-Civil War plantation house', now 'a gutted shell', and owned by the chief man, Will Varner. Once it was a splendid place and the Old Frenchman who built it drove 'behind a slave coach-man and footman in his imported English carriage'.<sup>11</sup> Now it is a source of firewood and its grounds the repository, so it is said, of buried treasure. After the Old Frenchman came

those...in battered wagons and on muleback and even on foot, with flintlock rifles and dogs and children and home-made whiskey stills and Protestant psalm-books, [who] could not even read...

Their descendants still planted cotton in the bottom land and corn along the edge of the hills and in the secret coves in the hills made whiskey of the corn and sold what they did not drink. Federal officers went into the country and vanished. p.4

Resilient people these, and most of them capable of surviving the 1904 to 1908 plague of Snopses, and who, as the reader of *As I Lay Dying* knows, still live in Frenchman's Bend in 1930: Will Varner himself, Armstid, Tull, Bookwright, Quick, McCallum. From one point of view, the society of Frenchman's Bend is presented as anarchical, *federal* officers...vanished, and from another, internally coherent, 'they supported their own churches and schools' (p.4). Frenchman's Bend repudiates one kind of authority, yet, implicitly, conforms to another.

His voice flowing from the land to the figures in it, the narrator comes to dwell on Will Varner. This man is more than a survivor, a winner, and powerful to boot, and the description of the power he holds comes before any evocation of either his personality or his habits:

He was the largest landholder and beat supervisor in one county and Justice of the Peace in the next and election commissioner in both, and hence the fountainhead if not of law at least of advice and suggestion to a countryside which would have repudiated the term constituency if they had ever heard it, which came to him, not in the attitude of *What must I do but What do you think you think you would like for me to do if you was able to make me do it.* He was a farmer, a usurer, a veterinarian: Judge Benbow of Jefferson once said of him that a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box. He owned most of the good land in the country and held mortgages on most of the rest. He owned the store and the cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop...and it was considered, to put it mildly, bad luck for a man of the neighborhood to do his trading or gin his cotton or grind his meal or shoe his stock anywhere else. p.5

The passage describes a monopoly of power, but implicitly, it also offers external perspectives of Will Varner. Will Varner's power is clearly projected as not in dispute; quite the opposite in fact, for Will Varner is a *fountainhead*, not of wisdom, but of an adequate replacement, of *advice and suggestion*. Equally clearly, the exercising of power in a community of the cast of mind of Frenchman's Bend's requires either carrots of diplomacy, or else sticks of retribution. A testimonial of sorts to Will Varner and his activities comes from the nearest actual fountainhead...of law, Judge Benbow of Jefferson, a *milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box*.

But if the picture of power contains ambivalences and even threats, that picture is softened by Will Varner's personal qualities, 'secret shrewd and merry, of a Rabeliesian turn of mind and very probably still sexually lusty' (p.5), and set in a wider perspective by the sheer leisureliness of Will Varner's habits, and by the tone of the narrator:

He was at once active and lazy; he did nothing at all...and spent all his time at it, out of the house and gone before the son had come down to breakfast even, nobody knew where save that he and the old fat white horse which he rode might be seen anywhere within the surrounding ten miles at any time, and at least once every month during the spring and summer and early fall, the old white horse tethered to an adjacent fence post, he would be seen by someone sitting in a home-made chair on the jungle-choked lawn of the Old Frenchman's homesite...Varner would sit there chewing his tobacco or smoking his cob pipe, with a brusque word for passers cheerful enough but inviting no company. pp. 5-6



Clearly, if Will Varner can be, in particular circumstances, a threat, he is also perceived by the whole countryside, whose point of view this is, as a familiar and even comfortable figure, and nobody grudges him his habits. The narrator's portrait of him, a kind of Southern, Dutch genre painting, speaks of a lordly yet homely habitude, but it is also no more than a public portrait of the external man,

since it was only to an itinerant sewing-machine agent named Ratliff - a man less than half his age - that he ever gave a reason [for sitting in the flour barrel chair]: "I like to sit here. 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...I reckon I'll just keep what there is left of it, just to remind me of my one mistake. This is the only thing I ever bought in my life I couldn't sell to nobody". p.6

The glimpse into Will Varner's thoughts is the reader's, but not the general countryside's, and it reveals Will Varner as a comparatively unpretentious man and one capable, in his own eyes, of making mistakes; so that the character becomes, in the reader's eyes, if not necessarily in the countryside's, a more ordinary man. This is an important point, for it places Will Varner among the other inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend, and it sets the scene for his being ripped off by Flem Snopes, along with everybody else. As a preparation for the advent of the Snopeses to Frenchman's Bend, Faulkner's picture of Will Varner works as a moral locus. It links back to the land-hungry old Frenchman's kind of greed, and forward to Flem Snopes's locust-like kind, but also, the picture implies that as the greedy old Frenchman came and went, so also might Flem Snopes. Where Will Varner now sits, Flem Snopes will sit next year. At the same time, by virtue of his ambivalent reputation, Will Varner has links with both the forces of good, represented by V.K. Ratliff, and the forces of evil, represented by Flem Snopes. In the event, the Varner chicaneries, in their known and discernible form, prove vastly easier than the slippery, undiscernible chicaneries of Flem Snopes.

In the man in his landscape portrait of Will Varner, two particular features are drawn in, the ruined building, attached to which is 'the stubborn tale of...money buried somewhere about the place' (p.4), and the attendant figure of V.K. Ratliff. Despite his insignificant introduction, in the passing, as 'an itinerant sewing-machine agent', V.K. Ratliff functions as Will Varner's confidant. Ratliff will emerge not only as confidant, but as the lynchpin around whom the narrative is built. His commonsense and insightfulness run through the whole trilogy. If he has an eye for the fast buck, he also has an eye for human need, yet both he and Will Varner will be outwitted by Flem, and because of Flem, Ratliff will uncharacteristically succumb to the *stubborn tale of...money buried*, and hence to greed. In direct contrast to Flem Snopes, Ratliff wheels and deals fairly, and it is Ratliff, not Flem, who provides home, food and clothing for months on end for Mink Snopes's wife and children. In *The Mansion*, Flem will be directly instrumental in getting Mink's prison sentence extended by twenty years; it will be Ratliff who sees to it that Mink has money when he is released.

The narrator moves on from Will Varner, to Will's son, Jody, whose 'heirship' Flem 'usurp[s]' (p.88), to Ab Snopes and finally to Flem himself. The Frenchman's Bend community, before the advent of the Snopes clan, is presented as generally contented, decent and hardworking, and representative in its own way of Faulkner's sometimes foolish and some-times gullible, ordinary mankind. Land and livelihoods alike are keyed to the farming year. Breaking and planting time, and harvest time are busy times, but the long summers are quiet. Ancient rural lore and Protestant mores co-mingle in a community whose moods and precepts, virtues and vices, are intimately known to itself. Faulkner's narrator also knows

the community intimately, and as he defines the land as much by his unhurried tones as by the content of his description, so he defines the characters as much by their sitting around in various places as by what they say. The lack of intrusion into characters' thoughts indicates not so much that they do not think but that they are part of a way of life that is, from their point of view, intrinsically passive and secure: bound to the seasons all the time, and bound for at least some of the year to Will Varner. The men of the community pass their leisure time at the de facto social centre of the village, the galleries of the Varner store and Mrs Littlejohn's boarding house. After Flem, most of the community including V.K. Ratliff is poorer, Henry Armstid and his family destitute, and Trumbull the blacksmith has been driven away. The fabulous Eula, Frenchman's Bend's 'one blind seed of the Olympean ejaculation' (p.147), as V.K. Ratliff puts it, becomes one more piece of Flem Snopes's property.

Faulkner takes great care to establish pre-Snopes Frenchman's Bend as a place apart, ruled by a kind of benign despot, and conducting its affairs with a haphazard, but generally comfortable and peaceful monotony. Will Varner's sharp practices are known about, put up with and sometimes challenged. They do not seriously harm the community, even if they line Will Varner's pockets, and in many ways they secure both livelihoods and the spirit of harmony. The whole ambience of hard-working decency might well be summed up in the clothing that all wear, 'absolutely clean though faded and patched overalls' (p.9).



## Vivid Pictures 2

## Flem in the Landscape

"That Flem Snopes."

"That's a fact. Wouldn't no other man have done it."

"Couldn't no other man have done it. Anybody might have fooled Henry Armstid. But couldn't nobody but Flem Snopes have fooled Ratliff." p.365

Ab Snopes moves his family into the vicinity of Frenchman's Bend in April of 1904. His history is chequered to say the least of it, as we know from *The Unvanquished*,<sup>12</sup> but his son Flem will surpass him to become 'the local Abraham and the clan he led displayed his traits: cunning, rapacity, utter amorality, plus the seething vigour of a swarm of vermin'.<sup>13</sup> Flem Snopes will live in Frenchman's Bend for four years, (although he will be absent for many months in the final year) during which time he will advance himself by nefarious means and marry Will Varner's beautiful daughter. In 1930, Flem is still in Jefferson, and president of the Sartoris bank, but beautiful Eula is dead, and Flem's putative daughter gone away to New York.<sup>14</sup>

Will Varner practices a benign form of Snopesism, but this works much more for the community than against it. Faulkner's evocation of Flem Snopes has none of the ambience of secure patriarchalism that attaches to Will Varner, or the comfortable monasticism of V.K. Ratliff, or, in the two following volumes of the trilogy, the woolly-minded concern of Gavin Stevens. Flem's character is built up in a series of line drawings and snapshot-like stills, the kind of Dickensian shorthand in which we think only of the parts, never of the whole, so that Flem becomes a 'clip-on bow tie', a predatory beak of a nose, and a 'chewing jaw'. Yet for all Faulkner's stylizing, over the course of the trilogy Flem becomes a

familiar, if never ordinary, figure in the landscape of Frenchman's Bend and Jefferson. In *The Hamlet*, he is a familiar ogre, one to be challenged by those who dare, like Mrs Armstid and the Tulls, and for those who do not dare, a figure to be sniggered at, if also feared. In *The Town*, Flem is still formidable, feared and challenged, but in *The Mansion*, the goals of respectability and an affluent lifestyle achieved at the expense of human relationships, Faulkner almost mellows, not to Snopesism as such, but perhaps to Flem himself. The tale of Flem Snopes is resolved in terms of revenge, but within the text of the final volume, as though to re-absorb Flem into the community of mankind, Faulkner makes him and his cousin Mink the parties to the analogical children's game of 'give-me-lief' in which one child gives the other leave to strike him, in return for which the striker allows himself to be struck.<sup>15</sup> Outwith the text of *The Mansion*, Faulkner's short preface presumes another absorption; one that encompasses the whole saga of greed and rapaciousness, Faulkner's long acquaintance with it, the Flem Snopeses of fiction and reality, and Faulkner himself:

This book is the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925. Since the author likes to believe, hopes that his entire life's work is a part of a living literature, and since "living" is motion, and "motion" is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death, there will be found discrepancies and contradictions in the thirty-four year progress of this particular chronicle; the purpose of this note is simply to notify the reader that the author had already found more discrepancies and contradictions that he hopes the reader will - contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then.

Flem's mannerisms and clothing become the symbols of his movement from no-account poverty to wealthy respectability. At his first appearance, Flem materialises, portrait-like, enframed 'in one of the sashless windows' (p.19). This view is channelled through Jody Varner's sudden awareness of him and underkeyed by Jody's knowledge of the

Snopes family reputation as barn burners. The physical approach to the tumbledown rented farm renders Flem's appearance faintly sinister:

The path (it was neither road nor lane: just two parallel barely discernible tracks where wagon wheels had run, almost obliterated by this year's grass and weeds) went up to the sagging and stepless porch of the perfectly blank house which he now watched with wire-taut wariness, as if he were approaching an ambush. p.19

The description of the environment reflects Jody Varner's *blank* assessment of Flem, but also projects something of Flem himself. Like the tracks in the path, the tracks of Flem's activities are to be barely discernible and like the *perfectly blank house*, Flem's face is utterly unrevealing. His portrait offers no more than 'a face beneath a gray cloth cap, the lower jaw moving steadily and rhythmically with a curious sidewise thrust' (p.19) but headwear of one kind or another, and the chewing jaw become two of the character's identifying marks. There is a curious similarity between Flem's first and last appearances in the trilogy that contributes to the final idea surrounding the character, the material advancement notwithstanding, of physical and moral stasis: in the first Flem scene of the trilogy, Flem is 'a face beneath a gray cloth cap' (p.19); in the last, he is a seated figure 'with his feet propped' and a 'black planter's hat'<sup>16</sup> on his head. Where the change of hat accompanies rise in status, the always-worn, 'tiny machine-made black bow' tie (p.57) symbolizes Flem's unscrupulous dedication to the business of making money, and his perpetually chewing jaws symbolize the predatory activities that Ratliff calls 'grazing' (p.70). While Flem is still grazing, he chews 'a nickel [of tobacco] now and then' (p.23). When Frenchman's Bend and Jefferson are empty of grazing material, Flem, as though hooked on the habit of predation, chews on nothing.

Faulkner renders Flem in the landscape of Frenchman's Bend from one point of focus: always the most prominent figure in the landscape,



always close and nearly always, for one reason and another, startling. Only V.K. Ratliff is capable of stepping back, mentally, from Flem. There are no alternative ways of seeing Flem, but only, in V.K. Ratliff and the reader, differences of perspective. Flem is a threat from start to finish, and the novel's actions and dilemmas are variations on that theme. Faulkner evokes the character in uncomplex ways, through the cumulative snapshot-like pictures of him, through dialogue concerning him and by registering his victims' reactions to the stages of his encroachment. Flem's appearances are sudden, brief and often caricatured:

a thick squat man...with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth...and eyes the color of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk.  
p.51

In this particular incident, of Flem's genie-like appearance in a village where everybody is a familiar figure for the - to the villagers - phenomenal purpose of beginning work in the Varner store where hitherto only Varners worked, the narrator implicitly enhances the villagers' amazement by pushing the caricature further with an extended simile about the nose being stuck on by 'a viciously maniacal humorist', or someone 'who only had time to clap into the center of the face a frantic and desperate warning' (p.52).

Faulkner places Flem in two small but upwardly-moving settings, the collapsing, rented farm and Varner's store, and he completes the first round of appearances with an account of Flem's appearance, all the more sudden for its unexpectedness, in church:

In addition to the gray cloth cap and the gray trousers, he wore not only a clean white shirt but a neck-tie - a tiny machine-made black bow which snapped together at the back with a metal fastener...and from that Sunday morning until the day he died he wore it or one just like it...a viciously depthless cryptically balanced splash like an enigmatic punctuation symbol against the expanse of the white shirt... pp. 57-8

The black bow is the only one in Frenchman's Bend, except for Will Varner's Sunday one. The *cloth cap* that signifies Flem's lowly origins - it gets exchanged for another, 'overlaid with a bright golfer's plaid' for the 'sporting' occasion of the wild pony auction - will be exchanged, fifteen or sixteen years later, for the far more prestigious black felt hat, far more suitable for the vice-president of a bank. The black bow, and later the hat, mark Flem's social advancement, but Faulkner's descriptive additive, the *tiny viciously depthless cryptically balanced splash* points towards the rapacious quality of his business dealing.

The series of snap-shot pictures takes on, with repetition, a high degree of stylization. The effect is to abstract Flem from ordinary, run of the mill humanity, and to underline his sheer unknowability. The pictures delineate the stages of Flem's advancement towards 'the usurpation of an heirship' (p.88) - Jody's - but Faulkner superimposes on the series the image of Flem as a huge animal - 'Flem has grazed up the store and he has grazed up the blacksmith shop and now he is starting in on the school' (p.70). Flem becomes a nebulous shape and force, sinister and grotesque, that fills up the whole landscape. He is like Charlotte's enormous Falstaff and Quixote puppets in *The Wild Palms*, 'filling all available spaces of floor and walls...perverse and disturbing, with startling rapidity'.<sup>17</sup> Flem's rise in status to the equal of Will Varner is caught in the bird's eye view of the runabout buggy with 'bright red wheels and a fringed parasol top' that

swept all day long along back country roads and lanes while Varner and Snopes sat side by side in outrageous paradox above a spurting cloud of light dust, in a speeding aura of constant and invincible excursion. p.89

The buggy, like the store, the blacksmith's shop and the Old Frenchman place, comes to be owned by Flem, Will Varner's need to find a husband for his daughter works to Flem's advantage, and Flem's marriage to Eula

adds another asset to the considerable chain that he amasses in four years. His marriage confirms Flem's social 'arrival' and destroys forever the dreams or hopes of every man in Frenchman's Bend.

To contextualize Snopeses in the landscape of Frenchman's Bend, I look back on them from the early days of their encroachment on Jefferson, from *The Town* and the voice of Charles Mallison:

In six months Snopes had not only eliminated the partner from the restaurant, Snopes himself was out of it, replaced behind the greasy counter...by another Snopes accreted in from Frenchman's Bend into the vacuum behind the first one's advancement by that same sort of osmosis by which, according to Ratliff, they had covered Frenchman's Bend, every Snopes in Frenchman's Bend moving up one step, leaving that last slot at the bottom open for the next Snopes to appear from nowhere and fill.<sup>18</sup>

This, of course, is only half the story, for within the ranks of the Snopeses themselves, Flem operates his own discriminatory tactics: the idiot, Isaac, does not come up from Frenchman's Bend, and nor, it seems, does Lump; both sodomy and the peddling of sodomy being outwith the pale of Flem's concept of 'respectable' Snopesian activities. Mink Snopes does come up from Frenchman's Bend, but at the behest of the law, on a charge of murder, not at a signal from Flem. Mink waits in vain for Flem to come to his rescue, and he waits very much longer to get his revenge. Eck, being overly honest, and courageous to boot, will be discharged, in Jefferson, as unfit for Snopesism, and Eck's son, Wall, with the moral help of his wife and financial help from V.K. Ratliff, will stand off Flem's solicitations to become a successful, independent, liked and respected chain store owner. But I.O. and his sons Montgomery Ward and Clarence, and the sons of the other schoolmaster Snopes (not I.O.: the Snopes who is tarred and feathered out of Frenchman's Bend after the incident of the schoolgirl in the cottonhouse,<sup>19</sup>) Virgil and Byron, flourish by dirty means in Jefferson, along with other, lesser, equally dirty Snopeses. Byron will rob Flem's bank and take a mischievous



revenge on Flem by sending him his four savage, half-Indian children, who Flem sends back. In 1946, at sixty-four years of age, Flem will wait in his mansion of respectability, for nemesis in the form of Mink, the cousin he could have helped, and did not, back in 1908.

### Vivid Pictures 3

#### Frenchman's Bend in Thrall to Flem

"Flem has grazed up the store and he has grazed up the blacksmith shop and now he is starting in on the school. That just leaves Will's house. Of course, after that he will have to fall back on you folks..." p.70

V.K. Ratliff serves as link character for the whole trilogy and as the chief agent of action, as opposed to talk about action, against Snopesism. In Frenchman's Bend, he acts alone, with Mrs Littlejohn and Odum Bookwright as his talking, but not his doing supporters. Within its own arbitrary ways of operation, Frenchman's Bend is decent and hard-working, if also passive and gullible. After Flem's outwitting of Jody Varner, Ratliff remarks to Will Varner, "'There aint but two men I know can risk fooling with them folks'" (p.28), Will Varner, that is, and Ratliff himself. Both are to be outsmarted by Flem at least once, but Ratliff is never to give up trying to counter Snopesism.

Tull and Bookwright bring Ratliff up to date on Flem's activities after Ratliff's year long absence. Throughout the passage discussed below, which is part dialogue and part narration, Ratliff's responses to pieces of Snopes information are accompanied by glimpses of his 'faint quizzical expression' (p.70) and there is an ongoing balancing of past and forthcoming events. Ratliff initiates the conversation about Flem and he

tries to arouse the two men's moral concern, or at least their self-concern. At the same time, Faulkner pin-points the moral point at which both men stick. Flem has, as Ratliff puts it, 'grazed' up most of Will Varner's businesses, and he is lending money to negroes:

"Well well well," he said. "So he's working the top and the bottom both at the same time. At that rate it will be a while yet before he has to fall back on you ordinary white folks in the middle." Bookwright took another huge bite of the pie...Tull began to cut his steak neatly into bites...Ratliff watched them. "Aint none of you folks out there done nothing about it?" he said. p.71

Ratliff prevails upon Bookwright and Tull to agree that Flem's activities 'aint right', but then they withdraw behind the notion of minding their own business. Pushed further by Ratliff, "'I believe I would think of something if I lived here'", Bookwright rounds on him with a remark that at once sidesteps the issue and demonstrates Bookwright's view of Ratliff's inability to outsmart Flem:

"Yes," Bookwright said. He was eating his ham as he had the pie. "And wind up with one of them bow ties in place of your buckboard and team. You'd have room to wear it."

"Sho now," Ratliff said. "Maybe you're right." p.71

Tull and Bookwright are either more interested in their food than in Ratliff's attempts to get them to do something about Flem, or else they do not know what to do about Flem and are unwilling to try. Tull's and Bookwright's moral evasiveness in this scene looks forward to the pony auction where, in circumstances unequivocally wrong, none of the men in the community has the courage to stand up to Flem: Flem takes the only money Mrs Armstid possesses, against her desperate plea to the men to stop her husband buying one of the ponies and in face of the Texan's cancelling of the deal, but, '[they] stood, gravely inattentive, in relaxed attitudes along the fence' (p.294). Ratliff gets the better of Flem, up to a point, when he burns the promissory notes that Flem circulates in the name of his idiot cousin Isaac, but Flem outwits Ratliff over the Old Frenchman Place.

In Jefferson, with Gavin Stevens and Chick Mallison as his allies in Snopes-watching, Ratliff will make fluctuating headway.

Much of Flem's encroachment on the community is marked by speculative dialogue and descriptive narration concerning him. But from time to time, usually at moments of crisis or foolishness or enlightenment, Faulkner juxtaposes aspects of the natural environment with the actions of the character or characters in such a way as to imply a gap between man and nature. For example, early in the novel Flem Snopes waylays Jody Varner after Jody leaves the Snopes's, and blackmails him into giving him (Flem) a job at the Varner store. The reader is shown the mechanics of Flem's blackmail in this instance, but also in this instance, the one being blackmailed is not far behind Flem in crookedness, and he is in the process of being upstaged by Flem. Two sentences describe Jody's homeward ride after the incident:

Two miles further on dusk overtook him, the shortening twilight of late April, in which the blanched dogwoods stood among the darker trees with spread raised palms like praying nuns; there was the evening star and already the whippoorwills. The horse, travelling supperward, was going well in the evening's cool, when Varner pulled it to a stop and held it for a full moment. "Hell fire," he said. "He was standing just exactly where couldn't nobody see him from the house." p.23-4.

This is a commonplace evening scene marked by its tranquillity and beauty, yet more than dusk overtakes Jody and Faulkner's use of one of his favourite symbols of enlightenment, the evening star, underlines Jody's folly. That it takes Jody two miles of riding for recognition to stir in him of the extent of Flem's deviousness marks him as far less shrewd than Flem, and less shrewd, for that matter, than his father and V.K. Ratliff. Much later in the novel, when Flem's secretive wheeling and dealing is known and feared, the spotted horses episode makes a resounding statement about both Flem's rapaciousness and amorality and Frenchman's Bend's gullibility.



In the spotted horses episode, natural landscape functions, obliquely, as an agent of moral perspective, but there is, in addition, in this episode, an imposed quality of mood that derives from the changing light, somewhat like the filters of a camera. The effect is to faintly mysticize the whole in a way that simultaneously softens, heightens, sharpens and distances pain, terror and foolishness. While much of the vivid fast-moving imagery indicates Faulkner's sheer delight in describing motion, the narrator's movement across changing states of light, combined with vivid image clusters, plots the stages of the watchers' reactions to the ponies. The episode comes at the beginning of Book 4, with its significant, Balzacian title of 'The Peasants'. Book 3, 'The Long Summer' has been taken up with stories of strange or unsuccessful love, and Flem has been notable for his absence. Now he is back, among his 'peasants', and surrounded by a flamboyant, intense and dangerous mystery. The episode opens from the vantage point of the gallery:

A little while before sundown the men lounging about the gallery of the store saw, coming up the road from the south, a covered wagon drawn by mules and followed by a considerable string of obviously alive objects which in the levelling sun resembled vari-sized and -coloured tatters torn at random from large billboards - circus posters, say - attached to the rear of the wagon and inherent with its own separate and collective motion, like the tail of a kite. p.271

The sun, shining in the watchers' eyes, masks the nature of - and metaphorically, the significance of - the approaching ponies. Once established as horses, they are described in terms more colourful than dangerous: 'rabbits', 'parrots', 'deer', 'rattlesnakes' and 'doves'. Faulkner's rapid switching of descriptive image clusters mirrors the 'harlequin' colouring of the ponies and serves to enhance the sense of excitement and confusion, but with the fading light, he switches to a less innocuous cluster of images. The ponies become a 'kaleidoscopic maelstrom of long teeth and wild eyes and slashing feet', out of which their Texan keeper

emerges with his shirt torn (p.274). At the same time, the ponies remain distanced from the viewers as much by the fence as by the harmlessness inherent in the simile used, twice, to describe them: 'like dizzy fish in a bowl', 'like hysterical fish' (p.275).

The viewing of the ponies is halted briefly by supertime, but in the interval the moon has risen, and Faulkner's next line of highly wrought images evokes a quite different atmosphere:

a translation from the lapidary-dimensional of day to the treacherous and silver receptivity in which the horses huddled in mazy camouflage, or singly or in pairs rushed, fluid, phantom and unceasing, to huddle again in mirage-like clumps... p.276

Across the natural change in the state of light, Faulkner injects the language of mystic deception, *mazy camouflage*, *phantom*, *mirage-like*, which is re-iterated in the description of the horse that seems 'not to gallop but to flow, bodiless, without dimension'. On the gallery in the dark, it is talking time. In the middle of the conversation that is pursuing a dilatory course of half-truths and speculations about pony-buying, Faulkner suddenly fixes the whole scene from the viewpoint of Ratliff and Quick, 'so that to them the others were in black silhouette against the dreaming lambence of the moonlight' (p.277). He evokes a complex of natural images that sets up resonances utterly alien to and distanced from the business of the day and the conversation on the gallery:

The pear tree across the road opposite was now in full and frosty bloom, the twigs and branches springing not outward from the limbs but standing motionless and perpendicular above the horizontal boughs like the separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman sleeping upon the uttermost floor of the windless and tideless sea. p.227

The effect of the complex is to contrast nature, with all its weird and natural beauty, with the day's weird, vivid, human deceits and foolishnesses. Twenty four hours later, when corruption and foolishness are bringing tragedy and havoc in their train, moonlight and natural landscape

are made to work in several different ways, all of them mysticizing. The moonlight conjures up a demonic world, in the image of the horse as it gallops along Mrs Littlejohn's veranda and soars 'outward, hobgoblin and floating, in the moon' (p.303), and it distils and transforms the cries of men and ponies into a mocking Tennysonian elfland, 'the silver air seemed to be filled with faint, sourceless sounds...sounds faint and thin and earnest and clear as bells' (p.305). The moonlight also calls up the world of medieval romance in the goddess-like and unattainable figure of Eula Varner as she stands in the window - 'she merely stood there, full in the mood the heavy gold hair, the strong faint lift of breasts beneath marble-like fall of garment' (p.306), and lastly, the moonlight triggers off Will Varner's country superstition story of Eula's pre-natal existence, 'Mrs Varner taken and laid every night with the moon on her nekid belly, until it full'd and after. I could lay my ear to her belly and hear Eula kicking and scrounging' (p.307). Will Varner goes on to re-align his picture in terms of an earthier view of conception and sex in general, but his line of images underscores the idea of man in harmony with nature, not opposed to it. The moonlight softens and distances folly and chaos. Flem is far away in the runabout buggy with the bright red wheels, with the Texan, not Will Varner, driving.

Flem's ponies bring injury and disaster to the community. Faulkner draws a pitiable picture of Henry Armstid's 'grey' wife on the day of the sale. Henry mortgages the farm to Flem for one third of the old Frenchman Place, and in the final scene of the book, Henry is found making a public spectacle of himself digging for non-existent silver in the grounds of the old Frenchman Place. Readers and watchers alike see Mrs Armstid

set the [food] pail in the corner of the fence and stand for a time, motionless, the gray garment falling in rigid carven folds to her stained tennis shoes, her hands clasped and rolled into her apron, against her stomach. If she were looking at the man, they could not tell it; if she were looking at anything, they did not know it.



Then she would turn and go back to the wagon (she had feeding and milking to do, as well as the children's supper to get) and mount to the seat and take up the rope reins and turn the wagon and drive away. Then the last of the watchers would depart, leaving Armstid in the middle of his fading slop, spading himself into the waxing twilight with the regularity of a mechanical toy. p.365

Greed and folly merge in the scene, in the victim of both. For Frenchman's Bend, Mrs Armstid represents the way things are, but for the reader, the way things should not be: Faulkner suddenly turns Mrs Armstid into a statue-like figure of Poverty. When she moves, he mechanicalizes the stages of her departure through his use of the word *and*. When she has gone, he turns to the even more mechanical Henry, who eventually falls flat on his face. With the one turned to stone and the other muddled and mad, both are dehumanised. Faulkner's final gesture of the novel makes them residual, inconsequential elements in the landscape of Flem Snopes, who sits in his wagon, on his way to Jefferson and the events of *The Town* and *The Mansion*, watching: 'Snopes turned his head and spat over the wagon wheel. He jerked the reins slightly, "Come up," he said.' The novel that began in even, calm tones and pursued its tale with humour ends on a very sour note.

#### Vivid Pictures 4

#### Faulkner's Landscape of Love

A situation intrinsically and inherently wrong by any economy.  
V.K. Ratliff, p.159

Faulkner's secondary system of values, based on love, is integrated with the primary system based on greed in as much as all the men of Frenchman's Bend lust after Eula and she ends up being bartered off to

Flem Snopes, which according to Ratliff is a 'waste' (p.149). Love forms a rather odd thematic landscape in its own right; as though Faulkner makes a kind of bouquet of aspects of love, and that as a bouquet, it is disappointing because he subverts love in every one of the stories. One wonders, in seeking some kind of perspective, to what extent, or if at all, love in *The Hamlet* works as a coda piece for love in *The Wild Palms*. The publication of the former follows quite closely on the publication of the latter, and Faulkner worked on *The Hamlet* while awaiting for *The Wild Palms* to appear in print. Love is a let-down in *The Hamlet*; not that it is in any way a bitter thing - and in the voice of Ratliff, it is even ironically funny - merely that it is pragmatically sad. In terms of structural coherence the stories seem to be somewhat arbitrarily affixed to the fabric of the narrative. I see that the stories work as a kind of counterpoint, but this does not alter the disappointing bouquet that they make.

The theme of love is secondary to the theme of greed, but Faulkner connects the one to the other through Will Varner and Eula. The Old Frenchman place and what treasure it may or may not hold is the price Will pays to Flem for marrying the pregnant Eula, 'and so one day they clapped her into her Sunday clothes...and took her into town in the surrey and married her to him' (p.147). Eula's unconscious beauty makes of her a fabulous landscape: in school, 'she would transform the very wooden desks and benches themselves into a grove of Venus and fetch every male in the room...springing into embattled rivalry' (p.114); for Ratliff, she should be 'the unscalable sierra, the rosy virginal mother for no man to conquer' (p.159). He thinks of her loveless marriage to Flem Snopes, 'the cold and frog-like victor' as a 'waste, useless squandering' (p.159). All of the love stories, Labove, Jack Houston and his wife, Mink Snopes and his, and Ike and the cow, counterpoint, in different ways, the marriage of

Eula and Flem Snopes. But the story of Ike and the cow, if one sets aside the sodomic aspect as reflecting the minds of the men who watch, takes on its own kind of moral relevance as a poignant and innocent story of ideal love, and perhaps it works as a kind of bitter denial of love between human beings.

In the story of Ike and the Cow, as he does with Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner uses Ike's handicapped innocence to ally him with nature rather than with human society. The alliance, indeed, becomes more of an infusion, to the extent that Ike seems barely separable from nature, and Faulkner's lyrical evocation of nature and the natural landscape stands in vivid support of this particular love story. Nature, where it is used in connection with the other love stories, which is not much, is not lyricized. Devotion, loyalty and sacrifice characterize love in this story, and they set up resonances that are to stand in sharp contrast with V.K. Ratliff's revolting but funny flight of fancy on the 'pornographic' picture of the tins of food that, imagines Ratliff, Flem Snopes would need to arouse him sexually, and in contrast too, to the explicitly pornographic display that Lump Snopes makes out of Ike and his cow in succeeding scenes.

The physical landscape into which Ike and the cow journey emphasizes both Ike's differentness from the rest of humanity and the strangeness of his situation:

They were in the hills now, among pines. Although the afternoon wind had fallen, the shaggy crests still made a constant murmuring sound in the high serene air. the trunks and the massy foliage were the harps and strings of the afternoon. p.179

Faulkner's lyric tone guides the reader into acceptance of this odd scene as one of love: 'they crossed the ridge and descended into shadow, the azure bowl of evening, the windless well of night' (p.179). He creates



a world apart; his switch of tense from descriptive past to continuous present takes the reader into Ike's world. It is a world beyond even the Wordsworthian in the assimilation of the eternal child with nature, 'the sleight hand of May shapes them both' (p.179). In 'The Idiot Boy', Wordsworth goes little farther than marking, through the fond eyes of the boy's mother, his enjoyment of and fascination with nature, but of course, neither in the story of Ike or anywhere else does Faulkner attempt Wordsworth's kind of philosophical infusion.

Ike comes so close to the natural world that the 'taint' of his humanity drops away - 'He and the dog recross the lot together in the negative down-wash cacophonous and loud with birds' (p.181). Even Ike's wondering discovery that 'dawn, light is not decanted onto earth from sky, but is instead from the earth itself suspired' (p.181), does not disturb the fusion of man and nature. Ike's marvelling at the making of the dawn,

the sun...the silent copper roar fires the drenched grass and flings long before him  
his shadow prone for the vain elusive treading p.182

becomes a hymn of and to the dawn. Homer's ox-eyed goddess is very close behind Faulkner's Juno simile in Ike's watching of his own reflection in the cow's eyes. The sense of togetherness is enhanced in their drinking from the spring - they 'interrupt the green reflections and with their own drinking faces break each other's mirroring' (p.183). (We are a far cry from Faulkner's other pair of spring mirrored drinkers, Horace and Popeye, in *Sanctuary*.) In the shower sequence, Ike is like a plant; the rain falls 'in thin brittle strokes through his hair and shirt and against his lifted face' (p.185). Around him the earth is like a 'receptive mare' awaiting 'the rampant crash, the furious brief fecundation which...seeded itself in the flash and glare and noise and fury and then was gone' (p.184). We are reminded of the 'mare earth and stallion sun' image in

*The Wild Palms* that marks the point of the tall convict's greatest contentment and freedom. The rain leaves 'the spent confetti of its carnival to gather and drip, leaf by leaf' (p.185). Faulkner seems to be remarking, through the story, that morality, as well as beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder, and when taken out of the immediate context of the men's salacious view of the spectacle, it improves on any other kind of love in the novel.

If, of the stories, that of Ike and the cow is, in its way, a story of 'pure' love, Houston's is the most mis-fortunate. Up to a point, Houston is like Joe Christmas. Both characters feel impelled by a 'something' into a position from which there is no retreat. In Houston's case, the 'something' is Lucy Pate, from whom he flees and to whom he returns thirteen years later, 'bitted now' (p.214). But where Joe Christmas sees no way of escaping 'the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe' (p.210), Jack Houston may have - 'he never said' - psychologically 'transubstantiat[ed]' (p.215) his 'polymanous and bitless masculinity' (p.214) to the stallion that kills Lucy. The picture of Houston as a figure of grief and loss notwithstanding, there is an offset and twisted symbolism in the stallion, that, in relation to the modest, if implacable Lucy, is aggressive. Except in the period following Estelle's refusal to divorce him and the breakup of his affair with Meta Carpenter, Faulkner is not antagonistic to women in his fiction. He is, however, undoubtedly mystified by them, and I do not altogether agree with the high degree of hostility that Frederick R. Karl, throughout his biography, attributes to Faulkner. (At the same time, I have found the attribution of hostility enlightening and very helpful in a general way, in the writing of this thesis.) Love fails in Houston's story, perhaps because of plain bad luck, but also in a way that makes the female

partner the fateful cause of the failure. The story might be rough on Houston, but it is even rougher on Lucy Pate.

The story of Labove is a technical achievement in its own right, with its superbly integrated steps of story within story within story. From a base of why it was that the fourteen year old Eula did not complete her sixth year in school, 'because the teacher vanished',

neither collect[ing] his term's salary nor remov[ing] his meagre and monklike personal effects from the fireless rented lean-to room in which he had lived for six years. p.102.

Faulkner works back into Labove's history of poverty and effort, and forward to the moment when his fumbling of Eula in the classroom is fought off by her in silent fury, with 'neither fright nor even outrage but merely surprise and annoyance' (p.121). If her only words during the struggle, "'Stop pawing me...you old headless horseman Ichabod Crane'", prove that she has learned something in six years, the prospect of her 'entering the room again tomorrow morning...not even remembering' (p.123) is too much for him. Labove's conception of Eula entertains something of Ratliff's classicism, if none of Ratliff's apparently contented celibacy, along with a great deal of leashed desire. Labove comes to grief on his own obsession with Eula, and Houston through bad luck. There is no love, only a marriage of convenience between Flem Snopes and Eula Varner. Ike's love, however beautiful, is a sad thing, which leaves only Mink, and his love is based on savage sexual fidelity. Faulkner makes a thorough job of subverting love in *The Hamlet*, and the somewhat sour aftertaste, finally, is only partly alleviated by the resilience of the people of Frenchman's Bend defined in the early pages of the novel, and confirmed in their ability to withstand loss and injury caused directly or indirectly by Flem Snopes.



## Footnotes for Chapter 7

1. Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: *The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p.167.
2. Joseph W. Reed, Jr., *Faulkner's Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p.240.
3. Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p.1049.
4. *The Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, edited by Joseph Blotner, first pub. Random House (New York), 1979; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), pps.684-690: 'Fool about a Horse', *Scribner's Magazine*, 100 (Aug. 1938), 80-86; 'Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 204 (27 Feb. 1932), 12-13, 52, 57; 'The Hound', *Harper's*, 163 (Aug. 1931), 266-274; 'Spotted Horses', *Scribner's Magazine*, 84 (June, 1931), 585-97.
5. *Faulkner's Narrative*, p.218.
6. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1940; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.70. Further references to this text in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
7. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, (London and Toronto: AUP, 1988), pp.148-162.
8. *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, edited by Joseph Blotner (London: The Scholar Press, 1974), p. 338.
9. *The Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, pp.152-164; pp.424-434: "Afternoon of a Cow" first published in French, translated by Maurice Coindreau, in *Algiers in Fontaine*, 27-28 (June-July 1943), 66-8; in English, under the name of Ernest V. Trueblood, in *Furioso*, 2 (Summer 1947), 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 17; "The Hound", *Harper's*, 163, (Aug. 1931, 266-74. The love element was incorporated during the re-working of both stories for *The Hamlet*.
10. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: the Yopknatawpha County* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p.174.
11. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1951; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p.32.
12. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1938; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1982), 'Riposte in Tertio', pps. 84-107.

13. *Flags in the Dust* (New York: Vintage, 1974), p.181;  
Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, (London: Chatto and  
Windus, 1974), p.527; *William Faulkner: American Writer*, p. 288.
14. William Faulkner, *The Town*, first pub. Random House (New York),  
1957; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), p.303;  
William Faulkner, *The Mansion*, first pub. Random House (New York),  
1959; this ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), pp. 109-116;  
*The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, pp. 211-2.
15. *The Mansion* p.395.
16. *The Town*, p. 123; *The Mansion*, p.378-9.
17. William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms*, first pub. Random House (New  
York), 1939; this ed. (New York: Vintage Books, [no date]), p.91.
18. *The Town*, pp. 11-12.
19. *The Town*, p.39.

Chapter 8

*Go Down, Moses*

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In *Go Down, Moses*...Faulkner recognises that history (public, cultural or private, familial) cannot be transcended, but that instead it must be encompassed. So that in this novel, not only has he grasped the artistic significance of his heritage as a white Mississippian and of the Negro in his culture, but he also has comprehended what becomes for him a way of making peace with his heritage and with the Negro. <sup>1</sup>

Planning *Go Down, Moses* in 1940, Faulkner thought upon 'a volume, collected short stories, general theme being relationship between white and negro races here'.<sup>2</sup> The stories he proposed to use had already been published,<sup>3</sup> or were about to be,<sup>4</sup> but for the new volume Faulkner indicated that he would 're-write them to an extent; some additional material might invent itself in the process'.<sup>5</sup> Between the re-writing, and the additional material that did indeed invent itself to become Part 1V of "The Bear", part of "The Fire and the Hearth" and a radically reworked "Delta Autumn", the *general theme* for the new novel took in not only the relationship between white and negro races, but also the relationship between man and man beyond the question of race, and the relationship between man and the earth beyond the question of ownership.

So vast a theme defies narrow focus, and in the novel, none is offered. Rather, as Faulkner turns the matter of the stories upon the themes, aspects of theme appear, singly, juxtaposed or contrasted; these expressed in terms of family, inheritance, death, regeneration, time, history, myth; in terms of land possessed or not possessed, the earth shared or unshared; in terms of the land primeval, inviolate, inviolable; the land tamed and worked, invaded and despoiled. These aspects of theme are interposed and worked into the generations of McCaslins, Edmondses and Beauchamp, male, distaff and negro lines of the family. The themes of *Go Down, Moses* make no final statement. They follow the inevitably

linear patterns of time, history and human progress, and the inevitably cyclical patterns of life, death, burial and regeneration. There is inherent paradox.

*Go Down, Moses* is a beautiful and peaceful novel. 'In place of the sense of doom, of tragic inevitabilities, one finds a sense of hopefulness, a promise of salvation.'<sup>6</sup> The novel tells of better choices made, and of a mankind more nearly in charge of himself. This once, Faulkner permits his chief character's life vision to prevail across the whole body of the novel. Faulkner is kind to Ike McCaslin, for Ike is allowed to live to be an old man before the shadow out of the Southern past that is none of his making crosses his threshold in the form of the Edmonds-Beauchamp baby. In another way, the child objectifies an idea almost miraculous to find in existence in the mind of an old white Southern man, if a thousand or two thousand years too early for his liking, of a family of man undivided by race. Even if white McCaslin blood still seeks to pay with money rather than acknowledgement, this child was not conceived by master on the body of his slave daughter, and if old Ike is horrified by the return of a spectre from his past, he nonetheless reaches out and touches for a second the flesh of the woman in whom some of his own blood runs, and to her for the child he gives his silver-bound hunting horn.

## 1

### The Impressionistic Landscape

Physical place in the novel means the McCaslin plantation and the wilderness. Land functions as much more than the location of the action, for a major argument of the novel flows from Isaac McCaslin's belief

that 'the earth was no man's but all men's'.<sup>7</sup> In this sense the plantation, and Southern farming culture as a whole, 'founded upon injustice and erected with ruthless rapacity' (p.285) works as an image of expansion 'breaking down the circular, organic and holistic wilderness', and leaving in its place 'a geometry of possession'.<sup>8</sup> The McCaslin plantation lies seventeen miles (p.64) north east of Jefferson, and Major de Spain's piece of wilderness twenty to the north-west around the Tallahatchie river.<sup>9</sup> To McCaslin ("Cass") Edmonds, the land of the plantation is heritable property to be worked and made yield, and to Major de Spain the wilderness land is a commodity to be bought and sold. For Ike McCaslin the wilderness is a special place. Here, as a boy, he learns to hunt, and from the living, 'breathing' (p.174) wilderness he absorbs values and a cast of consciousness that serve him throughout his life.

Time in the novel is measured by generations of McCaslins, and by the gradual disappearance of the wilderness, a hundred and forty years and more. Sam Fathers's tales of the 'old people', the wilderness Indians, take the reader back to the time before the white settlers first appeared, around 1799.<sup>10</sup> The McCaslin ledgers locate significant periods in McCaslin family history, and the killing of Old Ben in Part 4 of "The Bear" works as a static moment from which changes quickly flow. The stories themselves also relate to specific periods of time, for Faulkner sets out the frame for the active McCaslins in the first two stories, "Was", set in 1859, and "The Fire in the Hearth", in 1941. "The Old People" takes us back to Ike's boyhood in 1867, and "The Bear" to Ike's disinheriting of himself in 1888. While the pace of time in the novel varies with the mood of the particular story, fast and funny in "Was", hasty and overwhelming in "Delta Autumn", in his descriptions of the wilderness in "The Old People" and "The Bear", Faulkner infuses into these



scenes a profound and haunting sense of living timelessness. Ike McCaslin himself, as an old man, sums up the action of time and man on the wilderness:

At first there had been only the old towns along the River and the old towns along the hills, from each of which the planters with their gangs of slaves and then of hired laborers had wrested from the impenetrable jungle of water-standing cane and cypress, gum and holly and oak and ash, cotton patches which as the years passed became fields and then plantations. The paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them and along the rivers Tallahatchie and Sunflower which joined and became the Yazoo, the River of the Dead of the Choctaws - the thick, slow, black, unsunned streams almost without current, which once each year ceased to flow at all and then reversed, spreading, drowning the rich land and subsiding again, leaving it still richer.

Most of that was gone now. Now a man drove two hundred miles from Jefferson before he found wilderness...Now the land lay open from the cradling hills on the East to the rampart of the levee on the West, standing horseman-tall with cotton for the world's looms...the land in which neon flashed past them from the little countless towns and countless shining this-year's automobiles sped past them on the broad plumb-ruled highways.

p.324

In terms of society in the impressionistic landscape, Faulkner creates two main social groups, the extended McCaslin family of male McCaslins, distaff Edmondses and negro Beauchamps, and the spiritual wilderness family of the 'old people', Sam Fathers, and Ike McCaslin. A third society, the hunters, connects the other two. Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin arrived in Yoknapatawpha with his band of slaves in the year 1813, acquired land from the Indians<sup>11</sup> and turned it into a cotton plantation. On his death in 1837 the land passes to his twin sons, Theophilus ("Uncle Buck") and Amodeus (Uncle Buddy), and on their death in 1869 to two year old Isaac. During the years of Ike's minority, McCaslin ("Cass") Edmonds manages the plantation. At twenty-one, Ike refuses to accede, and relinquishes in favour of Cass. Thus the land passes to the distaff side of the family, through Cass to Zack to Carothers ("Roth"). The negro line of the family derives from old Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin's abuse of his female slaves. The existence of a 'thousand dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave-

girl' (p.257) together with enigmatic information in the ledgers reveals enough to allow Ike, at sixteen, to deduce the facts:

*June 21th 1833 Drownd herself*

*23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drowning him self...*

*Aug 13th 1833 Drownd herself p.256*

Eunice drowns herself on Christmas Day, 1832, six months before the birth of a son, Tomey's Turl of "Was", to her unmarried daughter, Tomasina. The child is white, and his father also Tomasina's father. From the 'white half-McCaslin' (p.6), in time, comes Lucas of "The Fire and the Hearth", the proud, intractable man, in Roth Edmonds's eyes 'more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together' (p.114), and in Lucas's own eyes far superior to the Edmondses, who are 'McCaslin only by the distaff' (p.44). The relationship between Lucas Beauchamp, the negro McCaslin, and the Edmondses, and between Ike McCaslin and Cass Edmonds create two central dramatic thrusts, while that between Ike McCaslin and Sam Fathers in the world of the wilderness creates another. In the broad term, the McCaslins constitute a Faulknerian version of Southern plantation society up to the end of the Depression years. Where Faulkner gives his particular evocation of the Ante-bellum period in "Was", he concentrates on the social economics of the late nineteenth century plantation system in Part 4 of "The Bear", touches on the Southern backlash against the negro during Reconstruction in the episode of Ike's search for Fonsiba the same section (p. 265), and focuses on contemporary society in "Delta Autumn" and "Go Down, Moses".

The main action of *Go Down, Moses* concerns events in the McCaslin family between 1833 and 1941. I say 1833 because this is the earliest recorded year referred to, and the notices given in the plantation ledgers form the root cause of Ike's refusal to take on what he considers to be a tainted inheritance.

Faulkner's value systems are extensive and profound elements of the impressionistic landscape. There is Ike McCaslin's idealistic concept of land tenure,

He made the earth...and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and...to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread, p.246

and the idea of the wilderness as a kind of deity capable of transmitting through teachers like Sam Fathers a pantheistic view of mankind in which spiritual regeneration and spiritual inheritance parallel nature's capacity for renewal. Even the practical Cass Edmonds, 'with one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank' (p.240) possesses a sense of the spiritual wilderness (p.179). Above all, the idea of family, and family bonding, predominates. The burden of guilt of the Southern past focused in Ike McCaslin's renunciation of his inheritance runs in tandem with Cass Edmonds's felt responsibility to sustain the economic viability of the plantation. On the sidelines, Lucas Beauchamp, with all the moral ascendancy of the wronged, and deprived by his colour of the responsibility, makes the comic, awkward utmost of his McCaslin blood. Faulkner links the world of the spirit and the world of the family in the one story not strictly about McCaslins, "Pantaloons in Black", for as Rider lives on McCaslin land and

built a fire on the hearth on [his] wedding night as the tale told how Uncle Lucas Beauchamp, Edmonds' oldest tenant, had done on his forty-five years ago and which had burned ever since, p.134

so when Mannie dies her spirit manifests itself to him, and he seeks her in death. Rider's plight is generically, if not biologically, linked, and his tragic loss of Mannie counterpoints Lucas's wilful and half-solicited abrogation of his wife Mollie. On another level, the story stands aside, like a medieval figure of death, as a kind of warning or reminder that



life is family, and family bonds are bonds to be neither broken or ignored.

The movement in *Go Down, Moses* is affirmative, diametrically opposed in visionary range and psychological structure to, for example, *The Sound and the Fury*. This once, Faulkner pitches his expectancies above rather than below the mean on a scale of human values and aspirations. There is outward and upward movement in *The Wild Palms*, it is true, but Faulkner savages it, and in any case, Harry's and Charlotte's escape from convention in search of love deprives her children of their mother and Harry of his medical career, both serious prior commitments. Ike McCaslin's choosing is of a different order, despite what Lucas Beauchamp thinks, 'turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land which was rightfully his' (p.39), and despite even Faulkner's own much later view:

I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people.<sup>12</sup>

In a way that harms nobody, Ike is off-loading, and by off-loading attempting to cry, 'This is enough' (p.271) to a whole heritage of taint. He is as the entrant to a religious order, who may not come in unless unencumbered by responsibilities in the secular world. There is humanity in *Go Down, Moses*, and warmth and pity, and terror, but all of these things are contained by love rather than by corruptions or hatred or any of the negative concepts that govern most of Faulkner's other novels, and they are articulated in the narrative action, quite literally, in the family. All of the stories deal with race relations, as Faulkner intended. Sequentially and cumulatively, they illustrate one man's effort to make up for the wrongs and injustices inflicted on the negro branch of the family by his white forebears. Faulkner encloses the body of the novel with two

portraits of the old man, Isaac McCaslin, and the final story "Go Down, Moses" functions as a quiet coda for the themes of race, family and possession. Faulkner both applauds and criticises his South in this novel, but in his dedication of the novel he offers a profound gesture to individual human worth:

To Mammy

CAROLINE BARR

Mississippi

[1840-1940]

Who was born in slavery and who  
gave to my family a fidelity without  
stint or calculation of recompense  
and to my childhood an immeasurable  
devotion and love

For the reason that this novel contains very many vivid pictures and many more possible radiating centres and linkages than can be explicated here, only those that follow most appropriately from the impressionistic landscape are listed: the 'portrait' of Ike McCaslin on the opening page; the furore in Uncle Buck's and Uncle Buddy's kitchen (pp.4-5); Lucas receiving an 'admonitory pat' (p.38), and Roth's visit to Lucas's cabin (p.115); Henry's riposte to Roth (p.110); Sam's early talks to Ike (p.164), Ike's sense of the wilderness (pp.169, 187, 185, 198-200, 249) and the 'statuary' scene (p.231); the commissary scene (pp.243-301); the gift of the hunting horn in "Delta Autumn" (p.345), and Miss Worsham's, "It's our grief", in "Go Down, Moses" (p.363). I look at three aspects of the landscape, McCaslins in the Landscape, Ike McCaslin: The Wilderness and the Boy, and Ike McCaslin: The Man and the Land.

## Technical Strategies

In so far as the reader constructs his landscape from the external structure, layer by layer, *Go Down, Moses* resembles *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Wild Palms*. But where in *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader must also construe his landscape layer by layer, in *Go Down, Moses*, more in the manner of *The Wild Palms*, he casts back and forth, discovering such linkages of motif and theme as gradually bind the stories into a complete novelistic whole. The finished picture is dramatically satisfying, and aesthetically pleasing. This sense of a pleasing picture derives from Faulkner's general tonal treatment of his subject matter, which differs greatly from *The Wild Palms*, from his obvious enjoyment in describing the wilderness, from the stylistic accessibility of the first two stories, and because quite simply, the reader is not made to work excruciatingly hard in order to come to grips with the narrative structure as he must do with *The Sound and the Fury*, nor is he at the mercy of a manipulative narrator as he is in *Light in August*. In *Go Down, Moses* the reader is as nearly wooed as Faulkner ever comes to wooing his reader.

Faulkner adopts a new technical device for the opening of the novel, that of making the reader see the landscape by looking through the portrait on the opening page. In a similar way, to jump ahead a little, in *The Reivers*, if the reader wants to find out what it is that 'Grandfather said', he must listen to the voice of young Lucius 111. The reader views the landscape of both these novels from a similar perspectival stance, which in the case of *The Reivers* is at a communicable distance from an intermediate figure in a frontal plane separated from the main landscape. The great strength of the young 'character' without a part in *The Reivers* is his clear, unhesitating, articulate voice: the



great strength of the portrait at the beginning of *Go Down, Moses* is its mute, poignant, idealistic transparency. Because of the total lack of any distinguishing accoutrements, clothes, possessions - 'in all his life [Isaac] had owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time' (p.3) - what the narrator describes is a mind or a soul rather than a face or a figure. The reader looks through Isaac McCaslin, yet somehow not with his eyes; Ike is not posed half-turned to the landscape as though inviting us to look but rather, he seems to be looking straight out at us. Through the transparent Ike, the reader looks, in the first instance, straight into a Southern landscape of 1859.

Once within the landscape of *Go Down, Moses*, the reader follows the action from a generally consistent focal distance and from a generally consistent perspective stance; the sudden and radical shifts of focal distance required of him in *The Sound and the Fury* are not required here, and not required either are the perspectival leaps from chapter narrator to chapter narrator in, for example *The Town* and *The Mansion*. Admittedly, the patterns of metaphor, motif and intertext are complex in *Go Down, Moses*, but they lead into value systems that are not, of themselves, complex. From the technical point of view, reading the novel is a relatively relaxing exercise, and the reader comes from it understanding that he has been shown a landscape of a time and a place, evoked with love.

The narrative structure in *Go Down, Moses* is piecemeal and jig-saw puzzle-like. Yet patterns emerge. The portraits of old Ike McCaslin in the first and sixth stories form a frame for the matter of the second, third, fourth and fifth stories, and the seventh becomes a coda piece, Or, on a base of Ike McCaslin as blood patriarch, an apparently random

pattern of family linkages runs through to the final story, where extended yet still strong blood bonds come together; bonds between white and black, male and female, old and young, living and dead. Yet another narrative structure emerges from Faulkner's presentation of the land itself, from a hundred and fifty years (and more, obviously, outwith the narrative) of the land's active and passive engagement with time and nature, and the white man. A concatenating movement develops through the seven independent stories, in which themes and theme-bearing motifs are taken up, developed, pivoted, overtaken or left behind. Such a movement serves to draw the reader towards an understanding of the multi-faceted and densely wrought patterns that, as the novel progresses, come to impose unity and meaning upon it. The massive physical landscape of the wilderness functions as a matrix for the two moral cores of spiritual man and social man that meet in Ike McCaslin. Although the burden of the Southern past is thematically crucial, this is not allowed to overmaster human action and human decision.

Hunting and gambling in one form or another, rituals homely and courtly, and images of kinds of freedom and kinds of bondage run through all of the stories, and light is also important. Faulkner uses starlight as Dante does, as a symbol of enlightenment, while the technique used in *The Sound and the Fury* in the 'two faces' allegory, of revealing human action in sharp light against a dark background, appears in the gambling scene in "Was" and the commissary scene in "The Bear". The peculiar quality of natural light in the wilderness serves to enhance the sense of the supernatural, and a powerful element of the visionary that is part of the cyclical, regeneration movement, is present in the characters of Sam Fathers, Rider and Ike McCaslin. The bear, as the predominating

figure of the wilderness landscape, serves as focal point, not only for the narrative movement, but for all the strands of morality that concern Ike McCaslin. Faulkner often uses Christian structures for ironic purposes, but in *Go Down, Moses* Christian motifs impinge directly and supportively on the character of Ike McCaslin. In a novel where rituals play a significant part, the Christian story thickens the thematic fabric of the novel. Finally, the omnipresent land is far more than motif or image. On the one hand it is a force invested with tutorial, admonitory and godlike powers, and on the other, a part of nature capable of being bought, sold, worked and destroyed by man.

## 3

## Vivid Pictures 1

## McCaslins in the Landscape

A more useful, though more prosaic, title would be *The McCaslins*, for the book has to do with the varying fortunes of that family.

Cleanth Brooks<sup>13</sup>

Old Carothers McCaslin leaves his mark on the landscape in the form of a fine plantation, twin sons, a bastard negro son and a set of plantation ledgers which through the generations of McCaslins reveal the family's economic and social history, and in terms of the novel's themes show 'rituals and motifs of possession being transformed into rituals and



motifs of family'.<sup>14\*</sup>

Beyond the enigmatic 'portrait' of Old Carothers's grandson Isaac on the opening page of the novel, the reader looks on to a Southern landscape of 1859. We see the twin sons Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy at home in a muddle of dogs and a pet fox. The pace is fast and the tone funny:

the fox and the dogs came out of the kitchen...into the dogs' room...into...Uncle Buck's room...into Uncle Buddy's room...into the kitchen again and this time it sounded like the whole kitchen chimney had come down and Uncle Buddy bellowing like a steamboat blowing. pp. 4-5.

Clearly, dogs and fox habitually create mayhem in the McCaslin household, and the McCaslins shout and gesticulate and put up with it. It appears to be a kind of ritual; periodically the fox runs and the dogs chase after it. By means of the tone adopted towards one kind of ritual hunt, Faulkner sets the stance he wants the reader to adopt, the different contexts notwithstanding, to two others: the slave Tomey's Turl has 'run again' and Tomey's Turl must be chased; but also, Tomey's Turl must be caught 'before he gets there' (p.5). *There* means the Beauchamp plantation where lives, as well as the Tennie to whom Tomey's Turl periodically runs, Miss Sophonsiba Beauchamp. She conducts a chase ritual all of her own, in which Uncle Buck becomes the hunted, she the hunter.

Faulkner resolves the two chases in the McCaslins' favour through a hand of poker and the not disinterested dealing of Tomey's Turl, after which Buck, Buddy, Tomey's Turl, Tennie and nine year old Cass all go home together. Much later in the novel, in "The Bear", the reader picks up incidental information that leads back to "Was": that soon after this

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\* Dirk Kuyk's systematic close reading of *Go Down, Moses* offers a much more detailed analysis of the McCaslin ledgers and the ramifications of these in terms of possessing and sharing than I have attempted here.

particular chase, Miss Sophonsiba succeeds in catching Uncle Buck, and from their union Ike is born in 1867. The poker game serves as the means of resolving the story, but it also introduces, in a muted way, an aspect of the possession theme, greed. Hubert Beauchamp's willingness to gamble slave and sister alike against money and land points forward to later scenes in the novel in which greed is overtly demonstrated: in "The Fire and the Hearth", Lucas Beauchamp finds himself willing to sacrifice wife and home - the composite fire and hearth - to money fever, and in "The Bear", the 'silver cup filled with gold pieces' (p.287) that Hubert Beauchamp wills to his nephew Ike has become when opened 'a tin coffee-pot...a handful of copper coins...and a collection of minutely-folded scraps of paper' (p.292). In the event, the changed and ravaged silver cup that symbolizes Hubert's greed and moral decline symbolizes, for Ike, another soured inheritance.

"Was" is a landscape of the Ante-bellum South, Faulkner version. It presents a romanticized picture in the tradition of those late nineteenth century Southern writers like James Lane Allan and Thomas Nelson Page, who heard about the old South rather than experienced it, but it is a picture richly panoplied in comic irony: Miss Sophonsiba's insistence on naming the plantation 'Warwick after the place in England that she said...Hubert was probably the true earl of' (p.5), her coy double talk about Buck as 'a bee sipping from flower to flower' (p.11), and the chivalric symbol of the lady's favour presented to the knight in the form of 'the piece of red ribbon that had been on...[her] neck' (p.15). The rituals are further undercut by the point of view, which is that of nine year old Cass: 'earrings and beads clashing and jingling...the perfume...like the earrings and beads sprayed it out each time they moved' (pp.10-11). Faulkner uses the fact of the existence of slavery to highlight the different responses to it of the McCaslins and Hubert Beauchamp. Hubert's slaves are a

possession, so many 'head...[to be added] to what he would give Miss Sophonsiba when she married' (p.6). Buck's and Buddy's are more of a clutter, so many...that they could hardly walk around on their own land for them' (p.5). Buck and Buddy have even 'moved all the niggers into the big house which...[their father] had not had time to finish' (p.6), for what reason we are not told, although by implication and juxtaposition we are left free to assume (quite wrongly) that the sheer number of McCaslin slaves has something to do with it. The relationship between slaves and masters on the McCaslin plantation is presented as casual, caring, and even roughly affectionate; although, at the same time, miscegenation is implied in Tomey's Turl, the 'damn white half-McCaslin' (p.6). The reader does not find out until he reaches Part IV of "The Bear" that Buck and Buddy set about freeing their slaves as soon as their father died in 1837 (p.254), nor does he learn of the 'sort of folk-tale' that has grown up, 'of the countryside all night long full of skulking McCaslin slaves dodging the moonlit roads and the Patrol-riders to visit other plantations' (p.251), nor that the so many slaves that Buck and Buddy mutter about in 1859 amount to Roskus and Fribby and their family who 'dont want to leave' (p.254).

Following the Ante-bellum landscape of "Was", Faulkner evokes a contemporaneous (1941) picture of the McCaslins. The land is still McCaslin family land in "The Fire and the Hearth", but Isaac whose plantation it should have been lives quietly in Jefferson sharing his 'cheap frame bungalow' with 'his deceased wife's sister and her children' (p.4), and Edmondses now own the plantation. Figuring largely in this landscape is sixty-seven years old Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp, negro grandson of Old Carothers and youngest son of the 'damn white half-McCaslin' runaway slave, Tomey's Turl, and the besought Tennie. The point of view is mainly with Lucas in this story, although from time to time,



Faulkner re-arranges the perspective, and the reader sees Lucas Beauchamp as Carothers (Roth) Edmonds sees him. In "The Fire and the Hearth" Faulkner brings the theme of possession into full focus in the form of lust for money, he describes the bonds that exist between the Edmondses and the Beauchamps, and in the powerful role allotted to it, he introduces the idea of the earth as a living force.

Lucas buries his illicit still in the Indian burial mound and the earth collapses on him:

*The entire overhang sloughed. It drummed on the hollow kettle, covering it and the worm, and boiled about his feet...hurling clods and dirt at him, striking him a final blow squarely in the face with something larger than a clod - a blow not so much vicious as merely heavy-handed, a sort of final admonitory pat from the spirit of darkness and solitude, the old earth, perhaps the old ancestors themselves. p.38*

As Lucas uses the earth for a criminal purpose, so he is warned, as it were, by the earth itself. He desecrates the burial ground, and perhaps he disturbs the spirits of the dead. The overhanging mound of earth, like a god making retributive mischief in the affairs of man, presents him with the single gold coin that fills Lucas with lust for more. The imagery in this scene forms a thematic nucleus that points towards later events that expand in various ways the relation between man and the earth. The passage links the earth to burial, and there is a muted reference to the cyclical pattern of regeneration and to the spirit world sometimes accessible to man, as it is to Rider in "Pantaloons in Black", and to Sam Fathers and the young Ike, in the visionary buck that Sam greets, "'Oleh, chief" (p.177). The gold coin links the earth to money, and the idea of buying and selling. As the earth simultaneously rejects the money and seems to punish Lucas, it teaches him, eventually, to value home and hearth above money. The coin works as a symbol of man's ownership of the land, and the medium through which the wilderness is sold and destroyed. It takes us back to the portrait of Ike McCaslin, who 'owned no property

and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were' (p.4), and it prefigures Lucas's orgy of digging for money with the divining machine. (The passage recalls the scene in *The Hamlet*, where Henry Armstid goes quite mad digging for non-existent silver coins.) Again, the idea of the earth as parent and teacher looks forward to "The Old People" and "The Bear", and the evocation of the wilderness as parent, teacher and deity, with Old Ben as its incarnation. (We think too, of the tall convict and the returning floodwaters in the same juxtaposition in "Old Man".) Finally, the idea of the earth of the burial ground as a place apart anticipates Major de Spain's reserving out of the sale of the wilderness the burial places of Sam Fathers and Lion.

As the earth of the Indian burial mound and the coin deposited in Lucas's hand begin to open up perspectives on to the theme of possession, so the fire in the hearth of Lucas's home opens up perspectives on to the theme of family:

It was full dark when he tied the mare to Lucas' fence...Lucas was waiting, standing in the door with his hat on, in silhouette against the firelight on the hearth. The old woman...sat...her tiny gnarled hands immobile again on the white apron, the shrunken and tragic mask touched here and there into highlight by the fire...Lucas drew up a chair for him. But Lucas did not sit down. He went and stood at the other side of the hearth, the firelight touching him too - the broad sweep of the hand-made beaver hat which Edmonds' grandfather had given him fifty years ago, the faintly Syriac features, the heavy gold watch-chain looped across the unbuttoned vest. 'Now what's all this?' Edmonds said. p.115.

Like the burial mound scene, this one, projected through Roth's eyes, states Faulkner's thematic material and pre-figures his expansions upon it. The powerful figure of Lucas *in silhouette, with the firelight touching him too* crystallizes and objectifies those perceptions that Roth has of Lucas, from which, in the narrative, the reader has just come: of Lucas as McCaslin of male descent against Roth's female descent, and the embodiment of independence, a kind of 'vessel, durable, ancestry-less,

nonconductive' (p.101), as 'the black man of whom he saw as much and even more than of his own father' (p.107), and a constant source of trouble,

who did not even bother to remember to call him mister, who called him Mr Edmonds and Mister Carothers or Carothers or Roth or Son or spoke to him in a group of younger negroes, lumping them all together as "you boys", p.113

and finally, from the passage immediately before the silhouette image in the text, Roth's recognition of Lucas as 'more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together' (p.114). If Lucas looms large in Roth's psychological landscape, however, Roth in Lucas's represents merely an Edmonds to be manipulated, 'like dropping the nickel into the slot machine and pulling the lever' (p.36).

The old woman by the fire, with the face like a *shrunk and tragic mask* is Mollie Beauchamp, the long-suffering wife of Lucas, and mother figure to Roth. To Roth, the fireside scene recalls his shameful childhood rejection of Mollie's son. The simplicity and clarity of the language betrays the continuing vividness of Roth's uncomfortable memories, and also articulates Henry's quiet moral victory:

It was too late...There was just one chair, one plate, his glass of milk beside it, the platter heaped with untouched chicken...Henry was turning towards the door to go out. "Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?" he cried. Henry paused, turning his head a little to speak in the voice slow and without heat: "I aint shamed of nobody," he said peacefully. "Not even me". p.110

Mollie's *tiny gnarled hands* touch the chords of Roth's memory, for she

had been the only mother he, Edmonds, ever knew, who had raised him...surrounded him with care for his physical body and for his spirit too...who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in the world for him. p.113-4

Roth and Lucas, equal before Mollie in the firelight, defer to her in their separate acts of giving to her, as a kind of libation, candy that her toothless gums can suck. Faulkner's language takes on paeanic



cadences in the 'Mollie' passage of Roth's memories, reminiscent of the tribute to Mammie Callie, Caroline Barr. As the central, mother figure Mollie is linked to the fire by her constancy and to the earth by her role as life giver.

A further expansion from the fire and the hearth scene derives from Lucas's position, *standing*. What is an implicit assertion of authority here looks back to the violent asserting of it in the duel with Zack Edmonds, Roth's father, about Mollie, over Zack's bed. The duel scene establishes two ideas, the one superimposed upon the other; of the near brotherhood of the white and negro cousins, 'they had fished and hunted together...they had eaten at the same table in the white boy's kitchen and in the cabin of the negro's mother' (p.54), and of Lucas's suspicion of Zack's sexual abuse of Mollie. The bed across which they struggle symbolizes both their common ancestry and Lucas's suspicion. The scene turns ultimately, however, not so much upon Mollie's status as Lucas's wife, as on Lucas's racial status and his disadvantage therefore, marriage or no marriage, in any argument over a woman with a white man. As so often, Faulkner pushes beyond the immediate premise, for Lucas's words go beyond race, to human instinct:

How to God...can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife? And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he wont?' p.58

If this argument still falls somewhat short from the feminine point of view, Lucas and Zack resolve a moral question of their day, that in the day of their mutual progenitor, Old Carothers McCaslin, would not have crossed that man's mind.

These family scenes, flowing backwards in the memories of characters, serve to enrich the themes of family and possession, and to enhance the

moral landscape that Faulkner is carefully constructing. In the third story, "Pantaloone in Black", he pivots the theme of family so that family warmth, and quarrels and ultimate unity are revealed by absence and loss, and he brings into focus the idea of spiritual family, of life-in-death and death-in-life. The association of the earth of the Indian mound with death at the beginning of "The Fire and the Hearth" becomes a factual association in "Pantaloone in Black", and a number of contrasts between Rider and Mannie, and Lucas and Mollie is set up. Rider spades soil viciously over Mannie's coffin as though punishing the receiving earth as the giving earth punished Lucas. The fire in Lucas Beauchamp's hearth has burned for the forty-five years of his married life, but the fire in Rider's burns for six months, when Mannie's death extinguishes it. The loss that Lucas was willing to conceive, of Mollie, does not come to pass, but the loss inconceivable to Rider, of Mannie, overtakes him. Mollie Beauchamp's face seems more dead than alive, a 'shrunk and tragic mask' (p.115). Mannie is dead, but 'wawkin' yit' (p.132). She appears in the half-world of 'the dead who either will not or cannot quit the earth' (p.132). The idea of regeneration that has been touched upon seems to be halted before it has come full circle, as though to dwell upon the arbitrariness of the death that has taken Mannie and not Mollie, and upon the arbitrariness of the earth that gives a gold coin to Lucas and receives Mannie into it. In the overall landscape of the novel, the earth itself has now fully assumed its position as giver and taker, as arbiter and monitor.

Beyond the transparent 'face' of Ike McCaslin, the reader has been shown three pictures of family, linked to each other in different ways; McCaslins in slave times, McCaslins in modern times, and a family who are not McCaslins sundered and re-united in death. Ike comes into full

focus in the following three stories, as boy, young man and old man. Cass Edmonds is shown as the surrogate parent of Ike's minority years, as plantation manager in the same years, and as the relative to whom Ike relinquishes the inheritance. Cass is thirty-seven in 1888 when he becomes owner of the McCaslin lands, with almost twenty years experience of running the plantation behind him. Faulkner's under-drawing of this character masks the fairly obvious fact that he is far more suitably cut out for the job than is the idealistic Ike. With 'one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank' (p.191), his commitment is to the tamed land. Nevertheless, Cass is also sensitive to the great cycle of regeneration embodied in the earth, and understanding of Sam Fathers's need to return to the wilderness to live.

A good part of the history of the McCaslins involves trying to right the wrongs of the past. The episode of Ike's search for Fonsiba exemplifies his sense of responsibility towards those who he - and the generations of Edmondses in their various ways - regards as part of the extended family. As Buck and Buddy refuse to live in Old Carothers's pretentious half-finished mansion, they find ways of getting round the slavery laws to the benefit of their negroes, and they triple Old Carothers's thousand dollar legacy to Tomey's Turl, which Turl never claimed. On Lucas's marriage, Cass Edmonds 'built a house for them and allotted Lucas a specific acreage to be farmed as he saw fit for as long as he lived or remained on the place' (p.106). Ike tries to distribute legacy money to Turl's children as they each become twenty-one. He cannot find James, whose grand-daughter comes to Ike's tent in the wilderness in 1941 with her and Roth Edmonds's baby, and he has no difficulty with Lucas because Lucas comes and demands his share, but he finds Fonsiba



somewhere in Arkansas in 'a single log edifice with a clay chimney which seemed in process of being flattened by the rain into a nameless and valueless rubble of dissolution' (p.265). The language of Ike's view of her reflects his pity and concern,

She could have retreated no further: only the tremendous ink-colored eyes in the narrow, thin, too thin coffee-colored face watching him without alarm, without recognition, without hope, p.268

but her response to his "Fonsiba...Fonsiba. Are you all right?" carries both poignant irony and McCaslin obduracy, "I'm free." The landscape of destitution represented by Fonsiba's plight serves as another structural pivot, one that swings away from the efforts of the McCaslins to make restitution, and comes to rest on the desperately untenable position of the negroes who seek what Fonsiba's husband calls 'Canaan' in the North. This scene forms one perspective of the central pivot on kinds of home and kinds of Canaans in the final story of the book, "Go Down, Moses".

With the sixth story of the novel, "Delta Autumn", Faulkner uses a long-range pivot on the life and changing times of Ike McCaslin. We see the old man 'ISAAC McCASLIN, 'Uncle Ike' of the opening lines in the flesh. The boy 'taught the woods' (p.164) by Sam Fathers is now the 'Uncle Ike' who shoots 'almost as well as he ever had', and kills 'almost as much of the game he [sees] as ever he killed' (p.320). In the old days, game was plentiful, now it is scarce. The wilderness that was thirty miles from Jefferson is now two hundred. The transport that was wagon is now fast car. But an Edmonds, Roth, is there, and the sons or grandsons of the old hunters. Rain pervades the landscape of this story, but rain rather than sunshine has always accompanied Ike McCaslin in the wilderness, and now it comes to symbolize a kind of regenerative annealing beyond the sombre immediate, for there is moral deterioration in the McCaslin family, and a return of old evils. As it is in *Absalom*,

*Absalom!* the sole male heir to the McCaslin lands is of mixed blood, and money is still the cheaper way of saying *My son* to a negro. Yet old Ike, the white Southerner caught between past shames and present doubts, makes one gesture of acceptance and faith in the gift of his hunting horn to the proud, scornful woman, in charge of her life beyond her time, for the negro child of the McCaslin blood.

In the final story of McCaslins, Faulkner moves to the very edge of the extended family, and as close to a final position as he comes in this novel. He strains family connections to the uttermost limit, and then very simply and easily contains them through old Mollie Worsham Beauchamp's extra-sensory knowledge of the death of her grandson, Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. In her eyes, blood must come home for burial. If Jefferson, including Roth Edmonds, attends to her wishes out of charity, the reader responds to one final fireside scene, a final act of love, and a final pivot into the Southern past. On behalf of Mollie, old Miss Worsham calls in her family's, and by extension the South's, debt to the negro:

"Mollie's...parents belonged to my grandfather. Mollie and I were born in the same month. We grew up together as sisters would.

...He is the only child of her oldest daughter...He must come home" (p.357-8)

Faulkner's use of an external viewpoint on to the scene of incantatory negro mourning at a white fireside, 'the brick hearth on which the ancient symbol of human coherence and solidarity burned' (p.361), simultaneously excludes the kindly but intrusive white stranger, encloses the mourners negro and white, and immeasurably augments the quiet dignity of Miss Worsham's response, "It's our grief" (p.363).

In the context, for Miss Worsham is probably poorer than Mollie Beauchamp, these two characters echo and exemplify Ike McCaslin's biblical paraphrase:

He didn't have His Book written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the heart, not by the wise of the earth...but by the doomed and lowly of the earth who have nothing else to read with but the heart. p.249

As Faulkner in the commissary scene pivots the motif of the Bible away from the wise and towards *the lowly*, so with Fonsiba's husband's 'new Canaan' (p.267), he pivots away from geographical location towards location in the heart of man, symbolized by the fire that burns in the hearth. Given Isaac McCaslin's inheritance of heart and spirit through Sam Fathers, and given Ike's ability to cry "This is enough", Faulkner seems to be saying that humanity, white and black alike, is capable of breaking bondages, and of creating bonds.

## Vivid Pictures 2

### Ike McCaslin: The Wilderness and the Boy

They were the white boy, marked forever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him...joining him and the man forever...so that the man would continue to live past the boy's seventy years and then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth as chiefs and kings entered it. p. 159

Faulkner evokes Ike McCaslin's changing perception of the wilderness by means of episodes presented to the reader in a non-sequential and piecemeal way. But because he casts almost imperceptibly back and forth between present and remembered episodes, because the descriptive language used of the wilderness is all of a piece in terms of size and might, and because the character himself is receptive to the lessons of the



the wilderness, the effect is to give to Ike's perceptions an overall smoothness and seamlessness. To a significant degree, Faulkner expresses Ike's perceptions of his surroundings, and his progress in understanding them, in the language of monasticism, so that within the concepts of eternity and regenerative illimitability invested in the wilderness, there exists a rigid structure of advancement. Other like structures, drawn from trade and learning, express respectively Ike's advancement in the skills of the hunt and in the inter-relationships between man and the animal life of the wilderness. The language of chivalry and the drama underkey the early and the later stages of Ike's conception of the hunt.

In the figure of Sam Fathers, Faulkner reverts to a pantheistic form of belief far removed from the Calvinism upon which he spent so much castigating energy in earlier novels. Faulkner's pantheism appropriates some of the hierarchical patterns and monastic language of Catholicism, much as his hunters (and the South in general) appropriate patterns and language of chivalry. Sam Fathers, as a 'wild man' (p.161), is a 'high priest' of the spiritual wilderness under whose 'tutelage' (p.159) Ike passes through his 'novitiate' (p.187), and the Bear is the master of a 'college' (p.201) of learning that is Ike's 'alma mater'. The wilderness itself becomes, for a while, a god-like, 'ancient immortal Umpire' (p.175), lesser than Whom all creatures, human and animal, are. While from the many descriptions of the wilderness, it is clear that Faulkner writes about it because he loves doing so, one effect of the descriptions is to reinforce its awesomeness in the reader's mind, while another is to draw together the boy and the land. There is no argument between character and land at this stage of the novel, and no differences of perspective between author, reader and character, and certainly none of the distance between author and characters that we find in *The Wild Palms*. A pattern of

progression in the descriptions accompanies the stages of Ike's sense of being of the wilderness.

In "The Old People" and "The Bear" Faulkner describes, in effect, the development of a cast of consciousness. Sam Fathers teaches Ike not only the skills of the hunt but a kind of philosophy of the wilderness out of which Ike renounces his title to the McCaslin lands when he becomes twenty-one. Long before Ike goes to the wilderness for the first time (when he can 'write [his] age in two numbers' (p.167)), Faulkner pairs the child and the old man in a 'kindergarten' of 'backyard rabbits and squirrels':

[Sam] would talk to the boy, the two of them sitting beneath the close fierce stars on a summer hilltop... or beside a fire in the November...woods...or fireless in the pitch dark and heavy dew of April mornings. (p.164)

Sam's tales evoke in Ike an extra-ordinary view of humanity, and of the 'action' of humanity upon the earth:

And he talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race...[and] gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow of the earth they had not quitted. And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would occur tomorrow, until at last it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet...; that although it had been his grandfather's and then his father's and uncle's and...someday would be his own land which he and Sam hunted over, their hold upon it actually was trivial and without reality and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Father's voice the mouthpiece of the host. p.165

The passage looks back to the opening portrait of the old man Isaac McCaslin, to his belief that the earth is 'no man's but all men's'. The reader now knows where Ike's belief began, but he does not discover, until Part IV of "The Bear", the process of its distillation, nor of its role as the moral bed-rock of Ike McCaslin's lifestyle in the adult world. The passage is also the first major statement of the regeneration theme. It

is not yet a cyclical movement, but rather a casting back and forth on the fulcrum of Ike's burgeoning consciousness. Sam awakens in Ike a sense of himself that by-passes the concept of ownership, and allies him with the spiritual 'family' whose 'home' has been, and still is, in spirit, the land. At this point in the narrative the paradoxical ideas of Ike as both *owner* and *guest* are simply laid side by side and enclosed in the special ambience of Sam's stories. There is not yet, in the child Ike's mind, either awareness or conviction of moral opposition.

On the day, at ten years of age that 'he entered his novitiate to the true wilderness' (p.187), Ike's impressions are of its seeming impenetrability and largeness, and his own smallness:

His day came at last. In the surrey with his cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson he saw the wilderness through a slow drizzle of November rain just above the ice point as it seemed to him later he always saw it or at least always remembered it - the tall and endless wall of dense November woods under the dissolving afternoon and the year's death, sombre, impenetrable (he could not even discern yet how, at what point they could possibly hope to enter it even though he knew that Sam Fathers was waiting there with the wagon), the surrey moving through the skeleton stalks of cotton and corn in the last of open country, the last trace of man's puny gnawing at the immemorial flank, until, dwarfed by that perspective into an almost ridiculous diminishment, the surrey itself seemed to have ceased to move (this too to be completed later, years later, after he had grown to a man and had seen the sea) as a solitary small boat hangs in lonely immobility, merely tossing up and down, in the infinite waste of the ocean while the water and then the apparently impenetrable land which it nears without appreciable progress, swings slowly and opens the widening inlet which is the anchorage. He entered it. Sam was waiting...[T]he wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him...

It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. p.187

The passage simultaneously describes a phenomenon of nature and the impression of that phenomenon on a consciousness. Its power derives not only from the language of infinities and perpetualities, but also from the action of language over movement, crystallized by retrospection. What is seen ahead, both physically and in the remembering, *the tall and endless wall of dense November woods leaves behind skeleton stalks of cotton and corn*. What is physically close and unclear, *a slow drizzle of November rain* is distanced and clarified by the projection inherent in



*to be completed*, and in turn perspectivized by the external simile of *the solitary small boat*. The external reference is exceptional for these passages, for the wilderness is normally projected as wholly sufficient unto itself, but the simile works coherently here as a comparative perspective for both character and reader. Faulkner renders the boy's sense of anticipation through the various internal images of physical impenetrability and spiritual unknowability, but the sense of livingness that Ike later comes to feel of the wilderness is not yet present. Once within the wall of the wilderness, however, the sense of anticipation is replaced by the powerful new image of Ike seem[ing]...to witness his own birth as a child, implicitly, of the wilderness.

Out of that notion, at the end of his first time in the wilderness, Ike finds himself, childlike, with

an unforgettable sense of the big woods - not a quality dangerous or particularly inimical, but profound, sentient, gigantic and brooding, amid which he had been permitted to go to and fro at will, unscathed, why he knew not, but dwarfed and, until he had drawn honourable blood worthy of being drawn, alien. p.169

The wilderness that is marginally and passively personified here becomes, at the point of Ike's being 'found at last worthy' (p.159) an entity capable of actively 'watch[ing] them pass', and the quality that Ike perceives as *not...particularly inimical* becomes first 'less...than inimical', and then 'never to be inimical again' (p.171).

In the watch and compass episode, Faulkner illustrates Ike's growing skills of woodsmanship and developing moral courage. Ike's successive relinquishing of his possessions works as a kind of practice run, and in as much as a Christian parallel is made explicitly in the scene of repudiation in the commissary in Part 4, so another Christian reference from Matthew 18.3 lies behind the watch and compass episode: 'Except ye

be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'. As the bear has been established earlier as caretaker,

Ash and Boon say he comes up here to run the other little bears away. Tell them to get out of here...until the hunters are gone', p.189

so he here takes care of the spiritual child, Ike, and as Mannie in "Pantaloons in Black" is pure spirit, and the buck that Sam Fathers greets is quasi-spirit, so the bear, because it leaves physical footprints and because it fades like a spirit 'back into the wilderness without motion' (p.200) is a fully realized, complete manifestation of form and spirit. In a brief epiphany, Ike is received into the spiritual company of the wilderness. But he is also led back to the watch and the compass, and returned, through them, to his proper world. In this scene, Ike has a guide in the bear, but later, when he comes to repudiate his inheritance, he needs none.

Faulkner leads out from and returns several times to the scene of Ike's killing of his first buck, and the consequential ceremonial of acceptance into the company of hunters. The episode works as a pivot on to several inter-related value systems:

Ike's 'novitiate' ends as 'Sam Fathers mark[s] his face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man' (p.171). With the passage of time, from this point on, Ike's sense of the wilderness as an inimical entity decreases and disappears, and he gains instead an increasing consciousness of its might and awesomeness and spiritual power. His sense of his own alienation disappears too, to be replaced first by a proper fear (pps. 192, 194, 195), and later by a fear infused by a love stronger even than the love of marriage: 'he would marry someday...but still the woods would be his mistress and his wife' (p.311).

The killing represents a stage in the hunting apprenticeship. Faulkner invests the moment of initiation with ceremonial language tinged with religious emphasis that reflects the boy's joy, pride and humility. This is one thing. But he also invests the whole institution of the hunt with the same kind of pseudo-chivalric rituals that saturated, in a gently ironic way, "Was",. He turns the hunt into a 'pageant', and finally into an 'act upon a set stage' (p.216). "Was", of course, is set in 1859 and in that story Faulkner is quite gently and amusingly telling *his* tale of the Ante-bellum South, but by the late 1870s and 1880s in which "The Old People" and "The Bear" are set, much of the literary South was pre-occupied with romanticizing the old lifestyle, slavery and all. Faulkner's applying of the language of chivalry to the institution of the hunt which ultimately failed Ike McCaslin has an ironic edge, so that the reader is wary, not of the 'natural' ritual and ceremonial attached to Ike and perceived by him in chivalric terms, but of the dramatic militarism attached to Major de Spain's organization of the final hunt for old Ben. The code of honour Ike learns through the hunt, the game

ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unrelenting contest according to the ancient and inmitigable rules, p.184

having come from the ordinary world of the South, should be transferable back to it, but in the event, for Ike, the conditions that pertain in the ordinary world - his heritage of the land, and of shame from the past - prohibit him, morally, from entering into that comfortable heritage.

Also from the initiation scene, the laying of Sam's hands on Ike comes to symbolize the perpetuating of Sam's spirit in Ike, 'joining him and the man forever' (p.159). Paradoxically, that same forward perpetuation also links Ike backwards to Sam's pantheistic world; a world in which the earth



is perceived as matrix, generator and re-generator of life, and the idea of man in harmony with the earth is a felt reality (p.165). Finally, as the rite of initiation takes place in the *November dawn*, so Cass's interpretation, both of the event itself and of the related appearance of the visionary buck, takes place in darkness where 'scoured and icy stars' glitter. By moving from the world of the wilderness in which Sam is Ike's spiritual father to the social world in which Cass Edmonds is 'rather his brother than cousin and rather his father than either' (p.4), Faulkner specifically maintains Ike's place in both worlds.

As the initiation scene functions as a meeting point of Ike's spiritual and social worlds, so through it Faulkner prepares for the moral question mark that he allows to attend Ike's act of repudiation. Despite Faulkner's derogatory remarks about his character, it seems from his explicit and firmly structured explication of Ike's moral consciousness that he means Ike McCaslin to be a character of exceptional integrity and courage, and that the Christian imagery he attaches directly to the character is intended as enhancement. Ike is initiated into a particular mode of belief as well as into a particular skill. On another level, Ike's experiences in Sam's world enable him to relinquish not only the McCaslin land but all possessions except 'one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets...the narrow iron cot and the lean stained mattress' (p.3).

A fundamental part of Ike's wilderness awareness consists of the fabled bear, Old Ben. The passage below comes from "The Bear". As recall

in Ike's mind the passage works as part of Faulkner's strategy of continually densifying the reader's impressions of the wilderness:

He had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the big old bear with one trap-ruined foot that...had earned for himself a name, a definite designation like a living man - the long legend...- a corridor of wreckage...through which sped...with the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive, the shaggy tremendous shape. It ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its crooked print...It was as if the boy had already divined what his sense and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men...through which ran not even a mortal beast but...a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life...the old bear, solitary, indomitable, and alone... p.185

This is Old Ben as Ike imagines him, but the passage contains projective images. The image of the *corridor* relates here to worked land destroyed, but later the same image will relate to the destroying of the wilderness by the lumber companies. The *ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive*, to which Old Ben is likened here, will relate to the merciless power of commercialism, invested in the lumber companies. The *unaxed woods* which are referred to in these and similar terms throughout the story carry connotations of sovereignty. And finally, the farmers and woodsmen who merely *gnaw, punily*, in this passage, will be replaced by 'a new planing-mill...and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails' (p.243).

In "The Old People", Faulkner uses the wilderness to create a mood and form a young consciousness. In "The Bear", Ike McCaslin and Sam Fathers remain the principal figures in the landscape, and they are joined by the figures of Old Ben the bear, the dog Lion and Boon Hogganbeck. The circular movement of life, death and regeneration that Cass merely illustrated for Ike is played out in both the natural and the spirit worlds, and the idea of inevitability inherent in the movement finds a vivid correlative in the dog, Lion. In the expansion of the two strands of morality, social and spiritual, that form Ike's character, the

wilderness, by virtue of its designation as 'ancient immortal Umpire' (p.175) is established as supreme authority in both. In the second part of "The Bear", Faulkner brings forward his major thematic complex, the life-death-regeneration cycle. The life-in-death motif that is prominent in this section will give way with the death of old Ben and Sam Fathers to death-burial-regeneration. At the same time, he accelerates the narrative action through Major de Spain's decision to hunt Old Ben for real. That it takes two years to accomplish serves to sustain both dramatic tension and sense of nemesis.

In capturing and training the huge dog, Lion, Sam Fathers knowingly sets in train his own life-in-death sequence: 'It had been foreknowledge in Sam's face that morning...*And he was glad...he was old...had none of his blood anywhere above the earth*' (p.206). The phrase that morning looks back to the episode of the fyce, in which Sam and Ike have the opportunity to shoot Old Ben and neither does so. The resolution to that episode demonstrates the developing quality of foreknowledge in Ike:

[Sam] withdrew his hand from the fyce's head and stood looking into the woods..."Somebody is going to, some day."  
 "I know it," the boy said. "That's why it must be one of us. So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer." p.203-4

Sensing the significance of the huge dog, Ike 'should have hated and feared Lion' (p.201), instead of which, there is 'a fatality in it...something...already begun...like the last act on a set stage' (p.216).

The speed and excitement of the hunt is shown through Ike's eyes, but at the same time, Ike's pervasive sense of the physical wilderness forms a powerful backdrop for swift and changing action.

Lion drove in, leaping clear of the ground.  
 ...[T]he bear...caught the dog in both arms, almost loverlike... He was off the mule now... Then Boon was running. The boy saw the gleam of the blade in his hand and



watched him leap among the hounds...and fling himself astride the bear...his legs locked around the bear's belly...and the glint of the knife as it rose and fell. It fell just once. For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man astride its back...then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too...It didn't collapse, crumple. It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man, dog and bear, seemed to bounce once.  
p.231

Fittingly, in a sense, Lion and Boon bring about the death of Old Ben by means of combat older and in some ways more 'honourable' than the gun which for all the skill and ritual attached to its use, belongs primarily to the world of civilized man and to the society of men who tame, work and destroy the land. But knife (or arrow) belongs to the way of the 'People' who through Sam Fathers Faulkner has been applauding while yet asserting the honourableness of the company of hunters. Fittingly also, in the world of Sam's values where Sam is 'the chief, the prince' and Boon 'the plebian...his huntsman' (p.213), Boon and Lion are the actual agents of death. On balance therefore, it seems that there is a marginal elevating of 'the old days and the People' (p.164). The image of the bear and the dog as *lover-like* confirms and brings to a point of culmination Sam's foreknowledge of the dog as the instrument of the bear's death. With Old Ben's death as pivot, the idea of life-in-death contained in Sam's foreknowledge becomes death and burial.

Faulkner holds the scene in stasis with the *piece of statuary* image. The abrupt halt places a huge full stop not only on the 'yearly pageant-rite of the old bear's furious immortality' (p.186), but on Ike McCaslin's boyhood in the wilderness. Change flows swiftly, for in the immediate aftermath, Sam Fathers collapses and dies, 'only the boy knew that Sam too was going to die' (p.236), and Sam's spiritual estate passes to Ike. In narrative terms, the statuary image acts as a kind of exclamation mark, like a traffic sign forewarning of change or diversion, for the natural flow of the hunting story is about to be diverted to the repudiation

scene, and the pageant-rite of the hunt to be replaced by the props of other pageants; in the wilderness, by the lumber company's 'miles and miles of stacked steel rails...and...piled crosstrees' (p.303), and in the world of the tamed land, by the goods in the commissary that are the emblems of both possession and bondage.

### Vivid Pictures 3

#### Ike McCaslin: the Man and the Land

That day and himself and McCaslin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land, the old wrong and shame itself, in repudiation and denial at least of the land the wrong and the shame even if he couldn't cure the wrong and eradicate the shame, who at fourteen when he learned of it had believed he could do both when he became competent and when at twenty-one he became competent he knew that he could to neither but at least he could repudiate the wrong and the shame, at least in principle, and at least the land itself in fact. p.334

The 'immitigable rules' of the 'unremitting contest' (p.184) of the hunt become for Ike morally untenable in the real world of owning and possessing, of buying and selling. Ike is eighteen when Major de Spain sells his wilderness land, and Cass and Ike come to town to see him about a last hunting trip. Although Faulkner understates the encounter, it marks a stage of Ike's moral advancement in the real world. The Major de Spain that Ike 'was used to seeing in boots and muddy corduroy, unshaven, sitting the shaggy powerful long-hocked mare' (p.303), becomes the desk-bound executive 'in sober fine broadcloth and an immaculate glazed shirt'. Implicitly, this is an image of betrayal, for in selling the land on which the wilderness stands to a lumber company, Major de Spain becomes the prime mover in its destruction.

Ike's final visit to the wilderness before the logging company starts cutting is described by means of a set of then and now pictures. As the locomotive-like Old Ben had been harmless once, so also had been the 'diminutive locomotive' (p.305) of the logging company, but as Old Ben had become a threat to the farmers on the edge of the wilderness, so now the train threatens the wilderness. Once the locomotive, like Old Ben, had seemed harmless:

The little locomotive shrieked and began to move... it had been harmless then...the light clatter of the trucks...its peanut-parcher whistle flung for one petty moment and absorbed by the brooding inattentive wilderness. p.305

But

it was different now...this time it was as though the train...had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill p.306

The language of the one passage, *light clatter, peanut-parcher whistle*, opposes that of the other, *doomed, shadow, portent*. Faulkner, we remember used the locomotive as a pivot for the two ways of seeing Old Ben, as the locomotive-like perpetrator of 'wreckage and destruction' (p.185), and as the 'apotheosis of the old wild life'. The train slows to let Ike jump down. The moment is a kind of stop the world, I want to get off. Ike leaves the train and the kind of world that it represents and enters the very different world of the wilderness. Three years later, he will stop and get off the world of his tainted inheritance by refusing to accept it.

Ike's first entry to the wilderness, eight years earlier, is described in terms of magnitude and awe. Now, this last time, the same sense of magnitude and awe is infused with green summer freshness. There is a muted sounding of the regeneration motif that is paradoxical in the context of the imminent destruction, but the motif comes to dominate the section and it will translate permanently and predominantly into the land-



scape of Ike's memory. This is a strangely silent scene: rather than the sounds of the summer woods, Faulkner evokes an almost heard sense of tumultuous evolution, decay and re-growth and within this, Ike's thoughts flow backwards. Since Ike's purpose in returning to the wilderness is to visit the graves of Sam Fathers and Lion, the episode is an emotional one, yet Faulkner firmly controls Ike's profoundly contemplative thinking by means of his meeting with the grumpy, recalcitrant Ash, and through the brief formality of Ike's offering of a libation at the site of Sam's grave. Ike's contemplation, essentially, is of a wilderness world and of his place in it. That it is far too highly geared for the real world of getting and spending and far too highly geared for the imperfections of human relationships is for the reader to see, but not Ike:

Then he was in the woods, not alone but solitary; the solitude closed about him, green with summer. They did not change, and, timeless, would not, anymore than would the green of summer and the fire and rain of fall and the iron cold and sometimes even snow ...-; summer, and fall, and snow, and wet and sapribe spring in their ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother who had shaped him if any had toward the man he almost was, mother and father both to the old man born of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief who had been his spirit's father if any had, whom he had revered and harkened to and loved and lost and grieved: and he would marry someday and they too would own for their brief while that brief unsubstanced glory which inherently of itself cannot last and hence why glory: and they would, might, carry even the remembrance of it into the time when flesh no longer talks to flesh because memory at least does last: but still the woods would be his mistress and his wife. pp. 308, 311

There is a kind of hiatus in the passage, despite the regenerative thrust, that derives not only from the enclosing solitude but also from the echo from Keats's Grecian Urn ode. The hiatus separates Ike - and the matter of Ike's thinking - from the ordinary social and economic world; from the processes of change and progress and from the shifting planes of human relationships. The spiritual genetic tree connecting Ike, Sam Fathers and the wilderness, that the reader knows about from the flashforward commissary scene, is seen to be consciously formed in Ike's mind here, as though confirming all that the narrator has been reading out of Ike's unconscious in the passages of his formulative years. A full

colon marks the transition in Ike's thinking from the human love that he attaches to Sam to the human love he attaches to the marriage that he will enter into *someday*, and for the first and only time the idea of something to be coveted and 'owned' is attributed to Ike. His anticipation of marriage, 'his heritage too' (p.297), looks forward to another idea that the reader also knows about, that by relinquishing the tainted heritage, he believes that he will have a better one to leave to his own son (p.335). Within the context of the passage above, the reference is to eternal time, so that Ike's *brief while* of marriage attaches to that, as his *brief unsubstanced glory* attaches to his pure and nature-conscious anticipation of the sexual act. That Ike's season of *unsubstanced glory* will be much briefer than he anticipates lends a quality of poignancy to the passage. Ike dispossesses himself of Old Carothers tainted lands but is himself dispossessed of the joyfully entered 'new country' of marriage: 'she turned and freed herself..."And that's all...from me. If this dont get you that son you talk about, it wont be mine"' (p.300). If Ike learns obedience in the wilderness, and elects poverty, he has the last of the three monastic conditions, chastity, thrust upon him, so that when James Beauchamp's grand-daughter charges him, in "Delta Autumn", with having 'lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love' (p.346), she is, in a sense, right.

Through the tone of his language, the narrator records a shift in Ike's mood from the profound to the quietly remembered stages of his learning about the woods: 'Time was and not so long ago either when he would not have been allowed here without someone with him' (p.311). The four concrete posts that mark the land of the graves that has been reserved out of the sale are 'lifeless and shockingly alien' (p.312). They exist side by side with, and in a sense they safeguard that one piece of wilderness, but they lack the wilderness's capacity for self-renewal

and they are utterly alien to the spiritual resurrection that is inherent in Ike's comfortable observation about Sam and the place where they buried Sam, 'He had stepped over it, perhaps on it. But that was all right.' *He probably knew I was in the woods this morning long before I got here* (p.312). The sense of regeneration triumphs over that of alienness and destruction, and the concrete posts are simply dismissed in face of the small gift that Ike places at the burial place, knowing that 'almost before he had turned his back [it would have] not vanished but merely translated into the myriad life' (p.313).

In October, 1888, Isaac McCaslin dispossesses himself of his grandfather's land. The landscape of the wilderness and the hunters is replaced by the social and economic landscape of the McCaslins and the scene of the disquisition between Ike and Cass. The relationship is not now one of boy and adoptive father, but of man and man 'juxtaposed not against the wilderness, but against the tamed land' (p.243), and the 'college' to which Ike now has right of entry are the McCaslin lands. As the Old Bear was his 'alma mater' (p.202) in the wilderness, so the ledgers are now.

The ledgers go back to the time when old Carothers McCaslin got the land from the Indians. They show, in effect, the pattern of McCaslin agrarian economics, and since they contain notes of births, marriages, deaths, legacies, slave dealings and a host of incidental comments, they also reveal the pattern of the McCaslins's social regime. In the course of their argument, Ike and Cass digress into the political and social history of the South, so that along with the immediate matter of the repudiation and the damning evidence contained in the ledgers, they evoke between them a formidable but very complete regional landscape. Faulkner



presents Ike as one man in contention with a vast arena of social and economic tradition: but then Ike is accustomed to the vastness of the wilderness and he is equipped for this particular contest through Sam's spiritual legacy and through the disciplines learned at the hunt. He has also pursued, at least once before, a solitary and determined path, when as a boy of twelve he sought out Old Ben.

The commissary in which Ike argues his case with Cass holds within its walls many forms of landscape, economic, familial, historical:

himself and his cousin amid the smells of cheese and salt and meat and kerosene...the desk and the shelf...the ledgers in which McCaslin recorded the slow outwards trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold...and the older ledgers...on the yellowed pages of which were recorded in the faded hand of his father Theophilus and his uncle Amodeus during the two decades before the Civil War, the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves pp.244-5.

Faulkner's image of the commissary as the 'solar-plexus of the repudiated and relinquished' (p.194) says much about the bondage inherent in the system; not only the minor moral brigandages of advertisements, but the major bondage of

the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads...cable-strong to bind for life p.245

Ike is capable of irony now, as he was not, or was not required to be, earlier: 'potions manufactured and sold by white men to bleach the pigment...of negroes that they might resemble the very race which for two hundred years had held them in bondage' (p.244). Beyond, but economically and socially attached to the immediate question of Ike's accession, are the McCaslin negroes.

Faulkner interrupts the debate, that erupts well beyond the question of who shall own the McCaslin land, as little as possible, punctuating

sparsely and introducing the speaker merely by 'and he'. From the heard tone of Cass's words, he appears to be expostulating or spluttering with outrage. I think we must assume that Cass is not aware, beforehand, of Ike's decision:

"Relinquish." McCaslin said. "Relinquish. You, the direct male descendant of him who saw the opportunity and took it, bought the land, took the land, got the land no matter how...translated it into something...worthy of bequeathment...Not only the male descendant but the only and last descendant in the male line...while I am derived through a woman and the very McCaslin in my name is mine only by...my grandmother's pride in what that man accomplished whose legacy and monument you think you can repudiate." p.245

Cass is concerned with bloodlines, but Ike's case for relinquishment is based on his belief that the land of the plantation was never his grandfather's to own, nor Ikkemotubbe's to sell, because God

"created man to be His overseer on the earth...not to hold for himself...but to hold the earth mutual and in tact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood". p.246

Cass comes to understand and to reluctantly submit to Ike's argument. They agree upon a kind of inheritance for Ike, from the wilderness, devolving on him through Ikkemotubbe and Sam Fathers. This is the spiritual possession allied to the idea of the earth as 'no man's but all mens' that we met in the enigmatic portrait of Ike McCaslin on the first page of the novel. It takes non-ownership for granted, and to this Ike agrees, "'Yes. Sam Fathers set me free'" (p.286).

The argument deepens into the question of not whether the white man in general and the McCaslins in particular can or should relieve the kind of "'thrall, '65 or no'" (p.244), in which the negroes are still held, but how. Ike would do it by abjuring the status quo that includes his grandfather's inheritance; Cass by operating within it. At this point, in the arena of moral choices, Faulkner implicitly invokes the paradox that he has allowed to attach to Ike's repudiation, at least in Lucas Beau-

champ's eyes (p.39); for the question, for the reader, arises from the argument, which of the two courses is the more right: Ike, who "escapes" (p.271) or who is "chosen" (pp.271, 286) to make a stand against the status quo, and to demonstrate it in his renunciatory lifestyle, or Cass, who can "do no else" (p.286) but to be one of the triers from within, as were Buck and Buddy. There is no resolution of the thematic paradox here or, not explicitly anyway, anywhere else in the novel, but within the argument between Ike and Cass, Faulkner effects a resolution through the Bible. Both use the Bible as their source of authority, and Faulkner uses it as a pivot on the nature of truth.

Ike rests his case not on the ambivalent literal word, that is open to different interpretations: "If truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how shall we choose which is truth?" (p.249), but on the truth felt in the heart. The truth felt in Ike's heart is encompassed in his notion about the earth being no man's and all mens'. We have come to understand that he means the earth to be held 'mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood' (p.246). Now we are made to understand that 'all mens' means a freedom to share that includes '[h]is lowly people' (p.248) in the communal anonymity of brotherhood. Mankind, Ike argues' (p.247), has been dispossessed of successive Edens by successive evils. Even the America of old Issetibbeha's forefathers became, in the nature of mankind, tainted, and only by 'voiding the land for a time of Ikkemotubbe's blood and substituting for it another blood could He accomplish his purpose' (p.248). And even the new stock, they argue between them, brings some of the 'old world's corrupt and worthless twilight' (p.247) with it, as well as 'a thousand...Bucks and Buddies' (p.250), and it needs two or three generations and a war before it outlaws wrongs.



Isaac, 'son' of 'Abraham' Carothers he might be, but he is not going to play the passive, sacrificial lamb to atone for the sins of his fathers; someone has got to "lift...the long ancestral musket down from the deer-horns above the door" (p.272) and take action on behalf of *"the weak because they are niggers being held in bondage by the strong just because they are white"* (p.272). Now we know the general and the specific grounds for Ike's repudiation, but Faulkner is not yet done with his digressions. In a further explanation of Ike's repudiation, he sets up a beguiling landscape:

It was evening now, the tranquil sunset of October mazy with windless woodsmoke. The cotton was long since picked and ginned, and all day now the wagons loaded with gathered corn moved between field and crib, processional across the enduring land.  
p.276

This is the good land indeed, but it is a land whose traditional economy is sundered in "that dark corrupt and bloody time while three separate peoples...tried to adjust not only to one another but to the new land" (p.276-7). In the voice of Ike, Faulkner works a fearsome landscape out of the times and the corruptions of Reconstruction: from carpetbagger, "that third race ... alien even among themselves save for a single fierce will for rapine and pillage" (p.277), to redneck, to Klansman; from usuary to civic corruption; from social order to social change and dissipation. And on the McCaslin lands, some negro families expand while others disintegrate, but all remain bound by the 'cable-strong' ebb and flow of insurmountable debt.

From this landscape, Faulkner returns to Ike's ongoing attempts to "explain to the head of [his] family something which [he] has got to do" (p.275) and to the economic, social and psychological questions that press on negroes and whites alike. We are on familiar Faulknerian ground in these passages; the thinking (white, Southern) man's toiling with the

fruits of his heritage that can be neither absorbed nor exculpated overnight. There is no resolution that Faulkner can attempt to a dilemma of such magnitude, certainly not in a narrative present of 1888, and within the argument of the novel, he merely offers two seemingly impotent positions that return us to the central paradox of man's right or not to own land and Ike's right or not to refuse to own. There is the position of Ike, who cries, in effect, *This is enough* (p.271), who 'escapes', refuses a heritage that encompasses so much of the dilemma, does what he has to do in order to live with himself (p.275), and that of Cass, who is not only embroiled in the economics of the dilemma, but is without Ike's convictions, so that, whether he wants to or not, he has no honourable option but to get on with it. In the world of the tamed land Cass is 'plebian' as Boon is in the world of the wilderness, and as Sam Fathers is a 'prince' (p.213), Ike is 'chosen' (p.286). Cass may seem, justifiably, disgruntled, but he accedes to the chosen quality in Ike and he seems, finally, to recognize the validity of Ike's 'way', and the spiritual authority invested in Ike by Sam Fathers:

"You said how on that instant when Ikkemotubbe realized that he could sell the land to Grandfather, it ceased for ever to have been his. All right; go on: Then it belonged to Sam Fathers, old Ikkemotubbe's son. And who inherited from Sam Fathers, if not you" p.286.

Ike McCaslin relinquishes his rights to the McCaslin lands, on a principle of moral disassociation, within the commissary and across the ledgers that are themselves artifacts and symbols of the Southern dilemma. In taking up carpentering in order to earn a living and to ward off loans from old friends for whom Ike's new way of life is not good enough, Ike gears his standards to a criterion far removed from the Southern world:

if the Nazarene had found carpentering good for the life and ends He had assumed and elected to serve, it would be all right too for Isaac McCaslin. p.295

## Footnotes for Chapter 8

1. Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983) p.240.
2. Letter to Robert Haas, in Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p. 1072.
3. "Lion", *Harper's*, 172 (December, 1935), pp.67-77; "The Old People", *Harper's*, 181 (Sept. 1940), 418-25; "A Point of Law", *Collier's*, 105 (22 June, 1940), 20-21, 30, 31; "Gold is Not Always", *The American Mercury*, 166 (Nov, 1940), 563-70; "Pantaloon in Black" *Harper's*, 181 (Oct. 1940), 503-13; "Go Down, Moses" *Collier's*, 107 (25 Jan. 1941), 19-20, 45, 46.
4. "Delta Autumn" *Story*, 20 (May-June 1942), 46-55; "The Bear", *The Saturday Evening Post*, 214 (May, 1942), 30-31.
5. *Faulkner: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), p.1072.
6. William Van O'Connor "The Wilderness Theme in Faulkner's *The Bear*," in *Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (Michigan State University Press, 1960), pp.322-330.
7. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1942; this ed. (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p.4. Further references to this edition in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
8. Graham Clarke, "Marking Out and Digging In: Language as Ritual in *Go Down, Moses*" in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Fiction* edited by A. Robert Lee (London: Vision Press, 1990), p.154.
9. William Falkner, *The Reivers*, first pub. Random House (New York) 1962; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p.20.
10. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens* (London and Toronto: AUP, 1988), p.37
11. Ibid. pp. 43, 37.
12. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner*, (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p.225.
13. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1960), p.244.
14. Dirk Kuyk Jr., *Threads Cable-strong: William Faulkner's Go Down Moses* (London and Toronto: AUP, 1983), p.114



Chapter 9

*The Reivers*

1	The Impressionistic Landscape	301
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i.	Lucius 11 and Non-Virtue	

Surely no other author got so much out of two words and a colon as Faulkner did.<sup>1</sup>

In the first Yoknapatawpha novel the young Faulkner fictionalizes his family history, and in the last the grandfather cossets his family future. The one novel looks back, the other, ultimately, forward. *The Reivers* does not bristle with technical innovation, but what the novel does show is that Faulkner at the end of his career had lost none of his instinct for telling tales, and none of his instinct for postulating universal human values. In complex novels like *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the layers of moral meaning extractable from the narrative reach well beyond the matter of the plots, but *The Reivers* embodies in the Priest family a pre-existing moral framework based on two straightforward ideas, and the parameters of the discourse emerge in tandem with the plot: 'No gentleman ever referred to anyone by his race or religion'<sup>2</sup>, and 'A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences' (p.252). In other novels Faulkner deals with fundamental Southern and universal problems - prejudice, freedom, possession, dynastic decline - but in *The Reivers* the Priests flourish, the problem of race has been accommodated, and Faulkner addresses a smaller but no less universal problem. He describes in effect the working of a young conscience, and Lucius Priest's rite of passage takes the form of a moral trip from which, in the nature of things and with a little help, the wrongdoer picks himself up.

### The Impressionistic Landscape

Beginning and ending with Jefferson in North Mississippi, three locations form a roughly equilateral triangle. The roadways of Yoknapatawpha and an automobile take Lucius Priest, Boon Hogganbeck and Ned McCaslin on an eighty mile journey to the 'foreign country...another state' (p.68) of Memphis, from which city the railroad carries them sixty five miles east to Parsham in rural Tennessee.\* While physical landscape in *The Reivers* bears none of the great burdens of meaning invested in it in *The Wild Palms* and *Go Down, Moses*, the triangle of locations serve as a template for young Lucius Priest's moral journey: at home, he is tempted and falls into Non-virtue; in Memphis he is exposed to real evil; at Parsham he works to repair the damage; back home in Jefferson he is forgiven, and he pays the price of his fall. All places have a hazy quality about them that derives partly from the speed of their being passed through, partly through Faulkner's close focusing on perpetually new faces and figures, partly through the physical tiredness of the telling character, and partly from Faulkner's blending of tones of comedy with tones of nervousness, adventure and guilt. As a dimension of both place and time, speed is a whirlwind affair marked by both caprice and incessance; a kind of fairground in which motion, 1905 style, is curiously and attractively romanticized from the time-of-writing distance of 1961.

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\* Both Calvin S. Brown and Cleanth Brooks locate Parsham at Grand Junction, Tennessee.

Calvin S. Brown, *A Glossary of Faulkner's South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.145.

Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963); this ed. 1972, p.446.



The narrative present time of the told tale, four days in May, 1905, is contained, as it must be, by whatever is the amount of time that it takes the grandson to re-tell, in 1961, the tale told him by his grandfather. The precise amount of time is not important, but because of the additional perspectives created, the existence of the re-teller is. Nothing grand attaches to time in *The Reivers*. Instead, a boy's guilt and excitement is latched to a few days of it, and the tensions increase with the hours of its passing. In its way, the sixty year gap between the action of the tale and the hour of its being re-told notwithstanding, *The Reivers* is a tale of, and for, any generation.

Some useful comparisons that relate not only to the element of time but to the thematic systems and the implied universals of both novels can be made with *Sartoris*. Young Bayard Sartoris and Grandfather Priest are born within a year of each other.<sup>3</sup> Young Bayard's life hurtles to a futureless and fatal cut-off point in June, 1920, but Grandfather Priest is still manifestly there in 1961 to tell the tale of 1905. The factor of time, related to futurelessness in the one novel, and to rising generations in the other makes for very different moods. Then concerning grandfathers (I use the term loosely: John Sartoris is young Bayard's great grandfather), the very much alive grandfather Lucius Priest attempts to teach a moral lesson to his grandson in 1961 by describing his experiences of 1905, but in *Sartoris*, the long dead John Sartoris 'teaches' his 'grandson', through tales told of him (John Sartoris) and the transmission of some of his genes, only self-destruction.

The Priests, like the Sartorises, Compsons and McCaslins, belong to old Jefferson families but, as Elizabeth M. Kerr notes, the Priests represent

the only family living in Yoknapatawpha which extends to three generations living in harmony and showing serious concern for the spiritual, intellectual and emotional well-being of the children in the family'.<sup>4</sup>

To sort out the generations of Lucius Priests now for the sake of clarity later, the grandson who has heard the tale on some earlier occasion and is now retelling it is referred to here as Lucius 111. Both Grandfather Priest and Grandfather Priest-as-a-boy are referred to as Lucius 11, and Grandfather's grandfather ("Boss") as Lucius 1. We do not know for certain the age of the grandson reteller, but from the direction of the voice in this passage, and given the sexual aura of the section, it seems that he is fifteen:

I think you should be tumbled pell-mell, without warning, only into experience which you might well have spent the rest of your life not having to meet. But with an inevitable (ay, necessary) one, it's not really decent of Circumstance, Fate, not to prepare you first, especially when the preparation is as simple as just being fifteen years old.  
p.85

I discuss voice in the following section. This is one of many occasions on which Grandfather Lucius 11 turns to his grandson-listener with an abstraction from the matter of his tale.

While social settings change with the physical settings, the unlikely trio at the centre of the action are securely bound together not only by the obvious fact of the car they appropriate and in which they ride to Memphis, but also by lifelong, intimate acquaintance and shared family values. Lucius 11, Boon and Ned are juxtaposed in episodic fashion with other social groups, the Priest patriarchy, the incumbents of Miss Reba's brothel, the local Law, the negro Hoods, and the rural horse-racing fraternity. As Cleanth Brooks has remarked, 'It is appropriate that Faulkner's last novel should exhibit...the full range of the classes and kind of people who live in his famous county'.<sup>5</sup>

The action of the novel derives from Boon's and Lucius's concerted reiving of "Boss" Priest's prized Winton Flyer, with Ned McCaslin as unforeseen passenger. By means of the co-incidental meeting of Ned and Bobo Beauchamp in a Memphis backstreet, and Ned's subsequent trading of the car for a horse, the action suddenly projects out of a surreptitious overnight trip to Memphis, to a nerve-jangling rural horse-racing scenario. In Memphis young Lucius finds himself confronted with unpleasant facts of life, and in Parsham, in order to recover the car, he works to become a racing jockey. At a point of doubtful success, "Boss" Priest suddenly materializes, irons out problems, and takes all three miscreants back home to Jefferson to face various punishments. Unlikely as the physical action of the tale is, it fits coherently enough with the moral action that represents a stage in young Lucius Priest's growing-up process.

The value systems of the novel surround two fundamental precepts of child-rearing: if it's not yours, you can't take it, and, don't tell lies. Faulkner explicates both precepts through what is basically an oral tale underkeyed with an allegorical content of good and evil, and shot through with a winning comic tone. The 'gentlemanly' values taught Lucius within the Priest household fall temporarily into wilful abeyance, causing him to feel guilt and remorse. But the same values also protect him and influence others, and they enable him to cope with some but not all of the new situations that arise. The main part of the moral action of the tale surrounds Lucius's efforts to cope with what he cannot cope with: 'things [he] had had to learn that [he] wasn't even ready for yet, had nowhere to store them nor even anywhere to lay them down'. (p.250).



The vivid pictures used here are: Lucius's dawning realization of a period of unfettered freedom (p.41); Grandfather's abstractions (pp. 42, 47, and very many others); Lucius's disaffection for lying, and his recognition of its habit forming capability (p.56); the mudhole and the cloud of dust on the road to Memphis (pp.73-8,80); Lucius's inadequately articulated feelings concerning the older prostitute (p.94), his response to Otis (pp.132-134), and his wanting his mother (p.132); Boon's efforts at sexual education (p.88).

I look at one aspect of the landscape in Section 3: Lucius 11 and Non-virtue.

## 2

### Technical Strategies

Although the conventional textual structure offers no clue as to the matter of the novel, both title and subtitle have clear and straightforward significance: Lucius, Boon and Ned reive, Faulkner reminisces. Faulkner organizes the narrative structure laterally, without major time distortion or diversion. Some small diversions, like the history of Boon Hogganbeck, work organically as background fillers for the grandson-hearer, and also as an opportunity for Faulkner to indulge in recollections of the wilderness and hunting camp days. A great many asides are present, which serve the dual purpose of explaining old-fashioned terms and customs to the grandson, and of reminding the reader of the double perspective involved in the grandfather's telling. A four-part pattern of explication based on the voices of Grandfather Priest-as-a-boy and Grandfather Priest surrounds the incidents of young Lucius's encounters

with Non-virtue. The pattern remains relatively constant, but the parts are sometimes rearranged.

Faulkner's handling of point of view is an important and complex feature of the novel. By virtue of the de facto first-person narrator, the point of view appears to be singular. In reality, it is multiperspectival. Multiperspectivity is, of course, common in Faulkner, but in *The Reivers* no fewer than four points of view exist: the reader's, the grandson re-teller's, Grandfather Priest's, and Grandfather Priest's-as-a-boy. Three of these are in simultaneous operation throughout the whole novel. Because the reader witnesses, as he must, the tale being re-told, he is within the frame, so to speak, of the landscape. The reader always sees the re-teller because the re-teller's is the voice that tells Grandfather's tale. Since Faulkner gives Grandfather Priest two first-person telling voices, the reader also always sees either Grandfather Priest or Grandfather Priest-as-a-boy, and sometimes by a process of what we might call choric intercutting, both at once. The grandson-reteller has an important function in the dynamics of Faulkner's perspectives. As I see it, this figure is not addressing me, as young Charles Mallison in *The Town* is addressing me, nor does he ever; so that I am, in effect, an eavesdropper watching the tale being told and simultaneously listening to the two voices of Grandfather Priest within the tale. The cinematographic qualities of multiple perspective present in my own mental vision come into play, or, to put it another way, although Faulkner never describes the young voice who says, 'Grandfather said', unless we can visualize and continue to visualize this figure we miss out a vital plane of the landscape, and more importantly, we miss the fact that the tale is being re-told by a young man who has taken on board its moral import, and is relaying it in such a way that the reader sees that he has done so. Another point is an obvious one. The young man must be telling

the tale for some kind of audience. Since the whole thrust of the novel looks to the moral future of rising generations, it is a reasonable conjecture that he is telling the tale to other young people (possibly other grandchildren), rather than merely recounting what Grandfather said to some member or members of an older generation, which would include of course the reader. By virtue of his assumed presence throughout, and his ability to view the overall landscape of the novel including the figure of the re-teller, the reader is uniquely equipped to comment on both the tale and the tellers.

In no other novel does Faulkner so uniquely engage the reader's commentative capacity, or employ multiperspectivity across the whole text. In *Sartoris* a straightforward form of multiperspectivity derives from occasional stories set into the narrative. These represent highly individual viewpoints which belong principally to the narrative structures, and function as elucidatory digressions. In *The Sound and the Fury*, each of the four points of view is under the control of the textual structure, and these build themselves into the reader's mind sequentially, a layer at a time. In *Absalom, Absalom!* multiperspectivity functions as a primary narrative technique, as it does in *The Reivers*, but in *Absalom, Absalom!* it is not used throughout. Rather, it suddenly densifies and accelerates half way through the novel, out of Quentin's and Shreve's separate yet integrated channels of thoughts, and their imaginative leaps into the respective minds of Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon. In *The Reivers*, multiperspectivity is virtually pre-existent: 'Grandfather said: This is the kind of man Boon Hogganbeck was'.

From the reader's point of view, Faulkner's multiperspectival structures densify thematic meaning while yet containing that meaning within the boundaries of the narrative. The reader listens to a story



being told by a fifteen year old grandson, Lucius 111. Within the story the Grandfather repeatedly turns from the tale to the grandson-listener for the purpose of augmenting or emphasizing a part of the tale. By virtue of the reader's being closer to the grandfather's experiential generation than the grandson re-teller's, he knows that the grandfather is making a perfectly serious didactic effort on his grandson's behalf, for all that he is casting it in a comic mould. But, as becomes clear from the grandson's demeanour in re-telling the tale, he is quite at peace with both the matter and the moral of the story. He appears to be a young man of considerable maturity. He neither postures at the tale verbally, nor intrudes upon it in any of the subtle ways Faulkner could have thought up if he had wanted to. By the very virtue of Faulkner's failure to describe Lucius 111, this character without a part adds a perspective dimension to the whole novel out of which the reader, at the end of the tale, finds himself asking questions that are a lot less inconsequential than those Faulkner might seem to invite him to ask at the end of, say, *Sanctuary*. In that novel, Horace Benbow's phone call to Little Belle invites some readers to consider whether Horace is still bothered by the burgeoning grape, or whether he has reverted to the figure of the fussing parent, but in *The Reivers* the reader finds himself pondering not the sexual fantasies or otherwise of a mature man, but whatever are his own notions of the point at which young people should be introduced to the adult sexual world. Thirty years after Faulkner's death, the question by and large has been addressed, but this was not so in 1961, and for that period, Faulkner adopts quite a bold stance. Through the mediating figure of Lucius 111, the reader's reactions complement Grandfather's efforts, thus creating a holistic structure that includes the presence of the reader within the frame of Faulkner's landscape. Given Faulkner's range of vision and his thought provoking explications of the human condition across the body of his novels, it seems a profound

gesture of affirmation that he should 'break his pencil'<sup>6</sup> on young Man. We are at liberty to agree or disagree with his choice of incidents, but we cannot fault his strategy, or given his concern for the young, the sincerity of his effort.

Another aspect of the novel adds to its technical and ideological coherence, the aura of grandfatherliness that pervades the told tale. Within the narrative this creates a kind of umbrella of care that protects not only legal grandsons (Lucius 11, born in 1894 and Lucius 111, telling the tale in 1961), but negro 'children' like Ned and 'adopted' 'children' like Boon Hogganbeck. Throughout the novel, grandfathers are kindly creatures who use humour and commonsense to sugar their pills. At the same time, Grandfather Lucius 11's invoking of his own grandfather, Lucius 1, creates an impression of a long, secure line of benign, patriarchal grandfathers that even manages to include without too much forcing the wicked old slave-seducing Old Carothers McCaslin. Translated to the universal range, the overall mood of the novel is one of care and reconciliation, and it pays towards the idea of the family of man that flowered in the real world beyond Yoknapatawpha - if not in the state of Mississippi - in the years after Faulkner's death.

One further dimension of Faulkner's narrative strategy that pays towards the mood of care and reconciliation derives from the speaking pace of the oral tale. The story of Grandfather's trip to Memphis comes out at Grandfather's pace of telling, which is quite unhurried, full of explanatory pauses and laced with humour. Within that very secure pace, whatever the tensions of guilt, exhaustion and excitement in the story, nothing can get out of hand for the listener, and manifestly, nothing did get all that much out of hand for Grandfather Priest, all those years ago. Faulkner's protective umbrella, fashioned out of multiperspectivity, grand-

fatherliness, and the pace at which the tale is told reaches over the physical and moral perimeters of the novel, and at the universal level it encompasses all rising generations. In the telling of the tale, however, young Lucius Priest wavers between illicit excitement, the guilt of disobedience and a surfeit of unsolicited knowledge, and for him the protective umbrella looks much more like a cloud of guilt and eventual punishment.

## 3

## Vivid Pictures

## Lucius 11 and Non-virtue

"There," [Grandfather] said at last. "That should have emptied the cistern. Now go and wash your face. A gentleman cries too, but he always washes his face." p.252.

Grandfather Priest, Lucius 11, is eleven in May, 1905 when he falls prey to what, fifty-six years later, he expresses as 'Non-virtue' (p.47). In view of Faulkner's vivid consciousness of evil in his novels, 'Non-Virtue' represents a quiescent and reparable strain. In this novel Non-Virtue is conjoined with forgiveness, restitution and return to 'Virtue', to form a positive, regenerative circle. As a pattern of the human conscience, it finds a correlative in Cass's explication in *Go Down, Moses* of the cycle of growth, decay and re-birth in nature<sup>7</sup>, and it is at a far remove from the bleak glories and blazing hells of Faulkner's Calvinist elect.



Temptation for Lucius takes the shape of his grandfather's prized Winton Flyer, and opportunity the shape of parental and grand-parental absence. Faulkner's four part pattern for the episodic stages of Lucius's fall into Non-virtue is repeated in more or less the same form across the novel. The voice of Grandfather-as-a-boy giving his version of the episode is heard first, followed by Grandfather with his. Grandfather then turns to his hearer (and by extension to the hearers of the re-told tale including the listening reader), and universalizes the episode with a small philosophical observation, which he subsequently leavens with a bit of humour:

So Grandfather and Grandmother were also going to the funeral. Which meant that...we...would have to be sent out to Cousin Zackary Edmond's farm...It meant ...that Father and Mother would be gone four days...It meant in fact what Boon had already told me twice by exuberant and still unbelieving inadvertence: that the owner of that automobile, and everyone else having or even assuming authority over it, would be three hundred miles away from it for anywhere from four days to a week. So all his clumsy machinations to seduce and corrupt me were only corroboration...He could have taken the car alone, and doubtless would if I had been incorruptible, even knowing that some day he must bring it back...Because come back he must... who knew nowhere else, to whom the words, names - Jefferson, McCaslin, de Spain, Compson - were not just home but father and mother both. But some frayed ragtag judgement...persuaded him at least to try me first, to have me by as a kind of hostage. And he didn't need to try, test me first. p.41

After the opening statement in the passage, a set of suppositions, *which meant...it meant...it meant*, represents Lucius's tentative survey of the new conditions surrounding the car. It is an independent survey during the course of which Boon's earlier *exuberant and still unbelieving* hints fall into place. In language suddenly become rhetorical, the voice of Grandfather gathers up his boyhood train of thought, confirms his own culpability along with Boon's, and extracts from the scene:

When grown people speak of the innocence of children, they don't really know what they mean. Pressed, they will go a step further and say, Well, ignorance then. The child is neither. There is no crime which a boy of eleven had not envisaged long ago. His only innocence is, he may not yet be old enough to desire the fruits of it, which is not innocence but appetite; his ignorance is, he does not know how to commit it, which is not ignorance but size. p.42

If the reader feels that he should pause before what is a quite profound and very interesting proposition arrestingly put, he gets no chance to do so, for Faulkner does not permit Grandfather to pause. Nor for that matter does Lucius 111 pause in his telling of the tale to his listeners, and so, since the implied assumption is that nobody blinks an eyelid, neither do we. Grandfather presses straight on into the action of the tale, and simultaneously leavens the homily with a bit of gentle humour: 'Grandfather and Father...were not going to wait until one o'clock to eat dinner, no matter who was dead' (p.42).

The word *corroboration* in *So all his clumsy machinations to seduce me were only corroboration*, from the first passage quoted above, linked to the same word in an earlier passage, helps to define the workings of Lucius's mind, and subtly underlines the differences between Lucius's cast of conscience and Boon's. Boon, protecting himself, needs to have Lucius as a *kind of hostage*:

That - the name New Orleans, not dropped so much as escaped into that context - should have told me all, revealed the whole of Boon's outrageous dream, intent, determination; his later elaborate machinations to seduce me to it should merely have corroborated.  
p.40

Here *corroboration* is used in its verbal form as the past participle of a pluperfect tense. This is a weak form and it refers merely to the existence in Boon's mind of Boon's *outrageous dream*. But in the later sentence, the word is used in its noun form. This is syntactically very strong, and it refers to the existence, **before** Boon sets out to *seduce and corrupt* him, of a very similar outrageous dream in Lucius's mind. The stronger form of the word opens up an edge of culpability in Lucius, and it absolves Boon as the primary agent of Lucius's corruption. At the same time of course, the word in either form implicates Lucius and Boon alike, and it mutely prefigures Lucius's taking of responsibility

for his own actions, which he does, explicitly, at the end of the paragraph: 'And he [Boon] didn't need to try, test me first' (p.42).

Boon takes Lucius to a piece of waste ground for an impromptu pre-dinner driving lesson. In this episode the humour and the homily precede the action, thus clearing the way for the grandson-listener's unimpeded view of Lucius's first wilful step into Non-virtue. Excitement overlays the guilt of taking the car in the narrative, and what moral edginess exists in Lucius is transposed in comic mode to an anticipatory picture of the uproar that Aunt Callie will create about Lucius's being late for the meal. Grandfather's voice intrudes into the driving lesson with some Tempest-laden observations about virtue, and the idea of a 'god or goddess whose charge virtue is'. He transfers the relatively minor aura of misdemeanour that has been evoked in the corroboration passages to the realm of universal humanity:

"So you see what I mean about Virtue? You have heard - or anyway you will - people talk about evil times or an evil generation. There are no such things. No epoch of history nor generation of human beings either ever was or is or will be big enough to hold the un-virtue of any given moment, any more than they could contain all the air of any given moment; all they can do is hope to be as little soiled as possible during their passage through it. Because what pity that Virtue does not - possibly cannot - take care of its own as Non-virtue does. p.47

This is another profound proposition. The effect of Grandfather's transfer is twofold. In the first place, it implicitly includes the child in the *no generation of human beings able to hold all the un-virtue of any given moment*, which makes him responsible for *hop[ing] to be as little soiled as possible*, and divests him of the innocence that Grandfather has already said no child possesses anyway. In the second place, and conversely, he is drawn into the company of those of whom Virtue would take better care if it were able to. All this can suddenly seem heavy going for the reader who is being asked, in effect, in the middle of a comic scene, to remind himself of his own moral parameters, but



Grandfather is doing no more than attempting to establish some guide-lines for his listener, and Faulkner is indicating to his reader at the same time what those guide-lines are. Grandfather's somewhat ironic observation that 'the goddess in charge of virtue seems to be the same one in charge of luck, if not of folly also' (p.46) is containable stuff for Lucius 111, listening and re-telling in 1961 within the umbrella of grandfatherly care. In the earlier scene of Lucius's contemplation of temptation, the humorous tailpiece cushioned for the grandson-listener what was not yet a misdemeanour, but in this scene Faulkner withholds the cushion of humour and leads straight into actual misdemeanour, Lucius's tissue of deliberate lies. Thus a gap is created between humorous cushioning and exposure of misdemeanour. As the episodes pile up, Faulkner increases this gap, and in the Memphis scenes he replaces exposure of Lucius's misdemeanours with exposure of Lucius to real crime.

To digress slightly in order to contextualize the moral parameters of the novel, Lucius 111 is re-telling a story the moral foci of which - deceit and prostitution - fall well within the possible range of human obnoxiousnesses, and from that elevation deceit of Lucius's variety, and prostitution of Miss Reba's (but not of Mr Binford's) are child's play. In the realm of child's play, which is where Faulkner is in this funny moral tale, the business of committing and repairing deceits, and the business of kinds of sexual relationship are articulated between the axes of Grandfather's wordly wisdom and Lucius's burgeoning maturity; lying and stealing are found to be less than irreparable, and Everbe's sexual habits are reformed by marriage to Boon. It is all delightfully uncomplicated in the end, but within the very simple moral poles of Virtue and Non-virtue that Faulkner is using, it works.

The goal at the end of Lucius's string of lies is the overnight possession of his grandfather's car. The lies are directed at adults of ascending status in his life, with Aunt Callie at the bottom, Ned in the middle, and the loco-parentis Cousins Ike and Zack at the top, and they are complemented by descending steps into Non-virtuousness. With Aunt Callie, Lucius can afford to start off by being very off-hand, if not downright rude: 'Dry up', he says to her. He follows through with a verbal version of the strategy - we have just come from a series of military metaphors - that attack is the best form of defence: 'Ain't dinner ready?', and then tells his lie, 'The automobile broke down. Boon fixed it' (p.48). The encounter with Ned, however, is a rout for Lucius. Ned asks awkward questions and Lucius retreats into, firstly, self-defence, 'I'm just telling you so you'll know where I am [supposedly fishing] and they won't blame you' (p.49), and then petty retaliation, 'And you'd better not let Father or Boss hear you calling him Boon Hogganbeck [without 'Mister' attached]'. Ned, of course, in the manner of setting a thief to catch a thief, knows a lie when he sees one. But gentle Cousin Ike McCaslin is a pushover, and because he is, the ease of the lie-telling has its backlash, and its premonition:

*I'm sick and tired of lying, of having to lie* Because I knew, realised now that it had only begun; there would be no end to it (p.56).

So far Faulkner has been dealing with his character's lie telling, and his strategy has been to alternate the telling voices and to move systematically into greater degrees of Non-virtue. He has also inlaid his passages concerning Lucius with recast, recurring, commonplace versions of the same nuclear idea: 'Non-virtue', 'primrose path', 'Faustus', 'who [Virtue] to the dedicated to Virtue, offer in reward only cold and odourless and tasteless virtue' (p.47), 'if I had sold my soul to

Satan for a mess of pottage, at least I would damn well collect the pottage and eat it too' (p.58). These work as any teacher's recapitulatory device, but as Lucius becomes involved in incidents increasingly outwith his control, Faulkner's strategy changes slightly.

In the journey sequence, Faulkner makes use of the road and the dust to make a broader moral point. A cloud of dust containing another automobile emerges from the direction of Memphis. To it are added the innocuous adjectives 'rapid' and 'mounting', and also a metaphysical dimension, 'a portent, a promise' (p.80). As the two cars pass each other the cloud becomes, in the nature things on roadways of 1905, 'giant'. It is also given an owner, 'our'. But the adjectives and the metaphors attached to the cloud are now enhanced with biblical echoing, 'one giant cloud like a pillar, a signpost'. The signpost, doing what it is supposed to do, not only points but is swept forward on the rhythms of the clause, 'a signpost raised and set to cover the land with the adumbration of the future'. The signpost takes in both *adumbration* and *future* and comes to settle on the irony, and the powerful cadencing of the final two clauses:

the ant-like to and fro, the incurable down-payment itch-foot; the mechanised, the mobilised, the inescapable destiny of America. p.80

Faulkner's sore, life-long distrust of the age of automation intrudes into the story, and reverberates into the future, but the sombre note is absorbed and over-ridden by Boon's bit of comic irony as Lucius takes over the driving wheel, 'Just don't get the idea you're a forty-mile-an-hour railroad engine' (p.80).

In Memphis, Lucius becomes more and more distanced from the familiar and the containable, and finds himself involved in a series of fast-



moving incidents, some of which are funny, and others nasty. Boon's fumbling effort to 'educate' Lucius about sex, for example, goes comically astray. His little supposition that Lucius has learned a lot in one day, 'how to drive...how to go to Memphis...even how to get...out of a mudhole' (p.88), and that tonight he is 'fixing to learn some more things' (p.89) comes to grief in the example of the mudhole. Boon's use of a literal mudhole to explain the figurative one of the brothel works as a piece of comic inadvertence, but at the same time, from the points of view of the three 'mature' participants to this tale, Grandfather, Lucius 111 and the reader, the figure of the mudhole is an appropriate one, for both kinds of mud wash off, leaving the muddied ones, if not lily white, then certainly knowledgeable about mudholes.

The courtesies and rules of conduct learned within his own home stand Lucius in good stead during Mr Binford's dinner-time regime. If Mr Binford's trade is prostitution rather than liquor, one feature, his eyes, reminds us of Popeye in Sanctuary. Popeye's habit of 'put[ting] his eyes'<sup>8</sup> on people is correctly perceived by Horace Benbow, out of Horace Benbow's adult knowledge of gangsters, as malevolent, but Mr Binford is being appraised by a boy without judgemental experience, so that the best Lucius can manage is to observe 'that the first thing you noticed about him was his eyes because the first thing you found out was that he was already looking at you' (p.90). The codes that apply in the Priest household enable Lucius to withstand, calmly and politely, Mr Binford's harassment:

"No sir... I don't drink beer."  
 "Why?...You don't like it or you can't get it?"  
 "No sir...I'm not old enough yet".

Mr Binford does not like refusals. He tries to push Lucius:

"Whiskey, then?"

"No sir...I don't drink anything. I promised my mother I wouldn't unless Father or Boss invited me."

The word 'Boss', with its underworld connotations, interests Mr Binford briefly, then he returns to his own form of bullying:

"But your mother's not here now...You're on a tear with Boon"...

"No sir...I promised her."

Since he cannot move Lucius, Mr Binford shifts his ground, very nastily over-reaches, and promptly invites retribution at the hands of Miss Reba armed with 'the whiskey bottle in one hand and three glasses in the other':

"I see...You just promised her you wouldn't drink with Boon. You didn't promise not to go whore-hopping with him."

Mr Binford's behaviour offered to the eleven year old child within the story is entirely reprehensible and almost unbelievable, but within the terms of Grandfather's 'preparation' (p.85) of a fifteen year old it becomes more credible if no less objectionable.

The sour comedy of this scene gives way to the cruel torment of the dinner table. In Mr Binford's debasing of the not-so-young prostitute, 'lady, girl', as Lucius thinks of her, the reader understands the evil net of prostitution, but Lucius sees only a more basic human condition, one that reminds the reader of the force of 'family' in the book:

It wasn't that she was old, like Grandmother is old, because she wasn't. She was alone. It was just that she shouldn't have had to be here, alone, to have to go through this. No, that's wrong too. It's that nobody should ever have to be that alone, nobody, not ever.

p. 93

He struggles to understand something he has never come across before, and he renders it in terms of loneliness. To him at this point Miss Reba's establishment is still only a kind of hotel, albeit of a kind new to him.

Faulkner is moving towards the revealing central episode, in which Otis links money with sex, sex with Miss Corrie, and her with money. Faced, in the character of Otis, with yet another hard to quantify life picture, Lucius settles inadequately for, 'There was something wrong with him.' (p.91). Throughout the episodes concerning Otis, who makes Grandfather's figure of Non-Virtue seem innocent indeed, the reader and Grandfather (and implicitly, Lucius 111 as well) are at one in seeing exactly what is wrong with Otis, so that a powerful, concerted, single viewpoint comes into operation that, in turn, enhances the idea of the protective umbrella. But none of the characters can help Lucius because the action, up to the fight, is all in his mind, and when he is given by Otis a 'peephole' (p.133) view of prostitution, with Miss Corrie as star performer, it is done precisely when he is at his most tired and where he should be most safe, that is to say, in bed. Immediately before Otis's revelations about Miss Corrie's trade, in a moment of anticipatory dread, Grandfather's and Lucius's voices merge in a kind of lament. Their voices project into the frontal plane of the landscape with choric intensity, over-riding the re-telling voice, and carrying the innocent and tragic rhythms contained in the passage:

I wanted my mother. Because you should be prepared for experience, knowledge, knowing: not bludgeoned unaware in the dark...I was just eleven remember. There are things, circumstances, conditions in the world which should not be there but are, and you can't escape them...But they should arrive with grace, decency. I was having to learn too much too fast, unassisted; I had nowhere to put it, no receptacle, pigeonhole prepared yet to accept it without pain and lacerations. p. 131-2

Truly, we pity the child. But our pity is the measure of Faulkner's success, for he postulates an extremity in order to achieve proper focus on Lucius's rite of passage. The boy is innocent, and exposed, yet out of what he has learned from within the familial umbrella, he is able to cope with one of life's nastier kaleidoscopes. And quite clearly, Grandfather, in telling the tale to his grandson, has no intention of



waiting for either 'Circumstance' or 'Fate' to do the preparing of the new generation of Priests.

Without the words to articulate his emotions, Lucius attacks Otis for his description of Miss Corrie at work. Otis draws a knife on him, and the rumpus brings Boon and Miss Corrie. From the reader's point of view, the scene is both frightening and poignant. The sense of poignancy derives partly from the reader's stance as a mature adult, from his ability to see beyond the nastiness of the narrative material and to absorb the child's point of view, and partly because this is a scene midway through a series underkeyed by aspects of sexual morality, so that in a sense the reader is prepared for it. Otis is worse than Lump Snopes, for his ambitions range further, and arguably worse than Popeye because he is shown as so corrupt so young. On the other hand, Popeye corrupts Temple Drake completely (or until Faulkner resurrects her in *Requiem for a Nun*), whereas Lucius escapes with a cut hand, a lot of unsolicited sexual knowledge, and his sensitivities badly bruised. Faulkner makes explicit both the fight and the underlying reason for Lucius's extreme violence, so that the image in the reader's mind contains a powerful double perspective:

I was hitting, clawing, kicking not at one wizened ten-year-old boy, but at Otis and the procuress both: the demon child who debased her privacy and the witch who debauched her innocence.  
p.133

Lucius fights Otis, as Everbe says, 'for me' rather than 'over me' (p.135), and he sets in train the reformation out of which she and Boon marry and produce, in time, young 'Lucius Priest Hogganbeck' (p.254).

Ned's trading of the Winton Flyer for the racehorse opens up a new narrative strand, cuts the link with home, extends the overnight trip to Memphis by three days, and moves the action to Parsham. In another series

of fast moving events, new characters appear. Lucius comes to understand the vicious circle of prostitution composed of Miss Corrie's need to earn money to live, Butch's blackmailing of Boon, and Miss Corrie's paying off of Butch with sex in order to free Boon. Miss Reba upstages Butch, Butch upstages Boon, Mr Poleymus the constable sorts out both Boon and Butch, and the negro Uncle Parsham takes Lucius under his wing. Plans proceed for the horse race that will recover the Winton Flyer, and despite the hand cut in defense of Miss Corrie's honour, Lucius, under Ned's instruction, works hard at becoming a jockey. By this stage of the novel, Lucius is safe again, if not safe at home, and if not at the behest of Boon, pre-occupied with Miss Corrie.

As Butch makes Boon's kind of Non-virtue seem innocent, Possum Hood (Uncle Parsham) stands alone as a figure of Virtue, and as a haven for Lucius. Faulkner's pattern of voices returns to the original order in the scene of Lucius with Uncle Possum. In the exchanges between the two, Uncle Possum gets Lucius talking about home, lets him cry all over him, takes him fishing, and gives him the option of going home on the ninety-fourth. The negro family's anticipating of Lucius's needs and feelings falters momentarily on a point of courtesy. As on the one hand Lucius is unwilling to displace Lycurgus from his bed, so on the other he is happy to sleep beside Uncle Possum. The negroes' hesitation derives from convention, but Lucius's request is based on grandfathers, and his not minding those who snore. Lucius falls asleep thinking about going home, even if

nobody likes to be licked, but maybe there are times when nobody can help being;  
that all you can do about it is not quit. p.210

Grandfather's voice takes over with his version,

Maybe I was just too little, too young; maybe I just wasn't able to tote whatever my share was, and if they had had somebody else bigger or older or just smarter, we wouldn't have been licked,

then abstracts for his listener,

You see? like that: all specious and rational; unimpugnable even, when the simple truth was, I wanted to go home and just wasn't brave enough to say so, let alone do it,

and Lucius wakes to the voice always associated with comedy, and in this instance with hope of success also, Ned's.

Faulkner's resolution is as prone to strained co-incidence as the rest of the unlikely tale, for during the races Grandfather's grandfather, Lucius Priest 1 ("Boss"), arrives hotfoot, hears Lucius's and Ned's and Boon's stories, and later takes them home. But in the solid and coherent arena of moral welfare grandfatherly wisdom plays a final major role. Lucius's father, like Quentin Compson's, although less so, falls short in the area of helping, advising or disciplining a son. Both parties recognize that punishment is due. Grandfather's voice, turning to Lucius 111, defines the problem: 'If all that I had done was balanced by no more than that shaving strop, then both of us were debased' (p.251). Whereas no grandfather figure is present to help Quentin Compson and his father, Lucius's grandfather knocks on the cellar door beyond which Lucius and his father are in a state of 'impasse', and enters. With superb psychological insight Lucius 1 gets rid of father without reducing him, sits down, and waits for Lucius 11 to begin his confession.

Lucius's confession turns on the very simple but very important matter of eleven year old truthfulness, but the implicit message is a advisory one for the fifteen year old hearing the tale: "Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It's too valuable...Live with it...Yes



you can...A gentleman always does" (p.252). Faulkner brings the circle of fall, guilt, penance and restoration full circle with Lucius tears, and with Grandfather 1's practical injunction, "Now go and wash your face", he closes the matter of Lucius 11's fall into Non-Virtue; and closes the whole novel on Lucius's unknown reaction, a year later, to the name of Boon's and Everbe/Miss Corrie's new baby, 'just another baby, already as ugly as Boon', Lucius Priest Hogganbeck.

## Footnotes for Chapter 9

1. Elizabeth M. Kerr, *William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha: "A Kind of Keystone in the Universe"* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), p.198.
2. William Faulkner, *The Reivers*, first pub. Random House (New York, 1962). this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970) p.122. Further references to this edition in this chapter are given after quotations in the text.
3. John Kenny Crane, *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens*, (London, AUP, 1988), pp.292, 293.
4. *William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha: "A Kind of Keystone in the Universe"*, p. 357.
5. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, first pub. Yale University Press (New Haven), 1963; this ed. (1972) p.366.
6. Eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, *Lion in the Garden; Interviews with William Faulkner* (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p.255.
7. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, first pub. Random House (New York), 1942; this ed. (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 179.
8. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, first pub. Cape and Smith (New York), 1931; this ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Modern Classics, 1984), p.7.

## Conclusion

This thesis began with some vivid pictures and a fascination with the literary landscapes evoked by William Faulkner. Despite the vast amount of critical work on Faulkner, it seemed to me that I had something to offer. In the course of researching and writing the thesis, the thought occurred from time to time that in face of ever new and exciting ways of looking at literature, my approach was not merely simple, which was desirable, but also simplistic, which was not. Yet the idea of landscape, if it could be formalized and made to work as a critical medium, afforded access to a range of perspectives simultaneously holdable and individually examinable. This seemed to me to justify the idea. At the same time, in the course of writing, I came to feel that had I possessed more than a fleeting knowledge of stylistics, I could have put the techniques to good use. As it was, Michael Toolan's succinct and Faulkner orientated book *The Stylistics of Fiction* did not come to hand until too late to be of help here.

For some considerable time, the ongoing work had no viable critical frame, for while the discovery and explication of the vivid pictures in Faulkner looked back to similar discoveries in the stories and literature of childhood, this pleasurable co-incidence scarcely constituted a method. Two sets of observations external to the work on Faulkner, similar in order but very different in kind, opened up a line of approach. As a nursery teacher, I observed four year olds 'seeing' vivid pictures in heard stories. I listened to these pictures being described, amplified, and sometimes translated into other real and imagined dimensions. As a tutor of first year undergraduate students, I observed much dependence



on plot, imagery, and characterisation, a fair amount of fumbling over point of view, and the existence of a mixed bag of terms, 'narrative', 'language', 'marxism', 'feminism', uneasily lumped together as style. The ability to visualize, to conjure, and to imagine had apparently given way to a set of conceptual templates by means of which novels had to be cut up. To keep tight shut the Pandora's box of methodological disputation that lies between the existence of vivid pictures in the minds of one group and the apparent absence in the other, I say no more than that these sets of observations, along with my own vivid moments of experience, form the nucleus from which the present critical method was developed.

In practice, the method seems to lend itself to expansion or simplification. The work on Faulkner presented here offers opportunities for further development. For example, the scene in Narcissa's parlour in *Sanctuary* leads into exploration of the public, as opposed to the private figure of Horace Benbow. The appearance of Mannie in *Go Down, Moses* leads back to Sam Fathers's tales of the Old People, and forward to the funeral gathering for Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, and pictures of Ned and Boon in *The Reivers* look to an explication of their positions in the Southern world of the novel beyond the enclosed environment of the Priest household. Possible developments within novels aside, choices also had to be made regarding inclusion or omission of whole novels. Even with an eye to Faulkner's stylistic development, which suggests the inclusion of both novels, *As I Lay Dying* gave way to *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* to *Light in August*. The Town was set aside with reluctance. I suspect that in a way different but as taxing, the interplay of multiple narrators in *The Town* challenges the critical method as much as do the complementing landscapes and the ideological linkages of *The Wild Palms*.

A simplified version of the critical method, applied to *The Town*, might run as follows. The impressionistic landscape consists of the physical town of Jefferson in 1927, with the preceding eighteen years of Snopes 'footprints' gradually brought into chronological relief through the account of Snopes activities given by Charles Mallison. Society at large is also the town according to fourteen year old Charles. He makes of it a happier place than other Jeffersons, if one less aware of the dangers of Snopesism than are the self-appointed Snopes-watchers, Charles, Uncle Gavin Stevens, and V.K. Ratliff, think it ought to be. The action concerns Gavin's effort to get eighteen year old Linda Snopes far enough away from Jefferson to be outwith Flem's orbit of influence. The value systems operate as a crusade against Flem Snopes's acquisitiveness, which becomes all the more dangerous with Flem's increasing social and economic respectability. Flem is perceived as a threat to the fabric and well-being of the community.

The title of the novel, like that of the first Snopes novel, is self-explanatory. Each of the twenty-four chapters bears at random the capitalised name of one of the three narrators, CHARLES MALLISON, GAVIN STEVENS, V.K. RATLIFF. The chapter ratio of 10, 8, and 6 respectively, indicates not so much the dominant voice as the dominant tone of the novel. Where Flem Snopes is concerned, all three narrators are fallible, added to which their habit of commenting on one another's appraisals of Flem's activities, as well upon the activities themselves, gives rise to additional speculative perspectives. Where in *The Hamlet*, V. K. Ratliff's competent objectivity functioned as a recognizable channel for the reader's viewpoint, in *The Town* no such channel exists, so that the reader is in almost the same position as the characters. The effect is probably to make the reader more conscious of Faulkner's technical dynamics. In as much as he keeps Eula in the background, and fails to

articulate the shock of her suicide more clearly, Faulkner underplays the major dramatic event of the novel, but at the same time, the underplaying places the event correctly and precisely in the overall thematic structure, for Eula is and always was, a pawn in Flem's game of acquisition.

Having said that Faulkner keeps Eula in the background, she is nevertheless the crucial link character, and enough information about her is given by means of Gavin Steven's observation of her demeanour in the scenes at home and in the office to make her a possible centre of interest for the kind of detailed explication undertaken in the body of the thesis. Scenes in the Mallison household, Linda's dinner visit for example, might make possible starting points. An interesting but potentially complex starting point is V.K. Ratliff's comment about Gavin Stevens's missing 'it' (Chapter 11). Explication would involve, I think, a detailed backtracking through Gavin Stevens's consciousness, and an appraisal of Charles Mallison's apprehension of Gavin Stevens's consciousness. Such an route would lead to Flem's respectability, and it would show how Faulkner works out the stages of his characters' thinking, and as importantly, it would lead into *The Mansion*, with its blocked, character centred structure, and what we might call sub-contracted narrators in the first and second blocks, "MINK" and "LINDA".

In its whole state, the thesis leans towards an interpretation of Faulkner's projection of moral values. This was not particularly my intention, since a major part of my interest surrounds his technical harnessing of the vivid pictures. In the process of writing, that which I half-expected to happen did, for despite the framework that I considered flexible, some of the novels responded better than others. *The Wild Palms* gave the most problems. The two separate landscapes given by Faulkner



notwithstanding, the novel yet constitutes one whole entity, and the single, integrated landscape that the reader forms from his reading must take shape on new ground. Attempting this novel again, I might proceed somewhat differently, by first identifying the two separate impressionistic landscapes, and then creating a rigorously quantified ideological landscape. The process of so quantifying might entail continuous and detailed reference to both stories, and probably also, in order to verify the values Faulkner projects, extended back reference, but it ought to simplify the analyses in Section 3.

*Go Down, Moses* presented fewer technical problems than I expected. In point of fact, the concatenation movement and the recurring motifs were of considerable help in the linking together of vivid pictures. I feel that the descriptive passages on the wilderness would have benefited from more detailed analysis, for despite their tendency to repetitiveness, I suspect that the slightly differing configurations of words accompany finer stages of Ike McCaslin's development than I have explored here. And quite clearly, Chapter 4 of "The Bear" yields vivid pictures enough for a separate thesis. The main problem with this novel was one of selection.

The critical method seems to have worked more or less satisfactorily with the remaining novels. I feel that had I not so treated *The Reivers* and *Light in August*, I would not have seen the crucial importance of the non-participating character, Lucius Priest 111, nor would I have achieved the distance of perspective that enabled me to see *Light in August* as a projection of a man beyond race. The interpretation given here is, of course, controversial. It seems to me to hold up well enough in the text as an undercover story, and it adds a dimension that is in consonance with Faulkner's love of masking strategies.

As more than one critic has said, Faulkner was an innovator, and his work challenging. However much he played down his abilities and his achievements, he was undoubtedly fortunate to come upon his home grown postage stamp of soil, steeped in beauty and tears, out of which he drew great landscapes of humanity. The privilege of exploring those landscapes remains with the reader.

The genealogical data given below is partly based on John Kenny Crane's tables in *The Yoknapatawpha Chronicle of Gavin Stevens* (London and Toronto: AUP, 1988), pp.278-298. Items not referred to in this thesis, for example, the Sartoris-Strothers connection, are omitted. A speculative date of birth of Lucius Priest 111 is given.

## SARTORIS

## Sartoris Parents

Wife = John Bayard I Virginia ("Aunt Jennie") = DuPre  
 (?-1851) (1823-1873) (1838-1862) (1840-1930) (1861) (?-1863)  
 :  
 (1871) (1874)  
 Husband = Daughter Wife = Bayard II ("Old Bayard") Daughter  
 (1849-1919)  
 John II = Lucy Cranston  
 (1875-1901)  
 (1919) (1917)  
 Narcissa Benbow = Bayard III ("Young Bayard") = Caroline White John III  
 (1893-?) (1893-1920) (1833-1918)  
 Benbow ("Bory") John IV  
 (1920-?) (1918-1918)

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## COMPSON

(1699-1783) Quentin MacLachlan I = Wife  
 Charles Stuart = Wife  
 Jason Lycurgus = Wife  
 (1778-?)  
 Quentin II, "Governor Compson" = Wife  
 (1795-?)  
 (1837)  
 "General" Jason II = Mrs Compson Bascomb = Danuddy  
 (1817-1900) (?-1898)  
 (1889)  
 Jason III = Caroline Bascomb Maury Bascomb  
 (1868-1912) (?-1933)  
 (1910)  
 Quentin III ?.....Candace "Caddy" = Sidney Herbert Head Jason IV Maury (Benjamin, "Benjy")  
 (1891-1910) (1892-?) (1893-1)  
 (1895-1935)  
 Quentin IV  
 (1910-?)



## McCASLIN EDMONDS BEAUCHAMP PRIEST

## McCASLIN

Eunice  
(?-1832)  
(100% Negro)

Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin = Wife  
(1772-1837) (1-1808)

Tomasina  
(1810-1833)  
(50% Negro)

(1860)  
Sophonsiba Beauchamp = Theophilus ("Buck") Amodeus ("Buddy") Carolina = Husband  
(?-1877) (1799-1869) (1799-1869)

Terrel ("Tomev's Turl")  
(1833-1888)  
(25% Negro)

Wife = Isaac ("Uncle Ike")  
(?-1921) (1867-1947)

Isaac Edmonds = Marv

## EDMONDS

Isaac Edmonds = Mary (McCaslin) ? Father's name

Alice = Carothers ("Cass")  
(1850-1897)

Sarah = Lucius Quintus "Boss" Priest  
(1853-?)

(1897)  
Louisa = Zachary ("Zack")  
(?-1898) (1874-1921)

Granddaughter  
of Tennie's Jim  
Beauchamp  
(15.63% Negro)

Son  
(1940-?)

## BEAUCHAMP

(Hubert and Sophonsiba pronounce their name "Bow-shomp")

## Beauchamp Parents

Hubert

Sophonsiba = Theophilus ("Buck") McCaslin  
(?-1977) (1799-1869)Isaac ("Uncle Ike")  
(1867-1947)

The Negro Beauchamps (who say "Beechan") take their name from their pre-Civil War owner:

	(1859)
Tennie Beauchamp = Terrel ("Toney's Turl") (McCaslin) Beauchamp	
(1838-?)	(1833-1888)
(100% Negro)	(25% Negro)

	(1866)		(1896)
Wife = James "Tennie's Jim"	Sophonsiba "Fonsiba" = A Preacher	Lucas O. C. McC.	Molly Worsham
(1864-?)	(1869-?)	(1874-?)	(1874-?)

Son = Wife	Daughter = Husband	Bobo	Daughter = Husband	Henry	George Wilkins = Nat
		(1886-?)		(1898-?)	(1923-?)

Daughter	Carothers ("Roth") Edmonds	Samuel ("Butch")	Child
	(1898-?)	(1914-1940)	

Son  
(1940-?)

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## PRIEST

## Priest Parents

	(1869)
Sarah Edmonds = Lucius Quintus Carothers ("Boss") I	
(1853-?)	(1847-?)

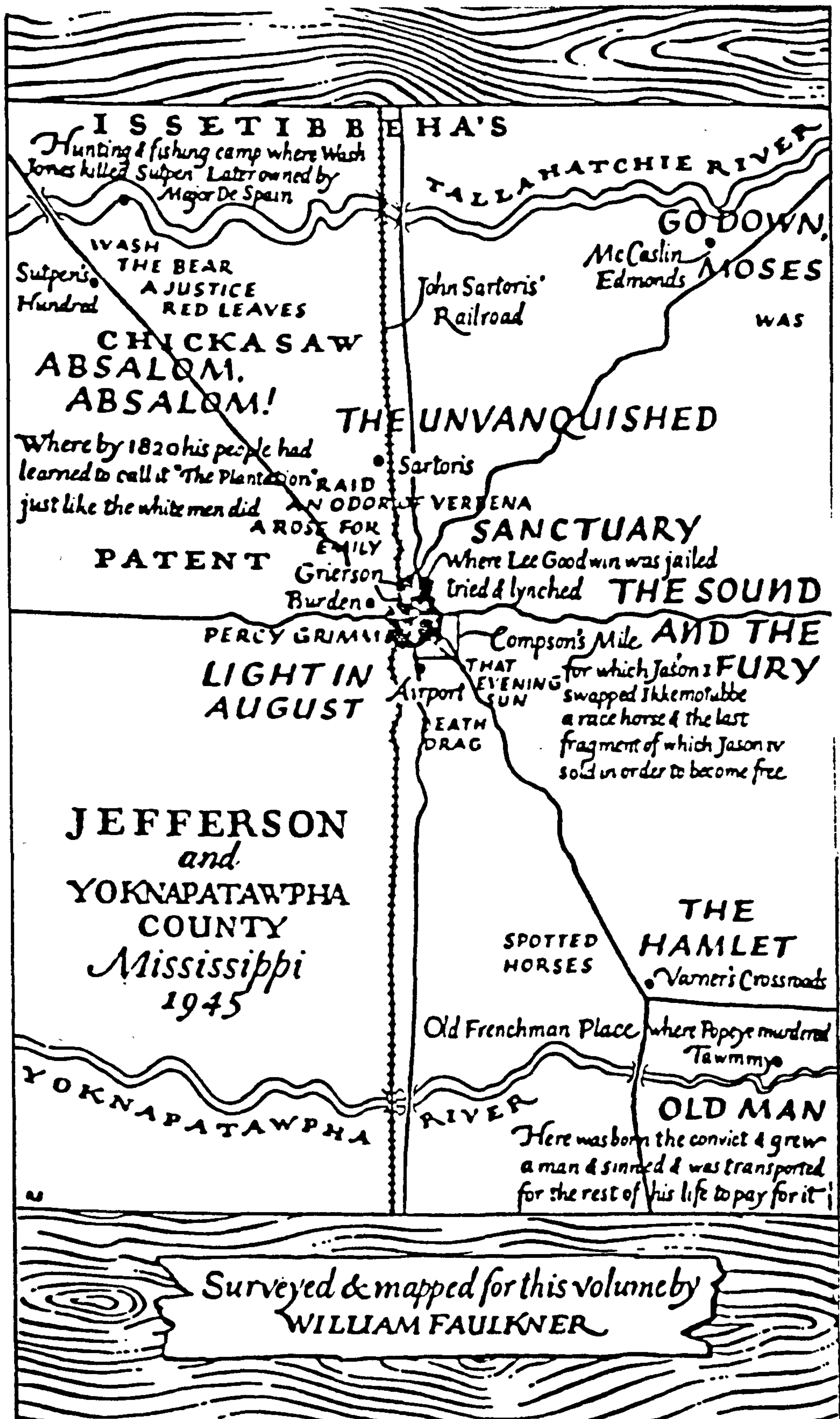
Maury = Alison Lessup  
(1870-?)

Wife = Lucius ("Loosh") II	Maury II	Lessup	Alexander
(1894-?)			

Son = Wife

Lucius III  
(1946-?)

## Yoknapatawpha County \*



\* From *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by Malcolm Cowley, first pub. Viking Press (New York), 1946; this edition 1974.



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