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The Moral Vision of William Faulkner as Revealed in the Yoknapatawpha County Novels

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THE MORAL VISION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AS REVEALED IN THE YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY NOVELS

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THE MORAL VISION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AS REVEALED IN THE YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY NOVELS

APPROVAL SHEET

DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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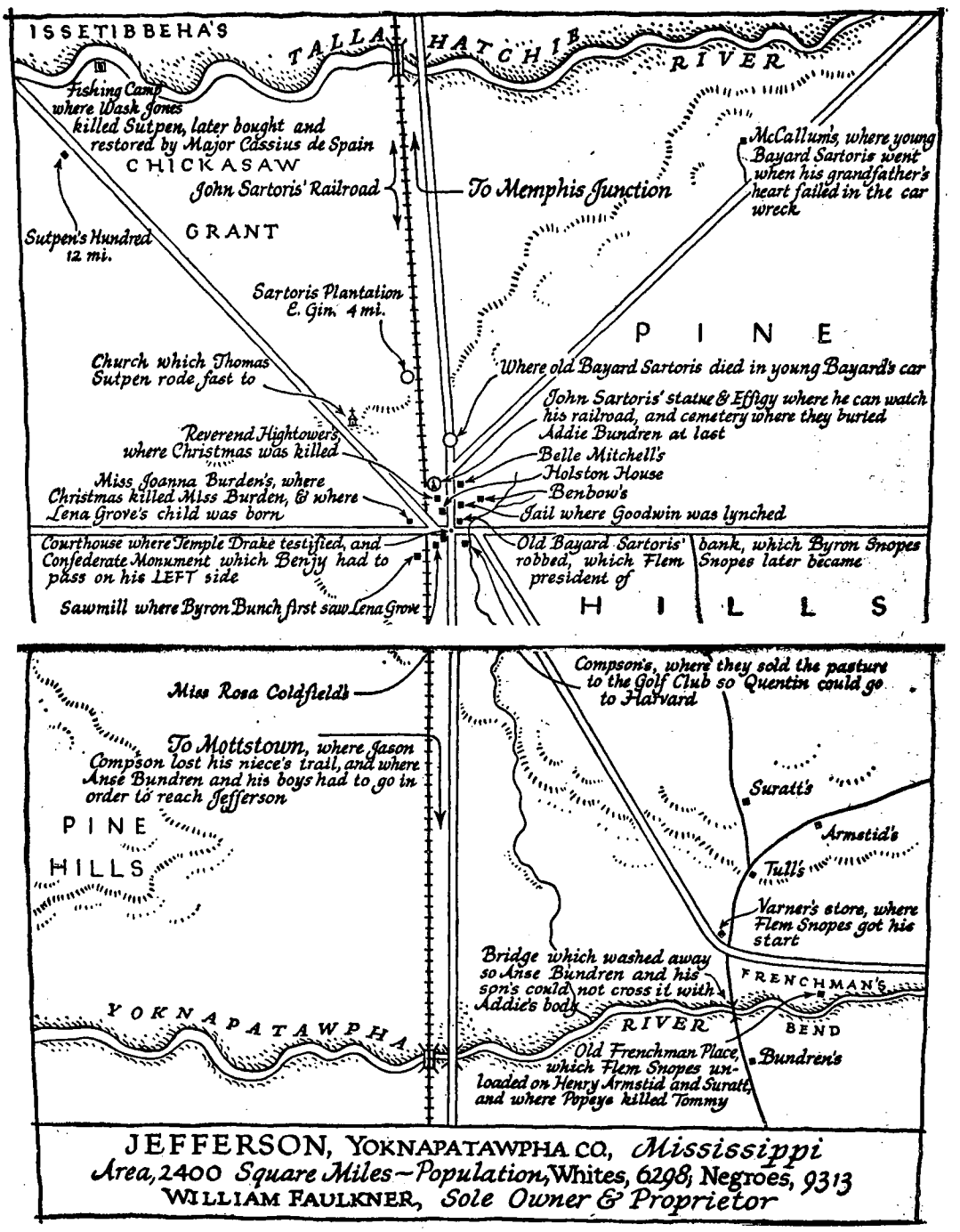
ISSETIBBEHA'S
TALLAHATCHIE RIVER
Fishing Camp where Wash Jones killed Sutpen, later bought and restored by Major Cassius de Spain
CHICKASAW
John Sartoris' Railroad
To Memphis Junction
McCallum's, where young Bayard Sartoris went when his grandfather's heart failed in the car wreck
Sutpen's Hundred 12 mi.
GRANT
Sartoris Plantation E. Gin. 4 mi.
PINE
Church which Thomas Sutpen rode fast to
Where old Bayard Sartoris died in young Bayard's car
John Sartoris' statue & Effigy where he can watch his railroad, and cemetery where they buried Addie Bundren at last
Reverend Hightower's where Christmas was killed
Belle Mitchell's
Holston House
Miss Joanna Burden's, where Christmas killed Miss Burden, & where Lena Grove's child was born
Benbow's
Jail where Goodwin was lynched
Courthouse where Temple Drake testified, and Confederate Monument which Benjy had to pass on his LEFT side
Old Bayard Sartoris' bank, which Byron Snopes robbed, which Flem Snopes later became president of
HILLS
Sawmill where Byron Bunch first saw Lena Grove
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To Mottstown, where Jason Compson lost his niece's trail, and where Anse Bundren and his boys had to go in order to reach Jefferson
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Tull's
Varner's store, where Flem Snopes got his start
Bridge which washed away so Anse Bundren and his son's could not cross it with Addie's body
FRENCHMAN'S BEND
YOKNAPATAWPHA RIVER
Old Frenchman Place, which Flem Snopes unloaded on Henry Armstid and Suratt, and where Popeye killed Tommy
Bundren's
JEFFERSON, YOKNAPATAWPHA CO., Mississippi
Area, 2400 Square Miles—Population, Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313
WILLIAM FAULKNER, Sole Owner & Proprietor

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND COLLECTION AND TREATMENT OF DATA

Until William Faulkner was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1950, he was largely ignored by the average American reader, who was at first puzzled by the "undeniable eccentricities" of Faulkner's style and the "apparent perversity of his ways of telling a story."[1] Many American readers and critics were surprised and puzzled by his acceptance speech[2] which contained the following statement:

> I decline to accept the end of man. . . . I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul; a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.[3]

He seemed to indicate in this statement that he had a

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[1]Lawrence Thompson, William Faulkner: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

[2]Ibid., p. 2.

[3]"Nobel Prize Address" quoted in Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner, Dorothy Tuck, editor (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), p. 244. See Appendix A for full text of speech.

serious purpose in his writings. This new light upon his intent and the fact that he was recognized in other countries caused many Americans to take a second look at his work to see whether he was really writing about the noble efforts of man.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to determine William Faulkner's moral vision through an analysis of his Yoknapatawpha County novels, reinforced by statements he made from time to time concerning his personal views.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

There is no lack of critical analyses of Faulkner's work. Much has been written concerning his style, themes, characters, symbolism, time, point-of-view, and unity. His novels have been the subject of much controversy. Randall Stewart, for example, calls Faulkner "one of the most profoundly Christian writers in our time,"[4] while others, such as J. B. Priestly, see no evidence of a moral standard in

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[4]Randall Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), pp. 141, 142.

his writings.[5] Several critics--Thompson, Anderson, Robb, Tritschler--have written briefly of his moral vision, but no one has done an exhaustive, systematic study of Faulkner's major novels, those concerning the Yoknapatawpha County saga, to determine (1) what system of values makes up his moral vision, (2) what factors may have influenced his personal belief, and (3) how he, as an artist, makes use of both good and evil in his writings to "create in his readers an awareness not only of conflicts but also of the possibilities for greater harmony through reconciliation of opposed drives in the human heart."[6]

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

William Faulkner has every right to be considered as one of the greatest American writers of our time.[7] Robert Penn Warren is quoted as saying that "the study of Faulkner is the most challenging single task in contemporary American

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[5] J. B. Priestly, Literature and Western Man (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 176.

[6] Thompson, op. cit., p. 176.

[7] William Van O'Connor, William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 9; and F. W. D. Dillistone, The Novelist and the Passion Story (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 92.

literature for criticism to take."[8] Although there has been little question in recent years about his importance, there have been many misconceptions concerning Faulkner's work. Perhaps the most important one arises from the failure of readers to recognize his moral vision, his system of values.[9]

Faulkner was not simply a regional writer as some critics claim. Although the setting of the Yoknapatawpha County novels is Northern Mississippi, he not only portrays life in the deep South, but he also dramatizes some of the most important universal problems.[10] He pictures the moral confusion of the modern world, lacking in discipline and a sense of purpose.[11] Properly interpreted, his works have meaning for man in every place and time.

Faulkner's novels usually deal indirectly with social

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[8]Charles R. Anderson (ed.), American Literary Masters (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), II, 1115.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Irving Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, Perry Miller, editor (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), II, 825.

[11]Robert Penn Warren, Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1935), p. 65.

injustice;[12] however, he is not so much concerned with the righteous zeal to uplift the oppressed as with man's struggle within himself.[13] He is not a crusader for community action. He repeatedly stated that he was writing, not simply about the South, but about people who want to do better than they can do, be braver and more honest than they can be--their struggles, failures, and occasional successes. All men--black or white, red or yellow--suffer the same anguishes, have the same follies and triumphs.[14]

To develop a serious and mature vision of human life, nothing is more effective than a story of courage and faith and sacrifice, the glorification of human effort and

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[12]One example of Faulkner's concern with social injustice is demonstrated in the following incident: Earl Wortham, an illiterate Negro blacksmith in Oxford said in a taped interview that Faulkner told him about his books and said, "'Well, I tell you, you all is good people and all, and I'm going to try to prepare a way for it to be easier on you than what it is been.'" When questioned about Faulkner's meaning he said, "So far as what that mean, I don't know."--Earl Wortham, "So I Could Ride Along With Him," Taped interview reproduced in William Faulkner of Oxford, edited by James A. Webb and A. Wigfall Green (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 168.

[13]Anderson, op. cit., pp. 1116, 1117.

[14]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences in the University of Virginia 1957-1958 (Charlottsville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 83, et passim.

endurance.[15] In the development of his novels, Faulkner not only glorifies human effort and endurance, but he also involves the reader almost to the point of devouring him. He wants the reader to participate not in the creative act alone, but in the moral act. Using the theme of the condition of man today and through the ages, he defines a moral consciousness which he expects the reader to share.[16]

In the development of his moral vision, Faulkner writes not about the effort of man to do good, but his struggle to be good. There is a vast difference in the two ideas. The former concerns the effort to reform the world and the latter the effort to reform one's self.[17]

Although many of his characters fail in their inner struggles, Faulkner contends that since man was created in the image of God with the power to choose between good and evil, he has the capacity to succeed, to endure, to prevail.[18] Because of this divine imprint, Faulkner believes

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[15]Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, p. 836; Dillistone, op. cit., p. 112; and Warren, op. cit., p. 68.

[16]R. W. B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint: A Critical Study (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1961), p. 199; and Anderson, op. cit., p. 1124.

[17]Anderson, op. cit., p. 117.

[18]Thompson, op. cit., p. 164.

that, although fate plays some part, man does have much to do with the outcome of his destiny and can usually win over the overwhelming forces which may seem to be against him.[19]

The assumption is made that a study of this kind will result in a greater appreciation of William Faulkner's works, particularly on the part of those who started with the wrong books--Sanctuary or The Sound and the Fury--and concluded that he wrote only horrific, sensational tales such as the former or that his style was too formidable to make the reading worth the effort such as in the latter.

IV. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was concerned with Faulkner's moral vision as revealed in the Yoknapatawpha County novels--Absalom, Absalom!; As I Lay Dying; Go Down, Moses; The Hamlet; Intruder in the Dust; Light in August; The Reivers; Requiem For a Nun; Sanctuary; The Mansion; Sartoris; The Sound and the Fury; The Town; and The Unvanquished. It did not include a study of Faulkner's style, his use of time, point-of-view, symbolism, themes, or characters, except as these techniques and devices related to his moral vision. Neither Faulkner's poetry nor his other novels and short stories were considered. Statements relating to his moral vision which

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[19] Ibid., p. 175.

Faulkner made in his lectures at the University of Virginia and in interviews were examined and related to the novels.

V. COLLECTION AND TREATMENT OF DATA

All of the novels under study were carefully examined for evidence of a unified moral vision. Biographies, periodicals, and reference books were analyzed. A study of Faulkner's informal conferences at the University of Virginia was made, as well as interviews made in Japan and other places. Criticisms, favorable and unfavorable, were read and presented.

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter II explains and clarifies "the curse of the South" as the term is used by Faulkner. Chapter III presents the various techniques--including his use of tragedy, humor, pathos, sensationalism, and horror--by which Faulkner portrays his moral vision. Chapter IV contains an examination of the moral qualities with which his characters are endowed, and the exemplification of them. Chapter V gives the summary and conclusions.

VI. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Moral vision. A writer's vision is simply his ideas

and feelings about life.[20] If his ideas and feelings concern or explore questions of right and wrong, "the universal verities," as Faulkner prefers to call them,[21] he may be said to possess a moral vision.

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[20] Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser, and Robert Penn Warren, An Approach to Literature (fourth edition; New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 9.

[21] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 197.

CHAPTER II

THE MYTH AND CURSE OF THE SOUTH

Critics have made many references to Faulkner's use of the Southern myth, his attitude toward his native land both in the legendary past and in the present and what he calls the curse of the South. This chapter will explain and summarize these ideas and the place they hold in Faulkner's moral vision as revealed in the Yoknapatawpha County saga. Some of Faulkner's ideas for a resolution of the problems resulting from the "curse" will be presented. These solutions will include both direct statements made by the author and inferences drawn through a study of the various characters and plots of the novels.

I. THE SOUTHERN MYTH

Definition of the myth. According to Irving Howe, the Southern myth "refers to a story or cluster of stories that expresses the deepest attitudes and reflects the most fundamental experiences of a people."[22] It concerns the proud ancestral glory of a homeland which insisted on working out its own destiny even though it meant heroically

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[22] Irving Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers in America, p. 829.

fighting a war which the South could not win. Following the loss of the war came poverty and squalor, a general mourning over the lost cause, and, in many cases, a loss of faith among the defeated.[23]

Faulkner examines this myth heroically and sometimes painfully. In fact, Howe says:

> He [Faulkner] has set his pride in the past against despair over the present, and from this counterpoint has come much of the tension in his work. He has investigated the myth itself; wondered about the relation between the Southern tradition he admires and that memory of Southern slavery to which he is compelled to return; tested not only the present by the past, but also the past by the myth, and finally the myth by that morality which has slowly emerged from this entire process of exploration. This testing of the myth, though by no means the only important activity in Faulkner's work, is basic to the Yoknapatawpha novels and stories, and from it comes his growing vision as an artist.[24]

In setting the past against the present, Faulkner sometimes writes in opposition to the myth, sometimes in acceptance of it. He often rejects the inherited tradition of the South[25] and writes <u>not</u> of the South, but of his vision of the

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[23]Irving Howe, <u>William Faulkner: A Critical Study</u> (second edition; New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 27, 28.

[24]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 29.

[25]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 26.

South.[26] Robert Penn Warren says:

> The fact is that he writes of two Souths; he reports one South and he creates another. On the one hand he is a perfectly straight realistic writer, and on the other he is a symbolist.[27]

Faulkner recognizes that arrogance was one of the cardinal faults of the Old South. This is best shown in the portrayal of Colonel Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!, but this fault also taints Colonel Sartoris in Sartoris, and the grandfather of the Reverend Gail Hightower in Light in August.[28] This fault helps to bring about the decline of the South, its economic failure, and its moral disintegration.[29]

Faulkner's feeling for the South. When asked how he felt about the South, Faulkner said:

> It's my country, my native land and I love it. I'm not trying--that is, I'm not expressing my own ideas in the stories I tell, I'm telling about people, and these people express ideas which sometimes are mine, and sometimes are not mine, but I myself am not trying to

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[26]Hamilton Basso, "William Faulkner: Man and Writer," Saturday Review, XLV (July 28, 1962), p. 13.

[27]Warren, op. cit., p. 59.

[28]Elmo Howell, "Reverend Hightower and the Uses of Southern Adversity," College English, XXIV (December, 1962), 86.

[29]Colonel Sutpen's arrogance, symbolic of that of the South, brought about his downfall. This will be discussed in Chapter III.

> satirize my country, I love it, and it has its faults and I will try to correct them, but I will not try to correct them when I am writing a story, because I'm talking about people then.[30]

Faulkner has been accused of hating the South because he has exposed the evil found there. But, as he said, he loved the South intensely. When asked by a Japanese interrogator why he could write such things about a country he loved, he replied that he wrote about its evil and baseness because he believed that writing only about the good would do nothing to change the evil. He said that "he had to make people angry enough or shamed [sic.] enough to want to redeem the evil."[31]

Quentin Compson in his conversation with his Harvard roommate, Shreve McCannon, at the end of Absalom, Absalom! best expresses Faulkner's own ambivalent feeling about the South. After explaining about the evil in the South, Shreve asks his roommate why he hates his own native section of the country.

> "I dont [sic.] hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. I dont hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron

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[30] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 83.

[31] Willard Thorp, American Writing in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 264.

> New England dark; I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it![32]

Faulkner's attachment may be one of tormented love, like that of Quentin's; but this ambivalent feeling of love and hate toward the South does not mean he has an admiration for it, and he probes the past for the causes of its failures.[33]

Significance of the South in Faulkner's chronicle. Since Faulkner grew up in the South, he knew the locale with "an intimacy beyond love or hate."[34] He used the locale and the people he knew best to write about people in general.[35] The social-economic-ethical principle of the South which Faulkner knew first-hand binds together the thirteen books in the Yoknapatawpha County saga.[36] This series of novels

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[32]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 378.

[33]Ursula Brumm, "Wilderness and Civilization: A Note on William Faulkner," Partisan Review, XXII (Summer, 1955), p. 349.

[34]Irving Howe, "In Search of a Moral Style," The New Republic, CXLV (September 25, 1961), 26.

[35]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 83.

[36]George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, editors (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 82.

not only dramatically portrays life in the deep South, but also dramatizes some of the most important problems of our times.[37] "The more severe Faulkner's treatment of the South," says Howe, "the more readily does one forget he is writing about the South."[38] The Unvanquished and Sartoris are among the milder books, while The Sound and the Fury is perhaps the most severe in its indictment of the South.[39]

Faulkner shows that Thomas Sutpen's racial attitude in Absalom, Absalom! is destructive of the very Southern culture of which it is a part. This same dream of magnificence, which is tainted by his attitude of racial superiority, is also typical of the United States as a whole and weakens our national culture.[40] The destructive attitudes of the South may be applied still further to include all countries of the world. All men suffer the same anguishes, have the same follies and triumphs.[41] Charles Anderson says:

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[37]Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, p. 825.

[38]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 7.

[39]Ibid.

[40]John Lewis Longley, The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner's Heroes (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 210.

[41]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 197.

> Though the South is Faulkner's subject, his theme is the condition of man today and through the ages. So Yoknapatawpha should not be taken as a county in Mississippi but as a microcosm of the modern world.[42]

II. THE WILDERNESS AND ITS EXPLOITATION

The curse of the South which eventually involved slavery and all the evils of man's inhumanity to his fellow man derives, at least in part, from the South's misuse of the land. Faulkner contends that had man used the wilderness in the way God intended when he entrusted it to man, many other problems might have been avoided.

Biblical themes. The heart or core of Faulkner's moral vision is found in the Biblical themes concerning the wilderness, the land, or nature in general.[43] In the beginning, according to the Bible, God created the earth and entrusted it to man for his use and safekeeping. He did not give it to man to own, buy, or sell.

In "The Bear" Faulkner allows Isaac McCaslin to explain his ideas concerning man's relation to nature:

> '. . . He told in the Book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and

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[42] Anderson, op. cit., p. 1124.

[43] Walton Litz, "William Faulkner's Moral Vision," Southwest Review (Summer, 1952), p. 200.

> peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread.'[44]

Almost from the beginning man violated God's trust and attempted to gain possession of the land. When man violated the terms of the stewardship, he was dispossessed from Eden. Isaac in his conversation with his cousin says:

> 'And let me say it. Dispossessed of Eden. Dispossessed of Canaan, and those who dispossessed him dispossessed him dispossessed, [sic.] and the five hundred years of absentee landlords in the Roman bagnios, and the thousand years of wild men from the northern woods who dispossessed them and devoured their ravished substance ravished in turn again and then snarled in what you call the old world's worthless twilight over the old world's gnawed bones, blasphemous in His name . . .'[45]

Throughout history this pattern continued, in Canaan, Greece, and Rome, man repudiating the terms of the covenant made with God and being dispossessed from Eden.[46] "The Bear" deals with the explanation of this fall of man and the resulting loss of innocence and poise.[47]

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[44]William Faulkner, "The Bear," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 257.

[45]Ibid., p. 258. [46]Litz, op. cit., p. 202.

[47]Howe, William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, pp. 91, 92.

Isaac explains in part how God gave man another chance by creating a new world:

> '. . . He used a simple egg to discover to them a new world where a nation of people could be founded in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another.'[48]

This new world, the South, which God had endowed with many natural resources stood as a refuge and sanctuary[49] "from that old world's corrupt and worthless twilight . . ."[50]

Problems concerning the Indians. In this new world, man again violated God's trust.[51] President Jackson established with the Chickasaws and Choctaws a treaty by which they would take land in Oklahoma in exchange for the land in Mississippi, but they had to leave the land or be treated worse than the Negro slaves. Faulkner says:

> I think that the ghost of that ravishment lingers in the land, that the land is inimical to the white man because of the unjust way in which it was taken from Ikkemotubbe and his people.[52]

The land was there to be used by the Indians, but it became tainted by "ownership" even before the white man gained possession of it. Isaac further states in his

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[48]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 258.

[49]Ibid., p. 259. [50]Ibid.

[51]Litz, op. cit., p. 202.

[52]Guynn and Hletner, op. cit., p. 43.

conversation with McCaslin:

> 'I cant repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe's to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation. Because it was never Ikkemotubbe's fathers' fathers' to bequeath to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instant Ikkemotubbe discovered, realised, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing.' [Italics not in the original.][53]

Litz says that the communal society of the Indians was violated by man (white man) causing the Indians to violate the land by greed even before the white man owned it. Man attempted to gain title to the land, ravished it, and enslaved his fellow man. In breaking the pattern of respect between man and nature, they left behind them "a land deswamped, derivered, and cursed by slavery as a seal of their sin."[54]

Faulkner's feeling for the wilderness. Faulkner's attitude toward the wilderness can be compared to that of James Fenimore Cooper. Although they are quite different in most respects, they both deal with the waste of the wilderness and man's greed. "The wickedness and waste of

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[53]Faulkner, "The Bear," pp. 256, 257.

[54]Litz, op. cit., pp. 202, 203.

the settlements" is one of Cooper's favorite phrases, especially in The Pioneers and The Prairie. Both Cooper and Faulkner present heroes who are "old, illiterate but wise, solitary, kinless, childless, without property, and are held by the others in the veneration of an almost extinct species."[55] More than Cooper, however, Faulkner felt deep sorrow over the rape of the wilderness.[56] He gives the reader a sense of the wilderness and his feeling for it in the use of such descriptive words as: "tremendous, brooding, impartial, omniscient."[57]

Faulkner explains his feelings concerning the ruining of the wilderness in these words:

> Well, of course the destruction of the wilderness is not a phenomenon of the South, you know. That is a change that's going on everywhere, and I think that man progresses mechanically and technically much faster than he does spiritually, that there may be something he could substitute for the ruined wilderness, but he hasn't found that. He spends more time ruining the wilderness than he does finding something to replace it, just like he spends more time producing more people than something good to do with the people or to make better people out of them. That that's to me is [sic.] a sad and tragic thing for the old days, the old times, to go, providing you have the sort of background which a country boy like me had when that was a part of my life.[58]

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[55] Brumm, op. cit., pp. 342, 343.

[56] Ibid., p. 346. [57] Ibid., p. 345.

[58] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 68.

Because of Faulkner's realization that the wilderness is being destroyed by the march of progress, he attempts in the stories in Go Down, Moses to reconcile what is left of the wilderness with society. As the big woods recede further and further and the days of the "big hunts" are disappearing, there is a very solemn feeling about the experience of the men who go to the woods to expiate the guilt of the town. "It [the wilderness] forms an Eden co-existing with society but never mistaken for society by those who come to it for purification and refreshment," explains Howe.[59]

John Longley shows a parallel between the experience of men such as Isaac McCaslin, Roth Edmonds, and Will Legate who continue to retreat to the wilderness in "Delta Autumn" and the ideal existence of Huck and Jim on the raft or Thoreau at Walden Pond. These hunters all have "more than one life to live and other duties to perform," and the time comes for them to return to society.[60] The important thing is for them to apply the code of the wilderness to the society of men.

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[59]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 92.

[60]Longley, op. cit., p. 80.

Man's relation to nature and to man. The lesson to be learned from the wilderness and the original covenant between man and God in the beginning of time is an "ideal harmony between man and nature."[61] In "The Bear" Faulkner says "that a right attitude toward nature should lead one to the right attitude toward human beings, white and black."[62] The moral flaw of the beginning of the South is the corrupting of the uncomplicated virtues of the Indians by placing a property or money evaluation upon nature and upon the Negro slaves.[63]

Ursula Brunn says:

> The McCaslin saga is another of Faulkner's representations of the story of the South: the ownership of the land by one man (the white man) under exclusion of another (his black cousin) results in tension and guilt, and this is the famous 'curse' of the South.[64]

A sense of harmony with the past and a feeling of harmony with nature should cause a "reconciliation with God's entire creation."[65]

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[61] Lits, op. cit., p. 201.

[62] William Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University Press, 1954), p. 34.

[63] Ward L. Miner, The World of William Faulkner (New York: Pageant Book Co., 1959), p. 132.

[64] Brunn, op. cit., pp. 347, 348.

[65] Lits, op. cit., p. 205.

III. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NEGRO

Slavery. Faulkner relates the exploitation of the land to the exploitation of man.[66] Man's lust of possession, his spiritual pride brought on the evils of slavery. The New World was tainted from the beginning.[67] Isaac McCaslin said that Grandfather and his kind brought this evil nature "from that old world's corrupt and worthless twilight" as though the sails were blown by a tainted wind.[68]

Robert Penn Warren explains the curse in this way:

> It is the slavery, not the Negro, which is defined quite flatly as the curse, and the Negro is the black cross in so far as he is the embodiment of the curse, the reminder of the guilt, the incarnation of the problem. The black cross is, then, the weight of the white man's guilt . . .[69]

The guilt of the white man lies in the arrogance and haughty ancestral pride, based on wrong and shame, which cause him to assert superiority over the Negro simply on the basis of his race, failing to recognize virtue and talent. "It is in the failing to recognize the dignity of man in the Negro, because

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[66]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 91.

[67]Lewis, op. cit., p. 206.

[68]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 250.

[69]Warren, op. cit., p. 75.

he must be made to act like a nigger in order to preserve the myth of superiority. . . ."[70]

According to the Southern myth, the plantation owners who ruled Yoknapatawpha County before the Civil War had a tradition based on justice, honor, decency, integrity, and kindness to the weak. But this did not extend to the social inferiors--the Negroes. In Faulkner's stories of this period of history, Buck and Buddy McCaslin were the only examples given of men who, in any sense, extended the code of honor to the Negroes.[71]

Thomas Sutpen's ambition kept him below the usual Southern code of ethics, but it made him successful until an outside force ruined him.[72] His refusal to recognize the simple human values of the Negroes dramatically represents the failure of the pre-Civil War plantation owner.[73] Because of this collective guilt the Civil War came "like a flaming sword and ended the paradise of the noble but guilty past."[74]

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[70]Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction in the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 180.

[71]Miner, op. cit., 133. [72]Ibid.

[73]Donald M. Kartiganer, "Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: The Discovery of Values," American Literature, XXXVII (November, 1965), p. 291.

[74]C. Hugh Holman, "William Faulkner: Man and Writer," Saturday Review, XLV (July 28, 1962), p. 90.

Faulkner does not treat lightly the injustice done to the Negro. Hyatt Waggoner explains one of the several moral lessons which the novel Light in August makes clear:

> To the region in which it is laid it says that its racial injustice is a sin of the most terrible proportions and consequences (not merely a mistake or an accident--there is no moral relativism here or anywhere else in Faulkner) but also an opportunity for moral action.[75]

After Isaac McCaslin repudiates his inheritance to expiate the sins of his forefathers, he seeks out one of the black descendants of Old Carothers McCaslin bearing a part of the legacy left to the old man's Negro son and his descendants. He finds the girl, Fonsiba, married to the ignorant, shiftless Negro minister who had come to the commissary for her five months before. The Negro is sitting amidst the desolation of a run-down farm in Arkansas reading a book through glasses which contain no lenses. The following anguished scene occurs:

> 'Dont you see?' he [Ike] cried. 'Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can--not resist it, not combat it--maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples' turn will come because we

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[75] Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 113.

have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Dont you see?'[76]

Two examples of the inhuman treatment of the Negro slaves occur in the comic short story "Was." Both of these incidents concern Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, the two brothers who, in "The Bear," are so concerned about the treatment of the Negro slaves that they move into a one-room log cabin which they built themselves, putting all the slaves into the big plantation house.[77] They know there is something wrong with slavery, and this is their attempt to right the wrong. But in daily life they think of the Negro on the level with the dog or the animals they run or hunt.[78]

When one of the slaves, Tomey's Turl, runs off to Mr. Hubert Beauchamp's place in the next county to see his girl, Tennie, as he does about twice a year, Buck and Buddy mount their horses and set the dogs on him, chasing him as they would a fox. Uncle Buck tells his brother, "'You stay back where he wont [sic.] see you and flush. I'll circle him through the woods and we will bay him at the creek

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[76]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 278.

[77]Ibid., p. 262.

[78]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., pp. 39, 40.

ford.'"[79] When questioned about their actions Faulkner explained, "'They would have run him all fair with the dogs and if he could escape, could kill the dogs and get away, good for him. If he couldn't, it was too bad.'"[80]

Still not having solved the problem of Tennie and Tomey's Turl since neither family wants to buy the other half of the romance, they decide to settle the "nigger business" with a poker game. The account of the result of this game played for human lives is recorded in the ledger which Ike reads in the commissary many years later:

> Tennie Beauchamp 21 yrs Won by Amodeus McCaslin [Uncle Buddy] from Hubert Beauchamp Esqre Possible Strait against three Treys in sight Not called 1859 Married to Tomys Turl 1859 [.][81]

Miscegenation and mulatto problem. Throughout the history of the Yoknapatawpha County plantations runs the problem of miscegenation. As Isaac McCaslin reads the ledgers in the commissary, as recorded in "The Bear," he learns of the shameful practice of his grandfather whose miscegenation with his slave girls extended even to the

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[79]William Faulkner, "Go Down, Moses," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 8.

[80]William Faulkner, "Was," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 57.

[81]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 271.

evil of incest when he beget a child on his own mulatto daughter, Thomasina. Chester Eisinger says that the guilt of the white man "is in the miscegenation in the South that makes the white wrong the Negro, even when love and remorse enter in."[82]

The mulatto, as a result of miscegenation, is always the victim of both races. In fact, Howe says:

> . . . The mulatto occasions some of Faulkner's most intense, involuted and hysterical writing. As a victim the mulatto must be shown in all his suffering, and as a reminder of the ancestral phobia, must be made once or twice to suffer extravagantly. . . . On the mulatto's frail being descends the whole crushing weight of Faulkner's world.[83]

The black descendants of Carother's McCaslin--including Lucas Beauchamp, Charles Bon and his son, and Joe Christmas--are some of the more outstanding mulattoes who appear in the Yoknapatawpha novels.[84]

Innocence of children. Although race prejudice is often referred to as something which one inherits, Faulkner shows through the depiction of the relationship between very young Negro and white children that they have a sense of equality until they are conditioned by society.

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[82]Eisinger, op. cit., p. 180.

[83]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, pp. 128, 129.

[84]These characters and their problems are discussed more fully in Chapters III and IV.

The difference which Ringo and Bayard in The Unvanquished recognized between themselves was based on experience rather than race. Admittedly, Bayard at one time was superior to his Negro friend, Ringo, but it was because Bayard had actually seen a railroad. In The Sound and the Fury the white and Negro children play together, and one of the favorite visiting places of the Compson children is the cabin of Dilsey, the Negro maid. Even Sutpen as a young boy is free from racial feeling. Chick Mallison and his "nigger," Aleck Sander, in Intruder in the Dust have a comfortable relationship transcending their races. Molly Beauchamp, a Negro, and Miss Worsham (later called Miss Eunice Habersham in Intruder in the Dust) grow up almost as sisters in Go Down, Moses. One final example is Roth Edmonds and his Negro friend Henry Beauchamp who were both nursed by the same black woman (Mollie Beauchamp). Until "the moment of pride," they ate together and slept together on the same pallet. Then Roth refuses to share his bed with Henry in shame and guilt when he realizes the difference in the races. A similar experience comes to each of the white children mentioned as they become indoctrinated in the "superiority" of the white race. It is too late to recall the old feelings. "Forever and forever--the terribleness of this estrangement recurs in Faulkner's work," says Howe, "not simply as a

theme, but as a cry of loss and bafflement."[85] Man continues the longing for the time of the innocence of children "when he could live as a brother with his Ringo or Henry Beauchamp . . . and not yet wince under the needle of self-consciousness."[86]

Faulkner's changing attitude toward Negroes. Faulkner's attitude toward the Negro gradually changes from one of benevolence and paternalism, "from amusement over idiosyncracies to a principled concern with human status, from cosy familiarity to a discovery of the profound estrangement of the races."[87] In Sartoris Joby, Simon, and Caspey are treated as comic Southern stereotypes. Caspey comes home from the war with questions of freedom which Faulkner fails to treat seriously.

In The Unvanquished this stereotyped response gradually changes to an awareness that the "easily knowable" psychology of the Negro is not so accessible to the white man as the latter would like to believe. Loosh deserts his master for the Northern lines. Faulkner seems to ridicule and hardly take seriously Loosh's and Caspey's rebelliousness.

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[85] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, pp. 117, 118.

[86] Ibid., pp. 118, 119. [87] Ibid., pp. 126, 127.

In both of these early novels, however, there are "overtones of doubt and uneasiness."[88]

In his later novels Faulkner's attitude changes to a serious consideration of the Negro's problem as a person in his own right. In fact, Howe says:

> In The Sound and the Fury there is an important modulation of attitude toward the Negro. While Dilsey's strength and goodness may be acceptable to traditional paternalism, she gradually assumes a role not quite traditional for the Southern Negro; she becomes toward the end of the book, an articulate moral critic, the observer with whom the action of the novel is registered and through whom its meanings are amplified.[89]

By the time Faulkner writes Intruder in the Dust he is able to present a Negro on his own with dignity and assurance. Although Lucas Beauchamp is friendless, "he is not a form of behavior but a person, not 'Negro' but a 'Negro.'"[90]

In Faulkner's fiction, however, despite the changing attitude toward the Negro, he recognizes the inherent problem. Howe asserts that:

> . . . in Faulkner's fiction, beneath its worried surface of attitude and idea, there is also a remarkable steadiness of feeling for the Negro. His opinions change, his early assurance melts away, his sympathies visibly

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[88] Ibid., pp. 121, 122.

[89] Ibid., p. 124.

[90] Ibid., p. 129.

enlarge; but always there is a return to one central image, an image of memory and longing.[91]

IV. RESULTS OF THE OLD ORDER AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW SOUTH

The Civil War. Faulkner contends that the destruction of the Old South by means of the Civil War was God's retribution against a society which had not been erected on a strong morality.[92] Lind explains the war as a "fratricidal conflict caused by denial of the Negro."[93] "The South lost the war," explains Miner, "because of its own moral weakness."[94] Faulkner insists that the South is responsible for its own degradation, and it must suffer the consequences for its loss.[95]

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[91]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, pp. 116, 117.

[92]Lits, op. cit., p. 203.

[93]Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!" William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, editors (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 300.

[94]Miner, op. cit., p. 134.

[95]Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 13.

Moral decay of the South. "Justice in Faulkner," says Brunn, "is always brought on by self-inflicted punishment."[96] Man finally punishes himself because mere exploitation (either of nature or of fellow human beings) is always avenged "because the attitude which commits the crime itself leads to its own punishment," according to Warren.[97]

Absalom, Absalom! presents a good example of a man who brings about his own self-destruction. In Sutpen's refusal to recognize his son, Charles, he denies him the same consideration that he set out to find for himself as a boy when he was told by the "monkey-nigger" in the butler's uniform to go to the back door of the mansion.[98] Sutpen forgets the humiliation he suffered when human dignity was denied him and thinks that by acquiring land he can gain power over his fellows. As a result the War destroys his land, and one of the least of the men he owns destroys him.[99] "Sutpen's self-destruction," asserts Swiggart,

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[96]Brunn, op. cit., p. 349.

[97]Warren, op. cit., p. 72.

[98]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 37.

[99]Mary Cooper Robb, William Faulkner: An Estimate of his Contribution to the American Novel (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1963), p. 34.

"reflects the South's failure to reconcile its moral pretensions with social realities."[100] Many of Faulkner's novels deal not only with an individual's fall but with the moral decay of a family or a society. The Sound and the Fury records the moral disintegration of the Compson family, representing the decay of the South and the universal decay and shame.[101]

The New South. Following the Civil War, even before the beginning of the Reconstruction, a New South emerged. This new society is characterized by (1) a disintegration of moral values, (2) impersonal relations between men resulting in isolation and bewilderment of sensitive men,[102] and (3) the mechanization and abstractness of modern life which separate men from the land and from each other.[103] One of Faulkner's later novels, The Hamlet, concerns "the decay of an old tradition which identifies power with the Land and the rise of a new order in which human conduct is perceived

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[100] Swiggart, loc. cit.

[101] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 47.

[102] Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers in America, p. 831.

[103] Litz, op. cit., p. 203.

and regulated strictly in terms of money."[104] Explaining the social significance of another novel, Howe says:

> [As I Lay Dying] serves as an image of the basic Southern experience. The wretched Bundrens, carrying their mother's putrescent corpse through the summer sun, wandering across the torpid land, defeated by obstacles both induced and inescapable, torn by obscure inner rivalries--all this suggests the condition of the homeland itself; unable to dispose of or come to terms with the dead.[105]

Longley explains a communal immorality of the modern world resulting in violence which injures the mind and spirit of oneself or others:

> In the modern world this violence sometimes degrades humanity in the service of the machine. This "machine" may be any mechanism: actual machinery which destroys and denudes the wilderness or over-farms the fields; a mechanistic process, such as banking; or the whole complex structure of finance capitalism which dares not recognize the existence of human hopes and fears.[106]

The word which Faulkner uses to describe this New South is "Snopesism." The land ultimately falls into the hands of the Snopeses who neither love it nor work it. They only use it for commercial transaction. Even though Isaac McCaslin repudiates the land in "The Bear" in expiation of the sins of his fathers, he does not want it to fall into

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[104] Paul Levine, "Love and Money in the Snopes Trilogy," College English, XXIII (December, 1961), 197.

[105] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 56.

[106] Longley, op. cit., p. 131.

the hands of the Snopeses. Faulkner, like Isaac, regards such a fate with strong disapproval. The Snopeses wear out the land and move to another piece, gaining only the hatred of their neighbors.[107] Howe explains:

> Perhaps the most important thing to be said about the Snopeses is that they are what comes afterward: the creatures that emerge from the devastation, with the slime still upon their lips.[108]

Morals are incomprehensible to the Snopeses. They are scavengers who fill the social vacuum left from the decay of the old order. "Snopesism, then," he says, "is the face of the New South as it combines the worst of the past and the present. . . ."[109]

Post-bellum aristocracy does not represent in Faulkner's works the best of the South. The only values are the money-values of the Snopeses, including men like Jason Compson (the Compson "Snopes" in The Sound and the Fury). Modern-day materialism, the tragedy of the modern South, is the key-note of the aristocracy.[110]

According to Litz, Sanctuary presents the most damning portrayal of life in the contemporary South.[111] To

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[107] Robb, op. cit., p. 34.

[108] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 80.

[109] Ibid., p. 84.

[110] Miner, op. cit., p. 135.

[111] Litz, op. cit., p. 203.

explain the meaning of the novel as the New South, Litz says:

> Popeye is the symbol of modern materialism and mechanization, impotent because of its abstract qualities, unable to perpetuate anything but evil. Temple is the New South, which should have been the "temple" and "sanctuary" of morality, but which instead has inherited the sins of previous generations. She is "raped" by modern materialism and then seduced by it, until in the end--while Horace, the southerner with a moral vision which he is too weak to implement, looks on helplessly--she turns against the justice and endurance which are the South's only hope and destroys them.[112]

V. EXPIATION OF THE CURSE

Recognition of evil. A lesson in pity, humility, courage, and pride which comprise what Faulkner repeatedly calls the "honorable" can be learned from the wilderness where a glimpse of immortality may be seen. The "honorable" emerges the instant that "the existence of evil is recognized."[113] Along with Isaac McCaslin's initiation into virtue in the wilderness in "The Bear" comes the vision of evil.[114] His knowledge of the greed and lust that have ravished the land and enslaved a people forms an important

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[112] Ibid., p. 204.

[113] Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 196.

[114] Ibid., p. 202.

part of his moral growth under the tutelage of Sam Fathers.[115] Years later as he goes past the graves of Old Ben and Lion and Sam Fathers, he muses upon the immortality of those who respect the harmony of God's creation and abide by its rules. He sees a snake, the Biblical symbol of evil, lying near his feet. It becomes a reminder to him of the innate evil in man which brought about the curse, but he is not afraid. He has confronted the evil, recognized it, and brought himself into harmony with the natural world.[116] This is the first step in the expiation of the curse of the South, but it is only a step toward, not the solution to, the problem.

Moral responsibility of individuals. After the war many Southerners recognize the evil, but rather than attempting to solve the problem they seek various means of escape. Colonel John Sartoris of Sartoris seeks death. Jason Compson of The Sound and the Fury drinks,[117] his wife retreats into hypochondria, Quentin commits suicide, and Caddy becomes a nymphomaniac. In protest against the war,

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[115] Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Jr., "Faulkner's Point of View and The Chronicle of Ike McCaslin," College English, XXIV (December, 1962), p. 170.

[116] Litz, op. cit., p. 206.

[117] Miner, op. cit., p. 134.

Goodhue Goldfield nails himself up in an attic room where he dies of starvation. None of these people contribute to the expiation of the evil inherited from the past.

Faulkner implies that individual responsibility and social conscience rather than a change in the social system is the positive resolution of disharmony.[118] Faulkner, of course, does not deny that change and responsibility play a large part in the external life of man; he blames much of the suffering of today on the actions of the earlier generations. But this does not lessen man's individual responsibility. In fact, Lits says:

> Man's freedom is an inner moral one. It is the responsibility to endure and attempt to expiate the evils which he inherits from the past. Then, secure in the knowledge that this free choice will improve the lives of succeeding generations, he will be able to reconcile himself to his fate and prevail over it.[119]

After Isaac McCaslin with Sam Fathers in "The Old People" has seen the phantom buck in the woods, he is trying to explain it to his cousin Cass. He does not expect him to understand or to believe the story, but Cass says, in part:

> "Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back into it. For grieving and suffering too, of course, but still getting something

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[118] Ibid., p. 152.

[119] Lits, op. cit., p. 201.

> out of it for all that, getting a lot out of it, because after all you don't have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that's shame."[120]

For those who abide by the rules of stewardship and are true to their own private moral vision, there is the satisfaction of a life without shame.[121]

Many years after this experience when Isaac is seventy years old, he encounters in "Delta Autumn" another example of miscegenation in the old McCaslin family line. Roth Edmonds, the great-great grandson of L. Q. C. McCaslin, has had a child by the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim. Repudiating her, Roth has left some money with Isaac for him to give to her for the child. As Isaac confronts the girl, he realizes that he is dealing with a different kind of Negro than the ones a generation before, the crimes against whom he had tried to expiate with a cash legacy. Although she is educated and intelligent with a sense of dignity and responsibility, he realizes that she is a Negro and that he is a white man who can act only within the limitations of his society. Yet he recognizes that she must be treated as an individual, equal

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[120] Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 186.

[121] Litz, op. cit., p. 205.

with the white man. To make good his insistence that the girl take the money, he presents to her for the child General Compson's old hunting horn as a recognition of her as an "heir to the best traditions of the South."[122] He is still trying to live a life without shame.

As Isaac gives her the money, he makes a gesture of recognition by touching her hand ("He didn't grasp it, he merely touched it . . .")[123] which represents a violent break with Southern tradition. But the Negro has to do her part, too, by moving toward him before the gesture can be completed.[124]

Faulkner tries to do justice to the Negro. In Intruder in the Dust he seems to be saying that if the South escapes the curse, the Negro himself, along with the young and the compassionate old, must do his part.[125] In the characterization of Lucas Beauchamp who can accept both the past and the future, the racial conflict is momentarily resolved.[126]

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[122]Michael Millgate, William Faulkner (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 80.

[123]William Faulkner, "Delta Autumn," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 362.

[124]Millgate, op. cit., p. 79.

[125]Willard Thorp, op. cit., p. 266.

[126]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 180.

Social conscience of the South. The problem of the Negro is a spiritual or moral one that cannot be solved by legislation.[127] Faulkner says that if Lincoln were here today he might amend his statement, "'This nation cannot endure half slave and half free'" to "'This nation cannot endure containing a minority . . . held second class in citizenship by the accident of physical appearance.'"[128] He says that the Negro may not be capable of more than second-class citizenship. If not, the South must take the Negro in hand and teach him responsibility, get him ready for first-class responsibility. She must teach him to be worthy of being equal and free, teach him to defend and hold to his freedom when he has won it. According to Faulkner, this is not a problem for the North to solve. In fact, the North does not even understand the problem.[129]

Faulkner further says that the white man is responsible for what the Negro is today, and book-learning will not solve the problem:

> What he [the Negro] must learn are the hard things--self-restraint, honesty, dependability, purity; to act

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[127] Warren, op. cit., p. 78.

[128] Gwynn and Bletner, op. cit., p. 209.

[129] Ibid., pp. 209, 211.

> not even as well as just any white man, but to act as well as the best of white men.[130]

If the South does not solve this problem, trouble will not only continue in this country, but America will suffer from international embarrassment.[131]

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[130] Ibid., p. 211.

[131] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES USED TO PORTRAY HIS MORAL VISION

Faulkner once said that any writer has only one story to tell and that he spends his life trying to find different and better ways of telling it. This story is really an attempt to reveal his own way of looking at human experience, his own moral vision.[132] Faulkner explains in his statement in the Nobel prize address that his moral vision "concerns the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself. . . ."[133] A complete picture of his moral vision can be seen only through a study of his works as a whole.

An examination of his Southern protestant background and the influences of Christianity on his work will help to explain his understanding of and the use in his novels of such moral qualities as justice, truth, pity, and compassion which he discusses in his address to the 1951 graduating class of Oxford, Mississippi.[134]

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[132] Thompson, op. cit., p. 159.

[133] Tuck, op. cit., p. 244.

[134] Robb, op. cit., p. 2. Reprinted from The Christian Science Monitor under the title "An Author's Adjuration," October 4, 1951, p. 11. (See Appendix B for full text of the speech.)

Since Faulkner's private vision is essentially tragic,[135] a discussion of the meaning of tragedy, both classic and modern, and a study of his tragic novels and heroes as they contribute to the revelation of his moral vision will also be contained in this chapter.

Tritschler asserts that an "examination of his works will reveal . . . that technique and theme may not be separated in the best of literature. . . ."[136] Faulkner repeatedly explains the use of his various techniques and devices by comparing them to the tools which a carpenter uses to build a house. "But he doesn't--the carpenter don't build a house just to drive nails," he says. "He drives nails to build a house."[137] This chapter will enumerate and explain some of the "'tools'" which Faulkner uses to construct his moral vision.

I. CHRISTIANITY

His Christian background and its influences on his works. Puritanism plays an important role in Faulkner's

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[135] W. M. Frohock, The Novel of Violence in America (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1950), p. 164.

[136] Donald Tritschler, "The Unity of Faulkner's Shaping Vision," Modern Fiction Studies, V, 337.

[137] Gwynn and Bleotner, op. cit., pp. 50, 51.

work, not just as applied to religious and sexual obsessions, but to habits of thought residual from the South's long Protestant tradition.[138] Although Faulkner is not basically a Christian writer,[139] Christianity forms the background of his Southern past.[140] He is both fascinated and repelled by his early background of Protestantism. While he is influenced by the Calvinistic teachings of his youth, he is not enslaved by them.[141] Howe says that "one of the more important sources of his moral outlook is an imperiled version of Christianity." [Italics not in the original][142]

When asked about his Christian views, Faulkner replied:

> Why, the Christian religion has never harmed me. I hope I never have harmed it. I have the sort of provincial Christian background which one takes for granted without thinking too much about it, probably. That I'm probably--within my own rights I feel that I'm a good

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[138]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 14.

[139]Randall Stewart, unlike most other critics, considers him to be "one of the most profoundly Christian writers in our time."--Stewart, op. cit., pp. 141, 142.

[140]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 149.

[141]Thompson, op. cit., p. 162.

[142]Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, p. 836.

> Christian--whether it would please anybody else's standard or not I don't know.[143]

On another occasion in an interview in New York City, Faulkner admitted being influenced by Christianity. He said:

> "No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word. It is every individual's code of behavior by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants to be, if he followed his nature only. . . . It shows him how to discover himself, evolve for himself a moral code and standard within his capacities and aspirations, by giving him a matchless example of suffering and sacrifice and the promise of hope. Writers have always drawn, and always will draw, upon the allegories of moral consciousness, for the reason that the allegories are matchless. . . ."[144]

Christian beliefs. Faulkner accepts the elementary Christian virtues,[145] rejecting the ideas which do not suit his purpose, just as he does in the case of the Greek religious beliefs.[146] While he could not be considered an orthodox Christian, many of his beliefs are drawn from the Christian doctrines, as the Nobel prize address clearly

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[143] Gwynn and Bleotner, op. cit., p. 203.

[144] Clarence W. Wachner, et al., (eds.), Contemporary American Prose (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 310.

[145] O'Connor, William Faulkner, p. 10.

[146] Thompson, op. cit., p. 165.

indicates.[147] Killinger says that while Faulkner refutes most of the Calvinism of his childhood he still relies strongly on the doctrines of original sin and predestination. One example of his use of these Calvinistic doctrines is demonstrated in his depiction of the murder of Joanna Burden by Joe Christmas in Light in August. Joe knows he is going to kill her and actually speaks of the act in the past tense before it is committed.[148]

Thompson says that instead of accepting the Christian belief concerning the redemption of man as a gift of God made available through the atoning death of Christ on the cross, Faulkner "reinterpreted the word 'salvation' to make it represent man's humanistic concern for saving the life of the race. . . ."[149] However, through Nancy Manigoe, dope fiend, prostitute and murderess, as the voice of morality in Requiem for a Nun, Faulkner comes closest to orthodox Christianity.[150] In this novel Faulkner seems to be

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[147]See Appendix A for text of Nobel prize address.

[148]John Killinger, The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 60.

[149]Thompson, op. cit., p. 164.

[150]Robert D. Jacobs, "William Faulkner: The Passion and the Penance," South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, editors (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 174.

stressing the "need for redemption from sin, and of the redemptive power resident in Christ."[151]

The Christian experience which Faulkner treats most sympathetically and significantly in his entire saga is the Easter service in The Sound and the Fury which Dilsey and Benjy attend in the Negro church. There is no indication of condescension or ridicule in the presentation of the highly orthodox sermon or the congregation's reaction to it. While Faulkner's beliefs are not always orthodox, he does believe that God is still in business.[152]

Christ-figures. Since Faulkner's early Christian experience made such an impact upon him, it is not surprising to see a number of Christ images in his works. Faulkner's Christ symbols, however, do not portray a complete picture of Christ. Each reflects only one aspect of Christ. Benjy Compson represents the innocence and sorrowfulness. Ike McCaslin becomes a carpenter "because 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

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[151] Hyatt H. Waggoner, "William Faulkner's Passion Week of the Heart," The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., editor (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 314.

[152] Thompson, op. cit., p. 164.

McCaslin. . . ."[153] Joe Christmas represents the scapegoat, suffers bitter agony, and is put to death by soldiers.[154]

Joe Christmas in Light in August, is the first Christ-figure to appear in Faulkner's novels, but as Jacobs says, "he is Christ as victim, the test of our humanity, not Christ the redeemer."[155] Holman gives a good discussion of the parallels between Joe Christmas and Christ, although he concedes that "he is not Christ; he is a rebelling, and suffering creature, embittered, angry, and almost totally lacking in love."[156] He says that the events around Joe's birth and death are more parallel to those of Christ, while those of the middle period are not symbolically clear. He is born to an unmarried woman, his father hidden to him and to the world. He is found on Christmas Day on the steps of an orphanage and is named Joe Christmas, the initials being the same as those of Jesus Christ. At the age of five he is spirited away out of the state to save him from the orphanage

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[153] Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 309.

[154] Stewart, op. cit., pp. 139, 140. (All facts presented in this paragraph, except the quote from "The Bear," are taken from Stewart.)

[155] Jacobs, op. cit., pp. 151, 152.

[156] C. Hugh Holman, "The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August," PMLA, LXXIII (March, 1958), 161.

authorities. After his return, he is adopted by the McEacherns who ceremonially wash his feet. The stern, harsh Calvinism of the McEacherns parallels the Pharisaism of Christ's day.[157]

Joe Christmas faces three temptations during his early manhood, all of which he rejects. First, he refuses the food and the feminine pity which Mrs. McEachern offers him. Second, he refuses the Negro girl who offers herself to him. And third, he refuses to allow his foster-father to buy his allegiance to the orthodox Calvinist beliefs through the gift of a heifer.[158] After an obscure middle period during which there is little parallel to Christ, Joe, at the age of thirty has no home. He works three years in Jefferson with Brown (or Burch) who tries to betray him for a thousand dollars. Faulkner calls them "master" and "disciple."[159]

During the last week of his life many events remind one of the Passion Week of Christ. On Tuesday, the day Christ cleansed the temple, Joe enters a Negro church, and with a table leg he clears the church of its worshippers. On Thursday (the day of the Last Supper) he invades a Negro

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[157] Ibid., p. 157.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

cabin, and after having refused food from others, he eats the meal which is before him. The next day, which he learns by frantic questioning is Friday, he sets his face toward Mottstown, entering the town in a mule-drawn wagon. There he is questioned by a mob. He never answers nor denies when he is questioned, and the crowd begins to cry for his death. Eventually the mob leaves him to the "law" which moves him to Jefferson for trial where he is guarded by gambling soldiers. There he is killed and mutilated.[160] In these and other ways Joe Christmas is like Christ, but "in his ineffectual death there is no salvation. His is a futile and meaningless expiation of his 'guilt.'"[161]

Faulkner says that he did not deliberately use the Christ symbolism in Joe Christmas. It was just there in his background, and he used it as a tool to tell his story of a man's inner struggles. He says that the Christ story is one of the best ones he knows, and because he has heard it so much, he draws on it from time to time in his writing. He insists that he writes primarily about people, with symbolism always secondary.[162]

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[160] Ibid., pp. 157, 158.

[161] Ibid., p. 161.

[162] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 117.

Failures of Christianity. Throughout Faulkner's works three weaknesses of Christianity stand out: the harshness of puritanism, the professionalism of the church, and individual and institutional hypocrisy.

In Light in August Joanna Burden's abstract morality which prompts her to try to help the Negro, not out of kindness but "out of an obligation to carry out God's design for a depraved world"[163] is a result of the effects of a puritan father who had tried to beat the love of God into his children. His religion was not of love, but duty. He read the Bible to the children in Spanish, a language they could not understand and preached to them a hellfire and damnation doctrine.[164] Miss Burden believes that God has put a curse on the Negro. Her father had taught her that the Negroes were "a race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins."[165] She sees the Negro "as a black shadow in the shape of a cross."[166]

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[163] O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner, p. 76.

[164] Swiggart, op. cit., p. 134.

[165] William Faulkner, Light in August (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 221.

[166] Ibid.

Eupheus Hines, the grandfather of Joe Christmas, hates him because of his Negro blood. "He becomes," says Holman, "a kind of perverted and evil divine father for Joe, and he pursues passionately his desire to destroy his grandson."[167] McEachern, Joe's harsh puritan foster-father is no better. He tries to force religion on Joe with a flail. He thinks that love is a weakness.[168] All Joe Christmas' life he had been taught the Calvinist concept of crime and punishment. When someone (usually women) shows compassion, Christmas feels that his code has been violated. In the end he kills Miss Burden because she tries to help him. He has thought of himself as an arch-criminal.[169] Waggoner says:

> The career of Joe Christmas constitutes a rebuke to the community, a measure of its sin of racial arrogance and of its corruption of Christianity from a religion of love and life to one of hatred and death, from Jesus to Doc Hines and McEachern.[170]

Faulkner cares little for Christian institutions. For him Christianity must be wrenched from institutionalism and

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[167] Holman, "The Unity of Faulkner's Light in August," p. 160.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Jacobs, op. cit., p. 160.

[170] Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 106.

must survive, if at all, through personal saintliness.[171] Ward Miner explains that "in Light in August the force which destroys Christmas, Hightower, and Miss Burden is institutional Christianity."[172] Hightower's view of the church expressed just before his death shows that he realized that it was the professionals within the church that were controlling it.[173]

Despite the many evidences that Faulkner accepts the Christian moral code, he hates the hypocrisy of many professing Christians. O'Connor says, "He despises stiff-necked and literal-minded righteousness. . . ."[174] A good example of this attitude can be found in Sanctuary in which "Southern fundamentalist Protestantism is pictured as self-righteous moralism."[175] While Lee Goodwin is awaiting trial for a murder he did not commit, the pastor of the local Baptist church uses Lee as a text to preach against him not only as a murderer but a "polluter of the free Democratic-

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[171]Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, p. 836.

[172]Miner, op. cit., p. 143.

[173]O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner, p. 61.

[174]O'Connor, William Faulkner, p. 38.

[175]Waggoner, "William Faulkner's Passion Week of the Heart," p. 94.

Protestant way of life in Yoknapatapha County as well. . . ."[176] He recommends that both he and his common-law wife, Ruby, be burned at the stake as a moral lesson to their baby. The church members force the hotel manager to turn the woman and her sick child out on the streets because they are contaminating the hotel by their sinful presence.[177]

II. TRAGEDY

Tragic vision. According to Murray Krieger, "'tragedy' refers to an object's literary form, 'the tragic vision' to a subject's psychology, his view and version of reality."[178] Tragic literature frequently dwells on the exceptional man, or a normal man converted to an exceptional man through the extremity in which he lives. The tragic vision never concerns man in a normal or routine situation. In fact, Krieger says:

> The tragic vision is . . . a vision of extreme cases, a distillate of the godlessness which, once induced by crisis, purifies itself by rejecting all palliatives. And the tragic visionary, by the stark austerity of his ontological position and of his dramatic position in the fable, is the extremist who--despite his rich

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[176] Killinger, op. cit., p. 94.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Murray Krieger, The Tragic Vision (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 20.

> intermingling with the stuff of experience--finds himself transformed from character to parable.[179]

Classic view of tragedy. Tragedy is very difficult to explain, and critics disagree on its meaning. According to Longley, "there is no final definition of tragedy; there never can be."[180] Although there is agreement concerning certain attributes of tragedy and tragic hero, the classic definition of tragedy usually comes back to that one given by Aristotle:

> "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper katharsis, or purgation of these emotions."[181]

In other words, to happen at all, tragedy must contain katharsis, the ultimate criterion, which is a "condition of the beholder [or reader], not the writer."[182]

A classic hero must be human, but an exceptionally fortunate one who is reasonably good, and who through a

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[179] Ibid.

[180] Longley, op. cit., p. 165.

[181] Aristotle, Poetics, VI, 2, translated by S. H. Butcher, quoted in Longley, op. cit., p. 165.

[182] Longley, op. cit., p. 174.

tragic flaw of character or an error in judgment brings about his own downfall. Aristotle thought that the fall was more meaningful when it was brought about by the misguided efforts toward virtue.[183] The attributes of the classic tragic hero include nobility, humanity, dignity, willingness to fight back, drive toward self-definition and self-revelation, and tragic reconciliation brought on by his own choosing.[184]

In Lawrance Thompson's study of Greek tragedy, he recognizes three different views. According to one concept, the victim is brought low through no fault of his own, strictly as a victim of Fate. He is controlled by outward and inner influences over which he has no control. Hence he "becomes a tragic victim of meaningless Fate, no matter how much he struggles."[185] Another concept teaches that man is brought low by errors in his own judgment, "through some shortcoming or lack of insight. Then the consequence is a tragedy of character."[186] The third concept is somewhere between. The tragedy is brought about by a combination of fate and free will. Thompson says that the Christian idea

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid., p. 171.

[185] Thompson, op. cit., p. 168.

[186] Ibid.

is closest to the second concept.[187]

Unlike pathos where there is no emphasis on struggle, tragedy depicts the character who struggles. In fact, he fights so valiantly that at times in the struggle it seems that he might win.[188] Anderson explains that "it is only man's struggle with himself that makes the essential conflict of tragedy, not his struggles with other men or with society as a whole. . . ."[189]

Faulkner's concept of tragedy includes a recognition of the contrasting forces of fate and free will. At times he creates characters who seem to be the victims of fate almost entirely, and at other times the characters bring about their own tragedy through an error of judgment, or a tragic flaw. He does not stick to a strict concept of tragedy and at times refers to something or someone as tragic who by a strict definition of the Greek idea would be merely pathetic.[190]

Faulkner explains his idea of Aristotle's concept of tragedy:

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Brooks, Purser and Warren, op. cit., p. 616.

[189] Anderson, op. cit., pp. 1117, 1118.

[190] Thompson, op. cit., p. 168.

> But tragedy, as Aristotle saw it, it's--I would say, is the same conception of tragedy that all writers have: it's man wishing to be braver than he is, in combat with his heart or with his fellows or with the environment, and how he fails, that the splendor, the courage of his failure, and the trappings of royalty, of kingship, are simply trappings to make him more splendid so that he was worthy of being selected by the gods, by Olympus, as an opponent, that man couldn't cope with him so it would take a god to do it, to cast him down.[191]

Faulkner's concept of tragedy reflects his Christian heritage, because he is primarily concerned with the fate which man brings upon himself. In some cases there are unavoidable disasters and miseries over which Faulkner grieves, but usually he grieves most over the things which happen because of man's own shortcomings. He shows that man does have the moral force and free will to help to correct the tragic mistakes of the past which bring about the tragedy of the present.[192]

Modern view of tragedy. It is hard for modern man to believe in tragedy. Man's behavior is explained by psychological factors and causes rather than his choice between good and evil.[193] Faulkner says that if writers wrote in the fine Hellenic tradition of tragedy, people would not read

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[191] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 51.

[192] Thompson, op. cit., p. 171.

[193] Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 33.

their works. The writer must write in terms of his environment. "So maybe when there are fine listeners," he says, "there will be fine poets again, that maybe the writing that is not too good is not just the writer's fault. . . ."[194]

Longley agrees that the scarcity of tragic literature is due to the climate of the present times. If a writer wrote pure tragedy, it would not be taken seriously by the reader because the tragic spirit is lacking in modern man.[195] To solve this problem man must first come up to the appreciation of tragedy. The second step of the solution involves the attempt to arouse the tragic response of Man as he now is. There must be a tragic response or there is no tragedy.[196]

To distinguish the modern view from the classic one, Longley explains:

> The modern tragic hero must be one whom all modern readers, each locked in the subjective prison of the individual self, can not merely see as believable but with whom they can identify and whom they can accept as typical of both the age and themselves.
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> Modern man does not believe in the Furies. But within

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[194]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., pp. 41, 42.

[195]Longley, op. cit., p. 167.

[196]Ibid., p. 170.

> an entirely different system of folklore, he does believe quite strongly in guilt, obsession, sudden violence, retribution, and death, or so we are told. The aspiring artist must find ways to embody these beliefs.[197]

Tragic novels. "Absalom, Absalom!," says Anderson, "is Faulkner's fullest rendering of tragedy in the Old South."[198] It is Faulkner's tragedy at its best. Jacobs explains the moral significance of such a tragedy in the following statement: "By the very completeness of the destruction Absalom, Absalom! affirms the existence of a moral order above and beyond man."[199] Concerning the dimensions and moral significance of the novel, Lind says:

> Broadly stated, the intention of Absalom, Absalom! is to create, through the utilization of all the resources of fiction, a grand tragic vision of historic dimension. As in the tragedies of the ancients and in the great myths of the Old Testament, the action represents issues of timeless moral significance. That Faulkner here links the decline of a social order to an infraction of fundamental morality cannot be doubted. Sutpen falls through innate deficiency of moral insight, but the error which he commits is also socially derived and thus illustrates the flaw which dooms with equal finality the aspirations of a whole culture. Events of modern history, here viewed as

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[197] Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

[198] Anderson, op. cit., p. 1122.

[199] Jacobs, op. cit., pp. 168, 169.

> classic tragedy, are elevated through conscious artistry to the status of a new myth.[200]

The ritualistic burning of the doomed house of Sutpen at the end of the book "is as nearly a genuine tragic scene as anything in modern fiction," says O'Donnell.[201]

Light in August is suffused with tragedy, especially that of Joe Christmas. It is concerned with the tragedy of isolation, since all the main characters are outside the close-knit community feeling.[202] Thompson contends that the major failures of the individuals and society in this novel are "ascribed to the failures of Christian preachments and practices."[203]

Although there is no distinctly tragic hero in The Sound and the Fury, it is "as completely suffused with tragedy," says Longley, "as anything written in the past hundred years."[204] It produces a tragic effect in its anguish for the innocence and helplessness without an individual tragic protagonist.[205]

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[200] Lind, op. cit., p. 278.

[201] O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 290.

[202] Anderson, op. cit., p. 1120.

[203] Thompson, op. cit., p. 170.

[204] Longley, op. cit., p. 223.

[205] Ibid., p. 224.

One other story, "The Bear," may be considered high tragedy. It really combines two stories: one the story of heroic hunters, and the other the sordid story of the dealers in slaves.[206]

Tragic characters. Most of Faulkner's characters are tormented with agonies of spirit. But not all of them can be called tragic characters. He takes his characters seriously and treats them as people growing under normal conditions. Faulkner "endows them with tragic freedom which permits them to work on (not work out) their fates under the narrow limits available to man," explains Charles Walcutt.[207] Longley concedes tragic status in the strict sense of the word to only three of Faulkner's characters: Colonel Sartoris, Christmas, and Sutpen.[208] Faulkner, however, in speaking of his own characters, uses the term "tragic hero," or "tragic character" in a much broader sense as indicated by his definition, or understanding of Aristotle's definition, of tragedy. When asked which he considered his most tragic

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[206]Stewart, op. cit., p. 138. The tragedy of this story is discussed more fully in Chapter II, concerning the Curse of the South.

[207]Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 300.

[208]Longley, op. cit., p. 223.

character, he said that it would be either Sutpen, Dilsey, or Christmas.[209]

Faulkner considers that Joe Christmas' tragedy lies in not knowing who he is, and knowing that he has no way of ever finding out. For this reason he cuts himself off from both the Negroes and the white world.[210] He tries to repudiate mankind and live outside the human race, but this is not really possible. He is not all good or all bad but simply the victim of his own nature and his environment.[211]

Longley regards Christmas as a "tragic hero and as one of the most important archetypes of the twentieth century hero yet created."[212] He is an extreme example of American loneliness, one of the most solitary figures in American fiction. In Light in August he is never seen "full-faced, but always as a silhouette."[213] He is a character who is both heroic and pathetic--"heroic in his struggle to define himself as a human being existing in his own right . . . but

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[209]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 119.

[210]Ibid., p. 72. [211]Ibid., p. 118.

[212]Longley, op. cit., p. 139.

[213]Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of Light in August," Interpretations of American Literature, Charles Feidelson, Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 160.

he is pathetic as a victim of soul-warping forces beyond his control."[214] When Joe violates a Negro cabin and takes bread, he realizes that the course of his life is of his own choosing.[215] He realizes that the "fate which drives him down his endless street is self-created and inescapable."[216]

Howe says: "of all Faulkner's characters Sutpen most closely approximates the tragic hero: he strives for large ends, actively resists his fate, and fails through an inner flaw."[217] He never, however, achieves a self-recognition. He falls, but he neither understands the reason nor accepts the responsibility for the failure.[218]

Sutpen's insolent pride, or the quality which most nearly approximates what the Greeks called hubris, is the main theme of Absalom, Absalom! A man with no ethical responsibility, he tries to conquer time by establishing a dynasty.[219] This was the essence of his "grand design." Longley summarizes the tragedy of Sutpen:

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[214]Jacobs, op. cit., p. 160. [215]Ibid., p. 159.

[216]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 42.

[217]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, pp. 74, 75.

[218]Ibid., p. 222.

[219]Jacobs, op. cit., p. 165, 166.

> The tragic pattern of Sutpen's career began in the innocence of primitive mountaineer virtue, received a mortal and undeserved insult, and resolved to match courage and strength, self-denial and persistence in the struggle to wipe out that insult. In the tragic waste of such virtues, in the persistence at whatever cost the tragedy is created. The price of the persistence is robbery, exploitation, and the violation of every human instinct including the withholding of love in a blood relationship--which in the case of Charles Bon cost Sutpen his sons and in the case of Milly Jones cost him his life. Motivated by the insult dealt him in the arrogance of ownership and possessions, he lives his life only to die for inflicting the same insult. . . . All he wants is a son, and the son he is left with is the idiotic, saddle-colored Jim Bond.[220]

According to Lind, Sutpen is an example of a modern tragic hero.[221]

Of all Faulkner's heroes, Colonel Sartoris most nearly fits the classic pattern of tragic hero. He is seen only through other characters in The Unvanquished. He has, among the other qualities such as virtue, nobility, and valor, a self-knowledge which Sutpen lacks. He also has grace, wit, intelligence, and self-detachment. But in all these qualities lies the power which brings about his destruction. His fatal flaw, like that of Sutpen is hubris. He must rule; he will not submit to another, whether in war, business, or politics. He realizes he has brought on

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[220] Longley, op. cit., p. 216.

[221] Lind, op. cit., p. 299.

his own destruction--death at the hands of his former friend and partner, Redmond.[222] Before his death, he realizes his mistakes and says, ". . . I have accomplished my aim, and now I shall do a little moral house-cleaning."[223] But it is too late. The damage is already done. When he approaches Redmond unarmed to make peace with him, he is killed.

Quentin Compson is considered by Longley to be merely pathetic. One responds to Quentin's sense of tragic loss and waste, but Quentin has no will to fight against his fate.[226] Waggoner says that his tragedy is that he cannot be really bad nor can he be good. He did not commit incest with his sister, but he wanted to. "If he could only sin he might be saved," Waggoner says. "But he can do no morally significant act, either good or bad. His world and his life are woven of the stuff of fantasy."[225] If he cannot be a St. Francis, he would like to be a Kurtz; but he is neither.[226]

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[222]Longley, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

[223]William Faulkner, The Unvanquished (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1938), p. 175.

[224]Longley, op. cit., p. 222.

[225]Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 52.

[226]Ibid., p. 49.

Other minor characters have some tragic characteristics. Bayard Sartoris is a character whose personal tragedy, a feeling of doom, seems to spring from his consciousness of the larger human tragedy. He is more a case of war nerves than a tragic hero.[227]

Nancy Manigoe, who was trapped and damned by her environment to live the tragic life of a prostitute,[228] sacrifices her own life by murdering Temple Drake's baby "in order to force Temple to face the truth about herself and, in so doing, to achieve some kind of moral salvation."[229] Using the word Nun in the title (Requiem for a Nun) seems to add something to her tragedy.[230]

Most of the characteristics of a tragic hero may be applied to the South. It was prosperous, offering a good life and cultural hope to some of the citizens of Jefferson. Its flaw was that, while it was committed to the ideals of freedom to all, it denied liberty to many. It was consistent, refusing to change or alter its course even in the face of a Civil War. The South had courage, strength,

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[227] Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

[228] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 196.

[229] Tuck, op. cit., p. 208.

[230] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 196.

determination, and suffering. Longley says, "There remains only the ideal final step of self-knowledge and reconciliation."[231] This step has been begun for certain individuals but not yet for others.[232]

III. CHARACTER PRESENTATION

Faulkner uses "situations, mood, and action as the background against which his characters display the qualities he believes in," explains Robb.[233] Meeting Faulkner's characters is like moving to a new town. One does not know everyone in the town when he first moves there. People do not immediately tell him everything he needs to know about themselves and others. Some things he knows about, but others are not known until much later. One simply comes into a situation that has no beginning and no end. Some of the things one hears about people do not mean much to him when he first hears them; they may never, or they may come to mean a great deal when he has known these people long enough to realize why this thing is important.[234] Faulkner's characters are one of his main tools for portraying his moral vision.

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[231] Longley, op. cit., p. 231. [232] Ibid.

[233] Robb, op. cit., p. 7.

[234] Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

Faulkner draws the reader into the novels by going over the same stretch of time and events several times--"each time in terms of radically different moral perceptions," explains Howe.[235] In other words, in books such as The Sound and the Fury; Absalom, Absalom!; Light in August; and As I Lay Dying, the reader sees the actions through the eyes and thinking of characters with diverse moral values and is thus able to discover for himself Faulkner's moral vision, or to make his own moral judgments.

Comic heroes. Comic heroes are ineffectual men of good will such as Bonbow, Stevens, Ratliff, and Byron Bunch. They are the antithesis of the tragic heroes. They are always on the side of angels, and though they may fail, they always come back undaunted to fight again.[236] Longley says:

> The comic hero is defined . . . as a man of good will who does what he can to redress the excessive imbalance between the powerful forces of ill will and the helpless victims of that ill will. His rise will not be very spectacular or consistent, and his success will not be very great.[237]

They help to relieve tragedy when it becomes excessive.

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[235] Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers of America, p. 838.

[236] Longley, op. cit., p. 225.

[237] Ibid., p. 60.

Although the comic hero is always on the side of the angels, he is not a saint. He is merely human with human limitations. He, like the tragic hero, may succumb to the temptation of self-interest, and when he does, he nearly always fails.[238] Even V. K. Ratliff, the most adroit, able, intelligent, and perceptive of Faulkner's comic heroes, fails when he succumbs to the temptation to get something for nothing. He falls into the age-old trap of planted treasure which Flem has set for him[239] and loses not only the respect of his neighbors but most of his material goods as well.

Moral mirrors. Benjy Compson, the idiot in The Sound and the Fury, serves as a moral mirror in which the members of his own family may see the reflections of their own moral positions. He also exposes for the reader the false morality of the other characters. Benjy cannot be said to have a moral point of view himself since he is incapable of thinking. He simply acts as a catalyst which precipitates the actions by which the other characters reveal themselves.[240] One sees the actions of each of the characters in the novel in relation to Benjy. The mother's whining self-pitying qualities would be there without Benjy, but even the idiot

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[238] Ibid., p. 23. [239] Ibid., p. 24.

[240] Swiggart, op. cit., pp. 88, 89.

seems to see through her meaningless words of mother-love, and he rejects her. Caddy would be a neutral character if seen only through Quentin, but through Benjy's eyes one sees her as capable of great love, patience and understanding. One tends to feel sorry for her after getting to know her through Benjy. Jason's meanness is judged mainly through his attitude toward Benjy in having him castrated, being embarrassed by him, and finally, in sending him off to Jefferson. Quentin feels sorry for Benjy, but he is a man of words rather than a doer and is ineffective in doing anything about Benjy's situation. Through Dilsey's love of Benjy she is seen as the character Faulkner admires with her endurance, love, and strength. She remembers Benjy's birthday and buys him a cake with her own money. She protects him from Jason, and she sees that the Negro boys take care of him. She takes him to church on Easter and feels that he is human, not a thing as others do. It is relevant that Benjy's section of the book gives the facts without interpretation. Benjy causes the reader to make moral interpretations of the Compsons which he himself is unable to make.[241]

Faulkner's readers are often asked to understand events and situations as seen and experienced by such abnormal persons as Darl Bundren, Benjy Compson, and Ike Snopes.

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[241] Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, pp. 45-47.

It is rather frightening to look into the minds of such people and actually see and think with them. Faulkner wants to prove through these characters something about the truths of the human heart. By using the stream-of-consciousness technique to portray people who are themselves unable to make moral judgments, the writer causes the reader to identify with the characters more readily than he would if he were merely told about them. This has a profound effect on the readers and often causes them to remember these people rather than Faulkner's characters who are fine and noble and moral--Ratliff, Aunt Jenny, Dilsey, Gavin Stevens, and Molly Beauchamp. Robb says:

> . . . Faulkner, by his own assertion, has a positive faith and a positive concept of life [not a lack of faith, or a dark one as Beach, Lucecock, Geismar, and Kazin accuse him of]. He is expressing it through his characters. He is trying by every means possible to show it to his readers. He believes that the only way to understand people, the only way to find out what is in them of "courage and pity and pride" is to know them inside-out, not outside-in. It makes no difference who or what they are, or how we feel toward them. We must study them, good or bad, with the same depth and thoroughness.[242]

IV. STYLISTIC TECHNIQUES

Most readers have some sense of moral values, and as they read a novel they expect the novelist to have a belief

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[242] Robb, op. cit., pp. 14, 15.

in something. They may not necessarily expect him to agree with their own standards, but they wish to believe as they contribute their own views while reading, that the author is doing the same. They like to be given an opportunity to respect an opposite view if the writer's standards are not the same as their own.[243] Faulkner does have an inner conviction of the value of the truths of the human heart, and he seeks to appeal to the heart and imagination and mind of his readers by every conceivable device to bring them to share his moral convictions.[244] In fact, Faulkner involves the reader in the creation and unfolding of the plot of his stories.[245]

According to Longley, the reader becomes more involved in Light in August than other novels as he "identifies with Christmas' efforts to earn the right to his own self-definition" in his conflict with the community.[246] Absalom, Absalom!, too, draws the reader in and makes him participate in the search for the truth. Faulkner ran the risk of putting a greater responsibility on the reader than he wished

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[243] Ibid., p. 6.

[244] Ibid.

[245] R. W. B. Lewis, "The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's The Bear," Interpretations of American Literature, Charles Feidelson, Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 336.

[246] Longley, op. cit., p. 208.

to bear by omitting an authoritative voice in the novel. But if the reader accepts the challenge, he finds the rewards are correspondingly great.[247]

The technique and theme of Absalom, Absalom! are completely unified. To match Sutpen's grand design everything in the novel is larger than life-size, especially Sutpen. The references to names from the Bible and from heroic, epic literature add to the total effect. Longley explains this in the following statement:

> In Absalom, Absalom! the subject of the writer is cosmic; it is the law and structure of the universe itself that Sutpen is in conflict with. . . . The sheer magnitude of Sutpen's grand design requires a matching magnitude of form and content: locale and time-span, geographical spread, and analysis of the meaning of history.[248]

The theme and technique of The Sound and the Fury also are in complete harmony, and the moral vision itself is well depicted. Whether taken as a study in individual self-destruction or as a rendering of the decay of the society of our time, "the novel projects a radical image of man against the wall."[249]

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[247] Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 209.

[248] Longley, op. cit., p. 209.

[249] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 174.

Time and style. Faulkner seldom tells a story chronologically for the reader. He suspends the plot while he goes back into time and collects the fragments that explain the crux of the plot. Sometimes his characters are inside a circle of time; for example, Joe Christmas.[250] Faulkner says he uses the long sentences and the mixed-up concept of time purposely as a tool to get the job done, ". . . trying to put the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin."[251] He says that there is no such thing as "was." The past and the present blend, and a man is a combination of all the events of the past which made him what he is at that moment, "and the long sentence is an attempt to get his past and possibly his future into the instant in which he does something."[252] A verse from the Old Testament expresses this idea in a similar manner: "That which is hath been long ago; and that which is to be hath long ago been: and God seeketh again that which is passed away."[253]

Setting. Like a carpenter using the nearest hammer to build a fence, Faulkner uses the quickest tool at hand to

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[250] Fritschler, op. cit., p. 342.

[251] Gwynn and Bleotner, op. cit., p. 84.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Ecclesiastes 3:15.

write his stories, the locale he knows the best.[254] It is through the men and women of his imaginary Yoknapatawpha County as representatives of people everywhere, according to Robb, that Faulkner "makes his bid to prove his artistic and ethical ideas."[255]

Point-of-view. Although Faulkner seems to keep himself out of the picture in telling his stories, many times it is obvious that he is giving his own views through his characters. Ten-year olds do not often think and react in the way that Ike McCaslin does in "The Bear" nor sixteen-year olds as Chick Mallison in Intruder in the Dust. The technique of letting the different characters in As I Lay Dying tell the story allows Faulkner to tell a "simple story" about the truths of the human heart in a manner convincing to the reader who identifies himself with the ignorant, illiterate, dirty, "poor white" Bundren family striving to carry out their promise to Addie Bundren. The reader makes the journey with them and helps them in the undertaking.[256] The story is told from fifteen points of view, largely through the stream-of-consciousness technique which is

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[254]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 3.

[255]Robb, op. cit., p. 10.

[256]Ibid., pp. 10-13.

view in which the reader is interested, whatever techniques he uses to present it.[261]

To understand the main problem of Absalom, Absalom!: "Quentin's heartsick recognition of his own, and likewise the South's, tragedy,"[262] the reader must cull many points of view. Point of view in this novel, says Tritschler:

> . . . conveys the tone of Miss Rosa's Miltonic demonology, Mr. Compson's intelligent dilettantism, General Compson's sympathetic understanding, Colonel Sutpen's errors of innocent judgment, Charles Bon's baffled outrage, Eulalia Bon's vindictive bitterness, Wash Jones's red-neck simplicity, Shreve McCannon's amused curiosity, and Quentin Compson's reluctant probing. . . .[263]

Faulkner often creates characters who lose their identities in the novels and function as his spokesmen. They become witness participants, identified with the author's point of view and often directly state his moral themes. V. K. Ratliff and Gavin Stevens are narrators, in this sense of the word, in The Hamlet and The Town, Intruder in the Dust, and Requiem for a Nun. His moral judgments are best made, however, through the development and action of the

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[261] Alfred Kazin, The Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), p. 262.

[262] Tritschler, op. cit., p. 341.

[263] Ibid.

characters rather than through these direct spokesmen.[264]

Pathos. Faulkner's handling of situations which stir the sympathy of the reader without trickling over into sentimentality is one of the most outstanding achievements of his fiction. The use of pathos relieves the reader from the high pitch of emotion with which most of his material deals.[265] Unlike a tragic hero, the pathetic character, if he struggles at all, struggles almost passively or so ineffectually that he arouses only pity in the reader.[266] He is usually unaware that he is pitiable and sees no reason for self-pity.

Lena Grove feels no pity for herself as she walks all the way from Alabama to Jefferson, in Light in August, looking for the father of her child which was soon to be born. Cash Bundren's detailed description of the building of the coffin for his mother evokes in the reader a sense of comic pathos, but Cash feels no self-pity.[267] Benjy Compson cannot be a tragic hero since he has no freedom, nothing to

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[264] Swiggart, op. cit., p. 77.

[265] Robb, op. cit., p. 25.

[266] Brooks, Purser, and Warren, op. cit., p. 7.

[267] Robb, op. cit., p. 26.

decide, and no choice of action. He cannot rise or fall. The reader should feel pathos for him, nothing more.[268]

When asked about Ike Snopes, the idiot in The Hamlet who had a love affair with a cow, Faulkner said:

> To me Ike Snopes was simply an interesting human being with man's natural, normal failings, his--the baseness which man fights against, the honor which he hopes that he can always match. The honesty, the courage which he hopes that he can always match. And at times he fails. And then he is pitiable. But he is still human, [although of low mentality] and he still believes that man can be better than he is, and that is what the writer is trying to do. . . .[269]

Humor. Faulkner says that a fine line exists between humor and tragedy, and when he uses humor in his writing he is still trying to write "about the human heart in some moving way, and so he uses whatever tool that he thinks will do most to finish the picture which at the moment he is trying to paint, of man."[270] The humor in Faulkner's novels is not usually in the words, but in the situations and reactions of the characters. They do not make an attempt to be funny; rather, the things they say and do are a part of

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[268] Longley, op. cit., p. 221.

[269] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 132.

[270] Ibid., p. 39.

their inmost nature.[271] Faulkner often uses humor to underline tragedy. The picture of Boon trying to patch up his gun to shoot a squirrel is an example of humor Faulkner uses to make the tragedy of the dog and the bear more poignant in "The Bear."[272]

Sensationalism, horror and violence. When asked if he thought it was all right for a young writer to begin with a sensational type of work, Faulkner replied that if the sensationalism was used as an incidental tool, as an effective way to tell a story about flesh and blood people who are honest and true, then he may use this method.[273] It is his conviction that the "artist should exercise his capacities for describing horror and evil as a means of measuring the distance between certain actualities and certain possibilities."[274] In this way the artist plays an important part in the moral scheme of things.[275] Faulkner is deeply conscious of evil, and to show the good he must show the opposite. "Horrors, when they occur," says Robb,

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[271] Robb, op. cit., p. 29.

[272] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 60.

[273] Ibid., p. 49.

[274] Thompson, op. cit., p. 176.

[275] Ibid.

". . . take their place as a part of those materials which convey Faulkner's purpose, and should be so regarded."[276] They should not be considered as isolated cases, but cause and effect should be considered together.[277]

Howe says that "shock in Sanctuary derives not from a lack of but from an excess of moral feeling."[278] And O'Connor asserts that this novel with the essential, though shocking, truth it contains, is "far above the level of 'potboiler,' the term Faulkner himself applied to it."[279]

Numerous examples of violence and horror can be found in Faulkner's works. Robb, who calls this horror "extra-realism," says:

> We are surprised to find an otherwise normal, average 15- or 16-year old boy like Chick Mallison who exhumes corpses at midnight assisted by a Negro youth and an old maiden lady to save a Negro man from lynching; or to find that a young girl like Temple Drake actually enjoys being raped. Why read about a zany family hauling a putrefying corpse all over the country in the heat of August, or an idiot in love with a cow? Is Faulkner simply trying to shock?[280]

After a careful look at the history of Yoknapatawpha County,

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[276] Robb, op. cit., p. 25. [277] Ibid.

[278] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 195.

[279] O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner, p. 64.

[280] Robb, op. cit., p. 16.

its injustice to the Indians and the Negroes, and the attempt--and failure--on the part of some, Robb concludes that Faulkner is not using horrors for their shock value, "but as the causes or results of more significant matters--as steps in the choice between justice and injustice, courage and cowardice, sacrifice and greed, pity and self."[281]

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[281] Ibid., p. 21.

CHAPTER IV

FAULKNER'S MORAL VISION REVEALED THROUGH HIS CHARACTERS IN ACTION

In the Nobel prize acceptance speech[282] and other formal addresses and through interviews, Faulkner has stated his moral beliefs quite clearly. In his Yoknapatawpha County novels, however, his moral code is embedded in the dramatic gestures of characters in motion, not in statements about morality.[283] Faulkner has repeatedly asserted that he is interested in people, "man in conflict with himself, with his fellow man, or with his time and place, his environment."[284]

In an interview in New York, Faulkner said that man "is compelled to make choices between good and evil sooner or later, because moral conscience demands that from him in order that he can live with himself tomorrow."[285] Robb says that the ethical choices which he presents in his characters

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[282] See Appendix A.

[283] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 150.

[284] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 19, et passim.

[285] Wachner, op. cit., p. 315.

are "essentially Christian ones--between justice and injustice, courage and cowardice, sacrifice and greed, pity and self."[286] Faulkner shows clearly that he admires those who demonstrate the Christian virtues--Ratliff, Miss Habersham, Sam Fathers, and others. He shows understanding of the unethical characters, even the criminal, and is careful to point out the circumstances which helped to make them what they are. "Faulkner does not spare these characters; neither does he condemn them without a hearing," says Robb.[287] There is no doubt that he condemns the human depravity of such characters as Popeye and the Snopeses, but his characters are seldom hopeless of redemption. Although they usually fail, Faulkner insists that the man has the opportunity to save himself.[288] Howe says:

> In novel after novel he [Faulkner] shows how fearful is the cost and heavy the weight of human existence, yet he illustrates how fulfillment and perhaps even salvation may come to those who stand ready to bear the cost and suffer the weight.[289]

Moral conscience denotes responsibility which Faulkner refers to as a "curse he had to accept from the gods. . . ."[290] Howe explains the curse which hangs over all of

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[286] Robb, op. cit., p. 34.

[287] Ibid., p. 35.

[288] Ibid.

[289] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 299.

[290] Wachner, op. cit., p. 315.

Faulkner's struggling characters as the conditions in life which cannot be escaped, whatever is "burden" in life. This means different things to different characters as he explains in the following statement:

> [It is] Joe Christmas, battling his whiteness and his blackness; the Reverend Hightower unable to mediate between dream and reality; Bayard Sartoris wondering whether his existence has any purpose; Thomas Sutpen compelled to die in a squalor of exploitation; Quentin Compson driven to suicide by the sheer pain of consciousness.[291]

The response the character makes to these unavoidable confrontations defines his identify. Howe explains this response as "the gesture by which the character declares himself."[292] He further explains that "the opposition of curse and gesture forms the dramatic and moral pattern of Faulkner's work. . . ."[293] Faulkner writes about the secret of the human heart which he says means to "believe in itself, believe in its capacity to aspire, to be better than it is, might be."[294]

This chapter will show morality--and the lack of it--through the action of different types of characters. The

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[291]Howe, "William Faulkner," Major Writers in America, p. 837.

[292]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 153.

[293]Ibid.

[294]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 78.

human depravity of the villains, exemplified in "Snopesism," and the effect of their evil on innocent victims will be disclosed. The vacillating action of certain weak characters will be shown; and, finally, the verities of the human heart--honor, compassion, pity, courage--will be portrayed through the lives and actions of a number of moral characters, including some primitives, throughout the Yoknapatawpha County saga.

I. VILLAINS

Faulkner's chief affirmation in all of his novels, especially the two which were wrung out of his heart--The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!--is the clear, and clearly human, image of man. Man is human because he can sin. Animals cannot sin. Faulkner's villains are people who "calculate the probabilities of effectiveness on the assumption that man can't either."[295] Villainy is the result of extremes of human conduct "without any emotional or personal commitments or envolvement."[296]

Longley gives the following definition of a villain:

> A villain, then, is the one who with coldness and calculation carries out acts of violence and injury,

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[295]Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 78.

[296]Longley, op. cit., p. 13.

> usually more damaging spiritually than physically, upon the weak, the helpless, children or old people--in other words, those unable to defend themselves. The ultimate motives for these actions may be unknown to the villain himself, but they grow out of some crippling inadequacy of the soul, which he can compensate for only in the way the evil is carried out. He is usually otherwise quite moral, even upright. He has few, if any, of the physical vices, lacking even this redeeming touch of humanity. . . . As the evil which is done becomes more monstrous, both the defect itself and the evil done tend to enter the area of the spiritual. As in the work of Hawthorne, the greatest evil is a violation of the individual human heart. Perhaps the greatest possible deformity of spirit is the will to commit such a violation.[297]

Flem Snopes. Flem is the chief representative of a clan of lying and thieving Snopeses who "recognise almost none of the rules of decency or fair play."[298] Warren says of them:

> [They are] the pure exploiters, descendants of barn-burners and bushwhackers, of people outside of society, belonging to no side, living in a kind of limbo, not even having the privilege of damnation. . . .[299]

In his insatiable desire for material wealth, Flem, although impotent and incapable of love, marries Eula Varner, who is pregnant. His price for saving the family pride is a deed to the Old Frenchman's Place. Ratliff, one of Faulkner's chief moral spokesmen, meditating on Flem's

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[297] Ibid., pp. 140, 141.

[298] O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner, p. 118.

[299] Warren, op. cit., p. 64.

wickedness, imagines Flem's encounter with the devil in Hell when he goes down to redeem his soul which he had "swapped in good faith and honor."[300] The minor devils search but cannot find the soul. The following conversation ensues:

> 'And we cant [sic.] find it,' they says. 'We done looked everywhere. It wasn't no big one to begin with nohow, and we was specially careful in handling it. We sealed it up in a asbestos matchbox and put the box in a separate compartment to itself. But when we opened the compartment, it was gone. The matchbox was there and the seal wasn't broke. But there wasn't nothing in the matchbox but a little kind of dried-up smear under one edge. And now he has come to redeem it. But how can we redeem him into eternal torment without his soul?'[301]

The Prince tries to give him another one in its place since there are plenty of unclaimed ones lying around, but Flem insists on his legal rights. In frustration the Prince offers him a bribe which he sneeringly refuses. His only personal vice is chewing tobacco, and a spittoon is the only gratification he needs or wants.

> 'Then what does he want?' the Prince hollers. 'What does he want? Paradise?' And the old one looks at him and at first the Prince thinks it's because he aint forgot that sneer. But he finds out different.
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> 'No,' the old one says. 'He wants hell.'[302]

When the Prince finally realizes who the man is, he implores him to leave, to take Paradise instead which Flem,

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[300]William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 151.

[301]Ibid. [302]Ibid., p. 153.

of course, refuses to do. The scene closes with Flem sitting on the throne and the Prince in the fire.[303]

Faulkner makes it clear that he has no sympathy for Flem "any more than one feels sorry for anyone who is ridden with an ambition or demon as base as simple vanity and rapacity and greed."[304] Of the Snopes clan Faulkner said, "I have hated them and laughed at them and been afraid of them for thirty years now."[305] He considers Flem inhuman in the terms of the "verities of the human heart," of which Flem has none.[306] His greatest desire in life is to get rich, to raise himself from the status of "poor white trash," and he is willing to use any available means to achieve his purpose. He is even willing to use respectability, although he has probably never heard of it before. Faulkner shows his detestation of hypocrisy through his portrayal of Flem's unctuous religious observance, which is actually only another handy tool which he is willing to use with complete ruthlessness to gain his desired goal.[307]

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[303] Ibid., p. 155.

[304] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 140.

[305] Ibid., p. 201.

[306] Ibid., p. 132.

[307] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 130.

Flem has no regard for human life as he shows by destroying his wife, who is driven to suicide after enduring his inhuman treatment for about twenty years; and by tricking her child into becoming his tool of respectability.[308] This trait is illustrated also in an incident related in The Hamlet. One of Flem's pawns has brought some dangerous wild ponies from Texas to sell at Frenchman's Bend. Henry Armstid takes his wife's last five dollars, which she has earned weaving by firelight to buy shoes for the children, and buys one of the ponies, which he makes his wife help him catch. Recognizing the wife's plight, the Texan gives the money back to Henry and refuses to sell him a pony. Determined to own one of the animals, Henry then gives his money to Flem who pretends to know nothing about the business. The Texan assures Mrs. Armstid that Flem will return her five dollars the next day. In the confusion of catching the ponies, Armstid suffers a broken leg and other injuries from which he never fully recovers. The next day Mrs. Armstid returns to Varner's store to get her five dollars from Flem. When she reminds him of the Texan's promise, Flem replies, "'I reckon he forgot it. . . . He took all the money with him when he left.'"[309] In dejection and disappointment,

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[308] Ibid.

[309] Faulkner, The Hamlet, p. 321.

Mrs. Armstid starts to leave when Flem calls her back, goes into the store, and gives her a five-cent bag of candy. "'A little sweetening for the chaps,'" he says.[310]

Longley gives the following description of Flem:

> Like Popeye and Jason, he is incapable of coming into a right relation with Nature and Man because he is basically incapable of love. . . . On the practical realistic level of day-to-day human life, he is simply a heartless businessman who has never been bested in a trade. On the philosophical and theological level, he is satanic in the precise Miltonic sense: he knows how to turn the impulses and weakness of human beings against themselves and to lead them to their own downfall. . . . Flem is exceptional in that he turns human impulse and emotion to his own profit and moves utterly unconcerned over the human wreckage that occurs.[311]

Jason Compson. Like Flem Snopes, Jason is inhuman in terms of the "verities of man's condition, compassion and pity and courage, unselfishness," says Faulkner.[312] He is the strongest of the Compson family, but his strength is only animal cunning. Though born a Compson, he represents the Snopeses in his acquisitiveness. With malicious pleasure he watches his family fall to pieces.[313] Jason

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[310] Ibid., p. 322.

[311] Longley, op. cit., pp. 150, 151.

[312] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 132.

[313] Anderson, op. cit., p. 1123.

is submoral,[314] "a product of a decayed gentility," says Swiggart.[315] Warren gives the following description of Jason:

> . . . the last Jason of The Sound and the Fury, whose portrait is one of the most terrifying in all literature--the paranoidal self-deceiver, who plays the cotton market and when he loses, screams about these "kikes" in New York who rob him, who himself robs the daughter of his sister Caddy over the years and in the end makes her into the desperate and doomed creature she becomes, who under the guise of responsibility for his family--the ailing mother, the idiot brother, the wild niece--tortues them all with an unflagging sadistic pleasure.[316]

Dilsey, the family servant, calls him a cold man. He loves no one, only his own material self-interest. For him there are no absolutes; only that which gets results have value for him.[317]

Jason thinks the rest of humanity insane because it "operates on the basis of emotion (pity, love, generosity, even pride)," says Longley.[318] He blames everyone--his dead or banished kinfolk, his idiot brother, the Negroes--except

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[314]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 50.

[315]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 104.

[316]Warren, op. cit., p. 64.

[317]Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 54.

[318]Longley, op. cit., p. 145.

himself for his troubles. Longley says that "his sadism is usually verbal: the cutting remark, the groundless accusation, the ruining of some small harmless pleasure for anyone too powerless to be worth the effort."[319] For example, as a child, he cuts up all of Benjy's paper dolls just to make him unhappy,[320] and later he burns the free carnival show tickets to keep the Negro boy Luster from seeing the show.[321]

Jason reveals his greed, cruelty, and disregard for the feelings of others when he charges his sister Caddy a hundred dollars to see her baby daughter, Quentin, who is being reared by the Compsons. She pays the money in advance and promises to see her on his terms, then leave town. Jason tells her where to wait, he wraps the child in a raincoat, then takes her in the hack past the spot where Caddy is waiting. Jason tells what happened:

> . . . I saw her standing on the corner under the light and I told Mink to drive close to the walk and when I said Go on, to give the team a bat. Then I took the raincoat off of her and held her to the window and Caddy saw her and sort of jumped forward.

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[319] Ibid.

[320] William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury & As I Lay Dying (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 84.

[321] Longley, loc. cit.

> "Hit 'em, Mink!" I says, and Mink gave them a cut and we went past her like a fire engine. "Now get on that train like you promised," I says. I could see her running after us through the back window. "Hit 'em again," I says, "Let's get on home." When we turned the corner she was still running.[322]

Popeye. Popeye is representative of the evil of industrial society. He is seen only from the outside, not from the inside out. Faulkner does not treat him with compassion as he does other characters, even some of his evil ones.[323] Faulkner gives the following physical description of him in Sanctuary:

> His face had a queer, bloodless color, as though seen by electric light; against the sunny silence, in his slanted straw hat and his slightly akimbo arms, he had that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin.[324]

He describes his eyes as "two knobs of soft black rubber."[325] Popeye is non-human. His evil is physical evil, corrupting individuals rather than a community as Flem does. Unable to love, he can gain no emotional response or even respect from other people. He can only gain gratification by inflicting

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[322]Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, pp. 222, 223.

[323]Jacobs, op. cit., p. 156.

[324]William Faulkner, Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun (New York: The American Library Company, 1951), p. 5.

[325]Ibid.

or observing pain and fear in others. Observing normal human gratification seems to enrage him.[326] Faulkner presents him "as a depraved gangster, as the projection of a fear of impotence, or as an inclusive symbol of evil."[327]

Faulkner says that no character is wholly good or wholly bad.[328] There is not much, however, that can be said in Popeye's behalf. Longley says, in his defense, "Popeye, aside from chain-smoking and a tendency to shoot people, has no bad habits, since he cannot commit fornication and knows that a single drink of whiskey would kill him."[329]

Sutpen. Faulkner shows through his portrayal of Thomas Sutpen of Absalom, Absalom! the terrible consequences of the sin of "violating the sanctity of the human heart."[330] Sutpen treats people as inanimate objects and never understands why his design fails or where his error lies.[331] His

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[326]Longley, op. cit., pp. 143, 144.

[327]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 197.

[328]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 9.

[329]Longley, op. cit., p. 140.

[330]Ibid., p. 216.

[331]Waggoner, op. cit., p. 167.

evil lies in "his ambition to own and dominate men."[332]

Sutpen wants more than respectability. Faulkner summarizes the story of Sutpen and his "design" and how and why it failed:

> He wanted revenge as he saw it, but also he wanted to establish the fact that man is immortal, that man, if he is a man, cannot be inferior to another man through artificial standards or circumstances. What he was trying to do--when he was a boy, he had gone to the front door of a big house and somebody, a servant, said Go around to the back door. He said, I'm going to establish a dynasty, I don't care how, and he violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion, and the fates took revenge on him. Thats what that story was. But he was trying to say in his blundering way that, Why should man be better than me because he's richer than me, that if I had the chance - might be just as good as he thinks he is, so I'll make myself as good as he thinks he is by getting the same outward trappings which he has, which was a big house and servants in it. He didn't say, I'm going to be braver or more compassionate or more honest than he--he just said, I'm going to be as rich as he was, as big as he was on the outside. . . . He wanted a son which symbolized this ideal, and he got too many sons--his sons destroyed one another and then him. He was left with--the only son he had left was a Negro.[333]

Sutpen leaves his family in Virginia and goes to Haiti where he marries a wealthy planter's daughter whom he later repudiates when he learns she is part Negro. After the divorce, their son Charles Bon is born, and as he grows older he learns that his father is Thomas Sutpen, who by this time

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[332]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 77.

[333]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 35.

owns Sutpen's Hundred and has another family. Bon longs to be recognized as Sutpen's son. He does not ask to be received into the family. He wants only a sign from his father. He says:

> That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son. . . .[334]

Sutpen never recognizes him, causing him to suffer the same kind of indignity which had so embittered Sutpen himself as a boy.

Sutpen brings about his death by his continued treatment of people as if they were things or animals. His only male descendant being a mulatto, the grandson of Charles Bon, he still wants a son to carry out his "design." He seduces Milly, the fifteen-year-old granddaughter of Wash Jones, and she bears him a child. When Sutpen learns it is a girl, he says, "'Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable' and turned and went out."[335] Enraged, Wash kills Sutpen with the scythe which he had borrowed from Sutpen to cut the grass.

Sutpen never realizes why his life is a failure. He says:

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[334]William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 319.

[335]Ibid., p. 286.

II. UNSTABLE CHARACTERS

Although Faulkner says that no person is completely good or completely bad, he presents some characters who vacillate more than others between good and bad. Some of these are simply weak people who have moral convictions but lack the courage to act on them. Others usually act courageously, but sometimes succumb to such temptations as greed, revenge, or a false concept of respectability and become untrue to their own beliefs. Sometimes the character's moral code is built on a false sense of values such as an empty code of honor.

Quentin Compson. Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury defends an empty code of honor based on Compson pride.[340] He loves his sister Caddy, and when he finds that she has been giving herself to the town boys and is pregnant, he tells his father that he committed incest with her, trying to change the Snopes amorality for the sin of Sartoris (or Compson) morality.[341] His Compson pride causes him to

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[340] Jacobs, op. cit., p. 142.

[341] O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 85.

prefer "incest (family sin) to promiscuity (public sin)."[342]

Quentin's reactionary protest against whatever injures truth takes the courageous yet mistaken form which asserts that man's inhumanity to man has made life unbearable; therefore, he seeks to escape through death.[343] Anderson says that Quentin refuses to accept moral responsibility by choosing death, "for he is in love with death."[344] He recognizes the moral decay of the Compson family, but since he feels he can do nothing to prevent or change it, he seeks the only complete escape from it.

Lucas Beauchamp. Lucas in Intruder in the Dust is Faulkner's tribute to strength, suffering, and patience.[345] Lucas maintains a dignity through the novel far superior to that of any of the white persons. He is supposedly guilty of the crime of murder, but in the end is exonerated, and the white race assumes the guilt symbolically.[346] He is

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[342]Albert Cook, The Meaning of Fiction (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), p. 149.

[343]Thompson, op. cit., pp. 174, 175.

[344]Anderson, op. cit., p. 1123.

[345]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 100.

[346]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 78.

independent, stubborn, proud, even arrogant; and he "regards himself as a man first and only incidentally as a Negro."[347]

In "The Fire and the Hearth," however, Lucas becomes so money-mad that he spends all his time with a money-finding machine searching for buried treasure. His wife Molly "regards the money he hunts as the curse of God that will put out the fire in the hearth by which the home and the family exist."[348] She goes to the lawyer to get a divorce, and the following conversation takes place:

> "I'm afraid he's going to find it [the money]."
>
> Again Edmonds sat in his chair, looking at her, "Afraid he's going to find it?" Still she looked at nothing at all that he could see, motionless, tiny, like a doll, an ornament.
>
> "Because God say, 'What's rendered to My earth, it belong to me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware.' And I'm afraid. I got to go. I got to be free of him."[349]

By the time they go to court to get the "voce," Lucas has changed his mind and decided that his home is worth more to him than the money. Lucas puts Molly into Edmonds's car and tells them to wait while he goes to the store. He returns soon, and "he was carrying a small sack--obviously

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[347] Tuck, op. cit., p. 184.

[348] Eisinger, op. cit., p. 184.

[349] William Faulkner, "The Fire and the Hearth," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 102.

candy, a nickel's worth. He put it into Molly's hand. 'Here,' he said. 'You aint got no teeth left but you can still gum it.'"[350] Obviously, he has given up the money-finding machine and the scheme to get rich.

Rosa Millard. Granny Rosa Millard in The Unvanquished, one of Faulkner's admirable female characters, rears Bayard Sartoris and his Negro companion, Ringo, teaching them truth and honesty by her own example.[351] During the war the Yankee soldiers come near their house, and Bayard and Ringo shoot at a soldier, killing only a horse. Frightened, they run into the house and hide under Granny's skirts. When the soldiers come looking for the boys, she lies to them, telling them she does not know where they are. This is the first direct lie she has told. She punishes Bayard and Ringo for using obscene language, then later she uses the same word herself. In this manner her corruption begins. In collaboration with Ab Snopes, she defrauds the United States government of mules for the poor people, also giving them large amounts of food and clothing. Although Ab does it only for selfish motives, Rosa does it for a good cause.

Because her conscience bothers her, she goes to the

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[350] Ibid., pp. 129, 130.

[351] Tuck, op. cit., pp. 208, 209.

church to repent. Kneeling in the empty church, she prays:

> "I have sinned. I have stolen, and I have borne false witness against my neighbor, though that neighbor was an enemy of my country. And more than that, I have caused these children to sin. I hereby take their sins upon my conscience. . . . But I did not sin for gain or for greed . . . I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that first time, I sinned for more than justice; I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves. . . . What I gained, I shared with them. It is true that I kept some of it back, but I am the best judge of that because I, too, have dependents who may be orphans, too, at this moment, for all I know. And if this be sin in your sight, I take this on my conscience too. Amen."[352]

Granny, however, is unable to break off her new habits of lying, stealing, and fraud.[353] She wants more and more so that when the men come home from the war, they will have something to begin with. She goes to meet Grumby, a notorious horse thief, thinking that he will not harm an old woman, but she is mistaken. There she meets her death.

Gail Hightower. Hightower, an ex-minister in Light in August, buys a dream of the past and pays for it with his wife.[354] He relives the tales of his grandfather's seemingly

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[352]William Faulkner, "Riposte in Tertio," The Unvanquished (New York: The New American Library, 1938), p. 115.

[353]Longley, op. cit., p. 182.

[354]Jacobs, op. cit., p. 161.

glorious end in battle, which really consisted of a henhouse raid in which he was killed. Hightower studies for the ministry and returns to Jefferson where his grandfather had died. His sermons evoke the sounds of galloping cavalry. He drives his wife to suicide, and the church forces him to resign. He lives on in Jefferson, however, immersed in the past.[355]

Toward the end of his life, through the influence of his one friend Byron Bunch, he does two things which help to alleviate his wasted life. When the time comes for the birth of Lena Grove's baby, there is not time to get the doctor, and Hightower delivers the baby. Later, when the hysterical mob is chasing Joe Christmas to lynch him, Joe runs into the preacher's house and knocks him down; although Hightower had told Byron earlier that he would not do it, he tries to give Christmas an alibi by saying, "'He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder.'"[356] However, it is too late to save either of them. Just before his death, he realizes what his life has been:

> "I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife. . . [ellipses in the original]

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[355] Tuck, op. cit., pp. 199, 200.

[356] Faulkner, Light in August, p. 406.

> the debaucher and murder of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die. . ."[357]

Others. Other vacillating characters include Horace Benbow, a lawyer with moral convictions, who "fails to save Lee Goodwin, primarily because of his own incapacity and innocence;"[358] Mink Snopes who "will not steal nor will he accept money in return for a promise he cannot keep,"[359] but who shoots Houston in The Hamlet and his cousin Flem in The Mansion; and Eula Varner Snopes who lives an immoral life for twenty years, then commits suicide for the sake of her daughter, Linda. She feels it is better for the girl to suffer the shame of a mother who has committed suicide than one who has run off with her lover. It is not the right decision, but her motive is good.[360]

III. VICTIMS

Victims abound in Faulkner's novels--victims of society, another individual, or circumstances. Faulkner reveals much of his moral vision through the response the

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[357] Ibid., p. 430.

[358] Longley, op. cit., p. 23.

[359] Levine, op. cit., p. 202.

[360] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 195.

victims make to their suffering and the effect their response makes on other people. Waggoner says that one of the lessons in Light in August concerns the individual's response to suffering as a test of character: "the hatred of Joe Christmas, the flight from responsibility of Hightower, the humble engagement of Lena and Byron."[361]

Joe Christmas. Howe says that Joe Christmas signifies "man as a helpless victim, a figure in whom neither good nor evil counts nearly so much as the sheer fact of being a victim."[362] Joe's response is a rejection of the kindness of his foster-mother and others. He wants to be punished as a martyr to alleviate his frustrated feelings of guilt.[363]

Miss Quentin Compson. Faulkner presents Caddy's illegitimate daughter Quentin as a victim of her mother's past sins, her hypochondriac grandmother who rears her, but most of all as a victim of Jason IV, the head of the Compson household. Jason's hatred of Caddy and the resulting cruelty to Quentin drive her to dishonesty and nymphomania. The

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[361]Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 113.

[362]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 68.

[363]Swiggart, op. cit., p. 135. For a fuller discussion of Joe Christmas see "Tragic heroes" in Chapter III.

only kindness shown her in the Compson house is the understanding and protection of Dilsey. Jason expects the worst from Quentin from the beginning and drives her to it, explaining his behavior by saying, "When people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger."[364]

Throughout the book, The Sound and the Fury, Quentin feels life is unbearable and a burden. She blames Jason for her troubles. For example:

> "Whatever I do, it's your fault," she says, "If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead."[365]

Jason pretends that he supports the family including Quentin, but actually Caddy regularly sends ample money for Quentin's support. When Quentin learns that Jason has been stealing this money all her life, piously pretending to burn the checks, she steals the money, climbs down the pear tree outside the window, and runs away with a traveling show man.

Others. Other victims through whom Faulkner shows the violation of the human heart include Temple Drake and Milly Jones. Temple Drake in Sanctuary is the victim not

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[364] Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury & As I Lay Dying, p. 199.

[365] Ibid., p. 277.

only of Popeye by whom she is defiled, but also of the decayed gentility of an aristocratic family who give her such an empty sense of values that she "allows herself to be abducted by Popeye and makes no attempt to escape from the brothel to which he takes her."[366] Milly Jones, the victim of Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom!, who is relegated to a position lower than an animal, loses not only human respect but her life and that of her infant at the hands of her grandfather, enraged and mortified by the inhuman treatment accorded her by Sutpen.

IV. PRIMITIVES

Faulkner portrays some characters in his novels who may be considered primitives. Swiggart says, "Faulkner's primitives are usually distinguished by their total lack of rational sophistication, and when they act morally they cannot really be conscious of doing so."[367] He further suggests that in Faulkner's later novels, the terms such as suffering, love, and endurance "suggest emotional attitudes rather than moral awareness as such."[368] Some of the primitives are

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[366] Tuck, op. cit., p. 195.

[367] Swiggart, op. cit., p. 47.

[368] Ibid., p. 48.

mentally incompetent; some are naive, ignorant, uneducated "poor white trash;" and some are animals who are portrayed as symbols of courage and endurance.

Benjy Compson. Benjy, the narrator of the first section of The Sound and the Fury, is an idiot--a victim of fate since he has no moral choice. According to Dorothy Tuck, Benjy "loves three things: his sister Caddy 'who smells like trees;' the pasture that his father sold to the golf club, and fire."[369] Cook calls Benjy a passive character, "one whose sole existence is to receive love."[370] Dilsey and Caddy are the only ones in the book who show him any love. Benjy cannot be said to have a rational point of view since he is incapable of moral choice or thinking. Swiggart says:

> Though Benjy's emotional response is primitive, it is uncorrupted by rational puritanism. He reacts not to his moral interpretation of Caddy's experiences, as Quentin does, but to his awareness of Caddy's own sense of shame. He feels instinctively that sex and puritan guilt are the forces that will drive Caddy from him.[371]

Anderson says that Benjy "stands for the collapse of the Compson mind. . . just as the others represent the Compsons'

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[369] Tuck, op. cit., p. 192.

[370] Cook, op. cit., p. 235.

[371] Swiggart, op. cit., p. 90.

physical, moral and spiritual chaos."[372]

Isaac Snopes. Ike, the ward of his cousin Flem Snopes, is another of Faulkner's idiots. The Hamlet contains a beautiful passage describing in lyrical fashion the love of Ike for Jack Houston's cow. In this episode Ike represents "gentleness, love, devotion--the lack of which makes Snopesism the evil it is; and by its locating of those values precisely where a smarter Snopes would never think to look," explains Waggoner.[373] Longley gives the following explanation of the strange romance:

> In the total abandonment of his love for the cow, the idiot has something that the cold and calculating Flem Snopes has never had and never will. The idiot has given himself; he has made a human commitment of himself into a living relationship. Flem is not capable of such a commitment. The idiot thus comes to stand for more than just himself and his cow: he represents perhaps all humanity, however crippled and limited, that takes the risk, the commitment of love, in contrast to those who, however fortunate otherwise cannot.[374]

The Bundren family. Although the Bundrens in As I Lay Dying are naive, poor, and uneducated, "almost

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[372]Anderson, op. cit., p. 1124.

[373]Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World, p. 187.

[374]Longley, op. cit., p. 224.

animalistic,"[375] they make an heroic effort to fulfill what they believe to be a moral responsibility to bury Addie where she wants to be buried. Anse, having promised his wife he would bury her in Jefferson, "sets up for himself an ethical duty which he recognizes as such."[376] The family is unable to realize the difference between "formal promise and actual responsibility,"[377] but they "are able to carry a genuine act of traditional morality through to its end.[378]

Although the distance to Jefferson is only about twenty miles, soon after Addie's death a flood washes away the main roads and bridges, and the trip takes nine days in the heat of August. Many misfortunes befall the family along the way. Attempting to ford a swollen stream, the mules drown, the wagon carrying the coffin turns over, and Cash breaks his leg. Nothing, however, can alter the Bundrens' plans. Each of the family members has his own reasons for wanting to go to Jefferson, but the obligation to the dead woman binds them together. Howe says:

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[375] O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 291.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 55.

[378] O'Donnell, loc. cit.

> Faulkner seems to be saying--and with the power of shock--that even the Bundrens, looked down upon and pitied by the poorest of their neighbors, are able to come together in a brief act of humanity. . . .[379]

Kinship unites the family even as it had disrupted them.[380] Jewel, who is really the illegitimate son of Addie and the preacher Whitfield, has bought a wild untamed horse to show that he does not belong in the Bundren family. He loves the horse more than anything. He thinks he will never part with it for anything; yet when the crisis comes, he behaves better than he thought he would. He sells the horse and gives the money to Anse to continue the journey, sacrificing his horse for the good of someone else, proving, says Faulkner, "that people want to do better than they can do."[381]

Nancy Manigoe. "Requiem for a Nun," says Jacobs, "is Faulkner's most direct statement of his moral position."[382] Nancy Manigoe, dope addict and prostitute, acts as a "scourge of white society"[383] by killing Temple Drake Stevens's baby,

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[379]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 53.

[380]Ibid., p. 55.

[381]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 109.

[382]Jacobs, op. cit., p. 174.

[383]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 132.

knowingly sacrificing her own life, "to force Temple to face the truth about herself and, in so doing, to achieve some kind of moral salvation."[384] In the jail just before her execution, she urges Temple to be saved through trusting, believing, and suffering for her sins. When the lawyer asks her if sinning is necessary, Nancy replies:

> You aint got to. You cant help it. And He knows that. But you can suffer. And He knows that too. He dont tell you not to sin, He just asks you not to. And He dont tell you to suffer. But he gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you are capable of doing. And He will save you.[385]

Nancy's last word to Temple as they leave is, "Believe."[386] Although Nancy Manigoe is a person who lives in modern times and cannot be considered a "primitive" in the same sense as Sam Fathers, Faulkner endows her with primitive emotions. Her act of killing a child to achieve an unselfish purpose is an indication of a moral though primitive quality.

Sam Fathers. The son of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief, Sam Fathers, whose blood is "taintless and incorruptible,"[387] acts as a spiritual father to Isaac McCaslin,

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[384] Faulkner, Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun, p. 332.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Ibid., p. 335.

[387] Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 191.

instructing him in the ritual of the hunt. Sam teaches Ike what he himself has learned from Old Ben, "to search for the wildness of nature and to tame it, in order to gain a clear understanding of the potentialities of the human spirit."[388] Under the tutelage of Sam, Ike learns "human woodlore and the human codes and techniques of the hunt. And he learns their limitations."[389] Sam teaches Ike courage through his example and in such lectures as the following:

> "Be scared. You cant help that. But dont be afraid. Aint nothing in the woods going to hurt you if you dont corner it or it dont smell that you are afraid. A bear or a deer has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be."[390]

Being a true primitive and belonging to the wilderness, Sam Fathers gives up when Old Ben is killed. The doctor said, "'He just quit. . . . Old people do that sometimes.'"[391] He chooses to die and asks Boon Hoggenbeck, another primitive, to kill him and give him a traditional Indian burial.

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[388]Irving Malin, "Ike McCaslin's Covenants," Bear, Man, and God: Seven Approaches to William Faulkner's The Bear, Francis Lee Utley, Lynn Z. Bloom, and Arthur F. Kinney, editors (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 304.

[389]John Lydenberg, "Nature Myth in Faulkner's The Bear," Bear, Man, and God, p. 283.

[390]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 207.

[391]Ibid., p. 248.

V. MORAL CHARACTERS

Faulkner says that man is not always challenged by his finest hour, but he believes that the hour or the need will find the man it needs. There is as much possibility for heroism now as in the earlier days. The tragedy is that the man who does not find his hour never has a chance to be what he might have been with proper challenge and need.[392] There are always men who have such a hatred for Snopesism that they will never stop trying to cope with it. Faulkner says, "It's a slow process but yet it apparently goes on."[393] Purity, innocence, and moral freedom are "virtues not of a historical and accidental but of an ideal and permanent kind; qualities not given but achieved, by conduct and by art, through discipline and submission."[394]

Faulkner's moral characters represent all classes of people from poor hill farmers to aristocrats; they represent all ages and both the Negro and white races. They are not saints, and they often make mistakes in judgment, but on the

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[392] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., pp. 204, 205.

[393] Ibid., p. 34.

[394] Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 207.

whole they are the characters in Faulkner's novels who most often demonstrate the "verities of the human heart."

Isaac McCaslin. A character in several short stories and mentioned briefly in The Mansion and The Reivers, Ike is known for his courage, humility, and endurance which he learned from Sam Fathers, Old Ben, and the dogs, Lion and the little fyce.[395] His courage is demonstrated in his heroic rescue of the fyce from Old Ben[396] and his willingness to relinquish his compass, watch, and gun--the symbols of civilization--to see Old Ben.[397]

More important, however, is the relinquishment of his inheritance because he thinks it is tainted by the sins of his fathers. Thompson says that Ike protests the evil of man's inhumanity to man by withdrawal from it.[398] His heroic passive suffering is related to the suffering of Christ, and Faulkner indicates that Ike deserves our moral admiration.[399]

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[395]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 58.

[396]Faulkner, "The Bear," p. 211.

[397]Ibid., pp. 206-209.

[398]Thompson, op. cit., pp. 174, 175.

[399]Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 96.

Ike never becomes completely free of race prejudice, as he shows in "Delta Autumn" in his encounter with the mulatto who is in love with Roth. This is his reaction when he realizes who she is:

> Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: "You're a nigger!"[400]

Although he is still subject to inherited phobias concerning miscegenation and race, he knows they are phobias.[401] Faulkner says that Ike realizes that if a country is to endure "it must have no inner conflicts based on a wrong, a basic human wrong."[402]

Chick Mallison. Chick, along with Ike McCaslin, Lucius Priest of The Rievers, and others, is one of Faulkner's boy heroes of whom Robb gives the following description:

> They are not only boys with all a boy's maddening qualities of indecision, self-assertion, and stubbornness. At the same time Faulkner shows us their incoherent gropings toward understanding, their yearning for maturity, their embarrassed awareness of beauty. Their emotions fly around like a weather

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[400] William Faulkner, "Delta Autumn," Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 361.

[401] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 90.

[402] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 46.

> vane in a hurricane. They are terrified and courageous; they are cautious and bold; they are childlike and adult; they are docile and mulish; they are disarming and infuriating. In other words, they are boys.[403]

Intruder in the Dust is a story of the threatened lynching of a Negro, Lucas Beauchamp, for a murder which he did not commit. Young Chick Mallison, his Negro friend, Ringo, and Miss Habersham prevent the lynching by digging up the grave in the middle of the night, finding evidence which exposes the real criminal. Anderson says that this episode actually "precipitates the real story, the education of a sixteen-year-old boy in good and evil and the preservation of his spiritual integrity."[404]

Gavin Stevens. Stevens, a prominent lawyer who appears in Intruder in the Dust, Requiem for a Nun, the Snopes trilogy, Knight's Gambit, and "Go Down, Moses," is described by Faulkner in Requiem for a Nun as:

> . . . a sort of bucolic Cincinnatus, champion not so much of truth as of justice, or of justice as he sees it, constantly involving himself, often for no pay, in affairs of equity and passion and even crime too among his people, white and Negro both. . . .[405]

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[403] Robb, op. cit., p. 45.

[404] Anderson, op. cit., p. 1119.

[405] Faulkner, Sanctuary and Requiem for a Nun, p. 205.

His principal interests besides the law are the Snopeses and society in general, especially his sister Margaret, his nephew Chick Mallison, and his friend V. K. Ratliff. "'I am happy,'" he says, "'I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other people's affairs without really doing any harm. . . .'"[406]

In Intruder in the Dust, after Gavin is finally convinced by Chick of Lucas's innocence, he helps to free him from the murder charge, and when Lucas insists on paying Stevens to preserve his own dignity, the lawyer charges him two dollars. Chick is still disturbed about the relation of the Negroes and the whites, his own guilt, and the injustice to the Negro. In an anguished conversation with his uncle, Gavin tells him in part:

> "Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them."[407]

V. K. Ratliff. Ratliff, a sewing-machine agent who serves as a moral spokesman in The Hamlet, The Town, and

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[406] Margaret Patricia Ford and Suzanne Kincaid, Who's Who in Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 96.

[407] William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 206.

The Mansion, is an extremely likable man as few of Faulkner's characters are. He has a highly developed moral sense; yet he can extend his sympathy even to the Snopeses.[408] Longley says that Ratliff may not be a Christian, but he has the Christian virtue of hating sin without hating the sinner. He does not wish to have personal revenge on Flem, even when Flem tricks him with the planted treasure. "Like the true knight of faith, he desires only to stand between the weak and helpless and all cynical, brutal exploitation."[409] Levine says that Ratliff represents "conscience and charity, rationalism, and responsibility. . . . [He] manages to uphold these human qualities which must be upheld."[410]

Ratliff not only talks, he acts. When he learns of Lump Snopes's money-making scheme of providing a view of Ike's love-making with the cow, he goes to see for himself. His reaction to the scene is given in the following account:

> When they looked around at him, he already held the loose plank, holding it as if he were on the point of striking at them with it. But his voice was merely sardonic, mild even, familiar, cursing . . . not in rage and not even in outraged righteousness.
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> "I notice you come to have your look too," one said.

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[408] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 249.

[409] Longley, op. cit., p. 65.

[410] Levine, op. cit., p. 198.

> "Sholy," Ratliff said. "I aint cussing you folks. I'm cussing all of us," lifting the plank and fitting it back into the orifice. . . . There was a half-brick on the ground beside the wall. With it he drove the nails back while they watched him, the brick splitting and shaling, crumbling away onto his hands in fine dust--a dry, arid, pallid dust of the color of shabby sin and shame, not splendid, not magnificent like blood, and fatal. "That's all," he said. "It's over. This here engagement is completed."[411]

He then forces the Snopes clan to buy the cow and feed some of the meat to Ike to cure him. One other example of his moral action is seen in connection with the Snopeses. When Mink Snopes is tried and convicted of murder, Ratliff brings Mink's wife, a backwoods ex-prostitute, and her two children into his home and persuades his widowed sister to take care of them.[412]

Dilsey. Faulkner pays Dilsey, the old Negro servant in the Compson home, the compliment of calling her "a good human being."[413] O'Connor calls her one of Faulkner's most memorable characters.[414] Longley says she is beyond good or

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[411] William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 199.

[412] Longley, op. cit., pp. 68, 69.

[413] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 85.

[414] William Van O'Connor, William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 14.

evil or tragedy itself. "[She] seems to stand for all the loving and inarticulate suffering in the world."[415] Instead of retreating from problems, Dilsey's protest against man's inhumanity to man is to try to remove, or to correct, or to defend someone from any immediate manifestation of falsehood or evil, be it large or small.[416]

In the decaying Compson household, it is Dilsey who tries to hold the family together, not for any reward for herself but for the good of others. She protects Miss Quentin from Jason; she coddles the no-good, whining mother; she stands up to the malicious Jason; and she provides loving care for the idiot, Benjy. When she takes him to her church on Easter Sunday, her daughter Frony is ashamed because she thinks folks criticize them. Dilsey answers:

> "And I knows whut kind of folks. . . . Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he aint good enough for white church, but nigger church aint good enough for him."[417]

After hearing a powerful Easter message, Dilsey comes out of the church with tears streaming down her face. Again Frony is ashamed and tries to get her to stop weeping. Dilsey says,

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[415] Longley, op. cit., p. 226.

[416] Thompson, op. cit., pp. 174, 175.

[417] Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury & As I Lay Dying, p. 306.

"Never you mind . . . I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin."[418]

Bayard Sartoris. In the story "An Odor of Verbena" when Bayard learns that his father has been murdered by his ex-business partner, Redmond, he realizes that he is expected to avenge his father's honor by killing Redmond. As he starts home after hearing the news, he thinks to himself:

> At least this will be my chance to find out if I am what I think I am or if I just hope; if I am going to do what I have taught myself is right or if I am just going to wish I were.[419]

Ringo has brought horses for them to ride home, and Bayard explains:

> He was already mounted when I realized that what Professor Wilkins wanted was to shake my hand. We shook hands; I knew he believed he was touching flesh which might not be alive tomorrow night and I thought for a second how if I told him what I was going to do, since we had talked about it, about how if there was anything at all in the Book, anything of hope and peace for His blind and bewildered spawn which he had chosen above all others to offer immortality, Thou shalt not kill must be it. . . .[420]

With these thoughts he goes to the man who has shot his father, and unarmed, he faces him and makes him leave town.

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[418] Ibid., p. 313.

[419] Faulkner, "An Odor of Verbena," The Unvanquished (New York: The New American Library, 1938), p. 164.

[420] Ibid., p. 165.

Although Drusilla, his father's young widow, expects him to avenge her husband by death and is disappointed, she realizes that this takes more courage than for Bayard to challenge Redmond to a duel.[421]

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[421] Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 42.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this thesis was to determine William Faulkner's moral vision through an analysis of his Yoknapatawpha County novels, reinforced by statements he made from time to time concerning his personal views. This was done by investigating the basis of his beliefs, seeking to determine whether his beliefs about man have universal value or are simply applicable to his local region the South, and examining the techniques he used to present his moral vision through the portrayal of his characters in action. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to summarize the material which has been discussed and to draw some conclusions concerning his moral vision.

In Stockholm when William Faulkner received the Nobel prize for literature, he made the statement that man will not only endure but will prevail. From time to time, in his writings and in speeches, he asserted his belief in the "verities of the human heart"--compassion, pity, pride, humility, honor, justice, courage, love, and integrity. He expressed his detestation of hypocrisy, false pride, inhuman treatment of individuals and groups, greed, and the violation of the human heart. These statements of his moral vision are expanded and made clear in the novels which

comprise the Yoknapatawpha County saga.

Faulkner is a Southern writer, and some critics insist that he writes only about the problems of the South. He does write about and contribute to the Southern myth, a collection or cluster of stories reflecting the attitudes and collective imagination of the Southern people, but he uses this myth to illustrate the universal problems of man. His ambivalent feelings of anguished love and hate and his lack of admiration for the South caused him to write about the evils in an effort to arouse the Southern people to correct these wrongs. Faulkner shows that the curse of the South was brought about by the rape of the wilderness, the exploitation of the land which God had entrusted to man, and the subsequent slavery--the exploitation of man. The Civil War which the South fought and lost was, according to Faulkner, a result of the decadent moral code of the South which allowed the inhuman treatment of the Negroes. Following the Civil War, the New South was further exploited by industrialization, symbolized in "Snopesism," the chief of which was Flem Snopes. Although the institution of slavery was abolished, the Negro still had not achieved the human dignity due him in the New South. Faulkner shows the moral decay of such aristocratic families as the Compsons and the Sartorises, their greed, false pride, and materialism. The mechanization of the society brought about

the isolation of individuals, even within the family. This is particularly true in the novels, The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!

Although Faulkner is not considered by most critics to be an orthodox Christian, he was influenced by his protestant background. His "verities" consist of the elementary Christian virtues. His abhorrence of institutionalized Christianity and the pious hypocrisy of individuals and churches is evident particularly in Light in August. The actions of men such as Eupheus Hines, Percy Grimm, and Simon McEachern leave no doubt about Faulkner's loathing of a fanatical puritan religion that leaves no room for compassion, love, and understanding. The self-righteousness and Pharisaism of the church are shown in Sanctuary in which Ruby and her sick child are put out of the hotel onto the streets at the insistence of the church. Despite the failure of many churches, however, Faulkner reverently pictures the Easter service in the Negro church in The Sound and the Fury, and he extols Dilsey's Christian virtues--endurance, passive suffering, love, and patience.

Faulkner's vision is basically a tragic one. His novels are about man's struggle, his conflict with himself. His tragic vision, a modified form of the Aristotelian idea supplemented by his Christian concepts, is demonstrated in such tragic characters as Joe Christmas, Colonel Sartoris,

and Thomas Sutpen. The modern view of tragedy as it differs from the Greek idea emphasizes the contrasting forces of fate and free will. The South is presented as the real protagonist in all of Faulkner's writing.

To portray his moral vision through his novels, Faulkner uses many different devices and techniques. These he compares to the tools a carpenter uses to build a house. One example is his portrayal of various types of characters. Besides the tragic heroes, he also presents such comic heroes as Benbow, an ineffectual, bumbling good man who usually fails. He uses idiots such as Benjy Compson as moral mirrors in which other characters in the novels and the reader can make their own moral judgment. He sometimes creates characters such as Ratliff and Gavin Stevens who lose their identities in the novels and function as his moral spokesmen.

Among the other tools which he uses, one finds his unusually long sentences which draw the reader into the consciousness of the one struggling between good and evil. Then, too, the mixed-up concept of time showing that the past and the present blend and that there is no such thing as "was," an effort, he says, to write the history of man on the head of a pin. He uses the Southern locale as a setting to tell a universal story. His use of different points-of-view, including stream-of-consciousness, is

another of his devices. Other writers have successfully used stream-of-consciousness, but Faulkner even dares to reveal the innermost thoughts of an idiot. Other tools include pathos, humor, sensationalism, horror, and shock.

Through a study of Faulkner's characters and an observation of them in action, the reader can readily determine Faulkner's attitude toward the villains, the victims, and the moral characters. In his portrayal of such evil men as Flem Snopes and Jason Compson, Faulkner shows his repulsion of the coldness and calculation with which some men carry out acts of violence and injury on helpless individuals or entire communities. They are presented as almost non-human with no capacity for love, only a malicious pleasure in watching the suffering of others which they bring about by the inhuman treatment accorded their victims.

According to Faulkner, no man is wholly good or wholly bad, but some of his characters vacillate more than others from heroic action to defeat. Gail Hightower, a character in Light in August, represents a weak character who failed throughout his life and arrived too late at self-recognition and an effort to atone for his mistakes by an heroic moral act. Rosa Millard, on the other hand, represents an upright, moral character corrupted by greed through the influence of a Snopes. Her corruption brought about her death and marked the beginning of the end of the

aristocratic Sartoris family.

Faulkner communicates to the reader his sympathy for the victims in his novels. Joe Christmas, who battles against his whiteness and his blackness, is one of the most isolated figures in American literature. He struggles not only with himself but with society as well and actually tries to live outside the human family. Milly Jones, a victim of Sutpen's frantic effort to produce a son to carry out his design to create a dynasty, suffers indignities worse than animals must endure. Both of these victims suffer death by murder--Joe by society and Milly by her enraged and humiliated grandfather.

The primitives have a place in the revelation of Faulkner's moral vision through his novels. The idiot, Benjy, stands for the collapse of the Compson mind in The Sound and the Fury. Ike Snopes, in his romance with Jack Houston's cow, shows gentleness, love, and devotion--a genuine unselfishness which "represents perhaps all humanity, however crippled and limited, that takes the risk, the commitment of love."[422] The naive, "poor-white" Bundren family, in As I Lay Dying, carry out what they consider an ethical duty to the dead wife and mother whom they promised

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[422] Longley, op. cit., p. 224.

to bury in Jefferson. This is done despite ridicule from their neighbors, natural calamities, and physical hardship. Sam Fathers, a primitive in the true sense of the word, acting as spiritual father to Isaac McCaslin, teaches him honor, dignity, courage, and endurance.

Faulkner shows his belief that man will endure and prevail by creating characters who embody the virtues and moral character traits which he considers admirable and allowing them to represent him in his novels. He says that there is not always the need for heroic action, but when the challenge comes, there will always be men to meet that challenge. Recognizing the sins of his fathers--the exploitation of the land and the inhuman treatment of the Negro--Isaac McCaslin repudiates his inheritance as a protest against such injustice. Chick Mallison, with the help of Ringo and Miss Habersham, is willing, at great personal danger, to exonerate Lucas Beauchamp from the murder charge. Ratliff may not be a Christian, but he shows many Christian virtues. He <u>talks</u>, but he also <u>acts</u> to help people, especially the victims who cannot help themselves. Dilsey, one of Faulkner's most memorable characters, a "good" person, decent, sympathetic, and responsible, tries to hold the Compson family together despite great difficulties. She is especially remembered for her loving care for the idiot, Benjy. Many other moral characters are found in the novels,

and Faulkner shows his approval of and admiration for them.

Many of Faulkner's attitudes changed through the years of his writing. Concerning his gradual changing attitude toward the Negro, Howe says:

> In the more than two decades of his literary career he has taken a painful journey of self-education, beginning with an almost uncritical acceptance of the more benevolent Southern notions and ending with a brooding sympathy and humane respect for the Negroes. His recent books indicate that no other social problem troubles him so greatly, and that his mind is constantly driven to confront it.[423]

When Faulkner wrote Sartoris, his first major novel, he included in it many of the themes which he pursued in his later novels. He may not have been completely aware of the total vision, but as his novels grew, his moral vision also grew. "The result," says Litz, "is a body of literature characterized by a complete homogeneity, a complete absorption of thought and character in plot. . . ."[424] From the beginning of his career, he was interested in people, not in programs. Spiller says that "almost from the start of his career, Faulkner showed an aching sensibility to the confusion and loss of values of men in his

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[423] Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 134.

[424] Litz, op. cit., p. 209.

time."[425] Faulkner believes that the writer's theme should be the representation of man's awareness of his duty and responsibility to "'choose between justice and injustice, courage and cowardice, sacrifice and greed, pity and self.'"[426] Following this theme he set for himself, he composed the Yoknapatawpha County chronicle, the individual books of which were all "parts of a steady aesthetic vision."[427]

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[425] Robert E. Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 220.

[426] Robb, op. cit., p. 3.

[427] Spiller, op. cit., p. 220.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

NOBEL PRIZE ADDRESS[428]

I feel that this award was not made to me as a man but to my work--a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed--love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and worst of all without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is

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[428]Tuck, op. cit., p. 243.

immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.

APPENDIX B

Address made in 1951 to the graduating class of the Oxford, Mississippi High School.[429]

What threatens us today is fear. Not the atom bomb, nor even the fear of it, because if the bomb fell on Oxford tonight, all it could do would be to kill us, which is nothing, since in doing that, it will have robbed itself of its only power over us: which is fear of it, being afraid of it. Our danger is not that. Our danger is the forces in the world today, which are trying to use man's fear to rob him of his individuality, his soul, trying to reduce him to an unthinking mass by fear and bribery--giving him free food which he has not earned, easy and valueless money which he has not worked for;--the economies of ideologies or political systems. Communist or Socialist or Democratic, whatever they wish to call themselves, the tyrants and the politicians, American or European or Asiatic, whatever they call themselves, who would reduce man to one obedient mass for their own aggrandisement and power, or because they themselves are baffled and afraid, afraid of, or incapable of believing in man's capacity for courage and endurance and sacrifice.

That is what we must resist, if we are to change the world for man's peace and security. It is not man in the mass who can and will save Man. It is Man himself, created in the image of God so that he shall have the power and the will to choose right from wrong and so be able to save himself because he is worth saving;--Man the individual, men and women, who will always refuse to be tricked or frightened or bribed into surrendering, not just the right but the duty too, to choose between justice and injustice, courage and cowardice, sacrifice and greed, pity and self;--who will believe always not only in the right of man to be free of injustice and rapacity and deception, but the duty of man to see that justice and truth and pity and compassion are done.

So, never be afraid. Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice

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[429] Robb, op. cit., reprinted from The Christian Science Monitor under the title, "An Author's Adjuration," October 4, 1951, p. 11.

and lying and greed. If you, not just you in this room tonight, but in all the thousands of other rooms like this one about the world today and tomorrow and next week, will do this, not as a class or classes but as individuals, men and women, you will change the earth. In one generation of all the Napoleons and Hitlers and Caesars and Mussolinis and Stalins, and all the other tyrants who want power and aggrandisement, and the simple politicians and time-servers who themselves are merely baffled or ignorant or afraid, who have used or are using, or hope to use, man's fear and greed for man's enslavement will have vanished from the face of it.

THE MORAL VISION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AS REVEALED IN THE YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY NOVELS

An Abstract of a Thesis
Presented to the
School of Graduate Studies
Ouachita Baptist University

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

---

by
Gladys Mosley Peterson
August 1966

THE MORAL VISION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AS REVEALED IN THE YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY NOVELS

A renewed interest by American critics accompanied the Nobel prize for literature which William Faulkner received in 1950. At that time few of his novels were in print although he was quite popular in Europe. With the world-wide response to his acceptance speech in which he asserted that man will prevail came an appreciation of him as a serious writer. He was, however, still misunderstood by many Americans. The purpose of this thesis was to discover his moral vision as revealed in the thirteen books comprising the Yoknapatawpha County saga. The assumption was made that a study of this kind would result in a greater appreciation of Faulkner and his novels.

The novels were read along with statements which Faulkner made from time to time, especially his lectures at the University of Virginia. Criticisms, both favorable and unfavorable, were analyzed. Evidence was given to show that a common bond existed in all the books of the saga and that Faulkner used different techniques to portray his moral vision as a carpenter uses different tools to build a house. Some of these techniques included the use of tragedy, sensationalism, pathos, horror, and shock. His use of time, varied points of view, symbolism, and unity were also studied

and related to his moral vision. A study of Faulkner's characters was made to discover his moral vision because he shows morality and depravity through characters in action, rather than through direct statements. His villains, exemplified in "Snopesism," and the effect of their evil on innocent victims, show human depravity. The lives and actions of his moral characters portray the verities of the human heart--honor, compassion, pity, courage, love, and sacrifice. He also includes certain weak characters, whose vacillating actions reveal a mixture of good and evil.

Faulkner was influenced by his Southern Protestant background, but he also showed his detestation of the hypocrisy in institutional Christianity. This influence can be seen in his use of Biblical themes and symbolism and his choice of values which he calls the verities of the human heart.

Although the setting of Faulkner's novels is the South, specifically Northern Mississippi, his works have universal value since all people have the same heartaches, follies, and triumphs. By disclosing the evil in his native South, Faulkner hoped to make the people so ashamed that they would want to change that evil. He tried to prove in his novels that man is braver and better than he thinks he is and that he can meet the needs of the hour.

Although Faulkner does not answer all the questions he raises concerning right and wrong, he believes that the writer's theme should be the representation of man's awareness of his duty and responsibility to choose between good and evil. Following this theme, he composed the Yoknapatawpha County chronicle, the individual books of which are part of a steady moral vision.