University of Nebraska at Omaha
DigitalCommons@UNO

Student Work

6-1-1961

William Faulkner: The sins and the curse

Lavon Mattes Jobes

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork

Recommended Citation
Jobes, Lavon Mattes, "William Faulkner: The sins and the curse" (1961). *Student Work*. 3257.
https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/3257

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Work by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

WILLIAM FAULKNER:
THE SINS AND THE CURSE

by

Lavon Mattes Jobes

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

June, 1961

UMI Number: EP74656

All rights reserved

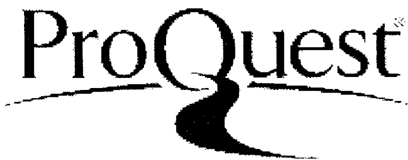
INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI EP74656

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.
All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to her thesis advisor, Dr. Paul C. Rodgers, for his advice and assistance, to the members to the Gene Eppley Library staff for their help in securing materials, and to her husband, Robert E. Jobes, for his encouragement and consideration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	iii
I.	THE CURSE OF SLAVERY: THE McCASLINS	1
II.	THE CURSE OF SLAVERY: SUTPEN, COMPSON, SARTORIS	32
III.	THE CURSE CONTINUES: MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN	75
IV.	FAULKNER REPUDIATES THE CURSE	99
	CONCLUSION	116
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	119
	APPENDIX A	123
	APPENDIX B	126
	APPENDIX C	128

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner is not only a Southerner by birth, he is a Southerner by choice. He has spent most of his life in the small Southern community of Oxford, Mississippi. He often works with a Southern setting, presenting a study of Negro and white relationships.

Faulkner's most extensive treatment of black and white relations is found in Go Down, Moses.[1] His respect for Negroes is shown in the dedication:

TO MAMMY

CAROLINE BARR

Mississippi
(1840-1940)

Who was born in slavery and who
gave to my family a fidelity without
stint or calculation of recompense
and to my childhood an immeasur-
able devotion and love

Although Faulkner has been more explicit in expressing his respect for Negroes in Go Down, Moses, similar sympathy and admiration may be found in most of his works.

Faulkner's earliest fiction (the sketches and stories

---

[1]William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses and Other Stories (New York: Random House, 1942). See Appendix A.

published in New Orleans in 1925)[2] shows interest in Negroes and the problem of race relations. The earliest evidence of Faulkner's concern with the Negro is found in the New Orleans sketch entitled "The Longshoreman."[3] This character sketch portrays a Negro singing a Negro spiritual as he works. In between fragments of his song the Negro makes various statements concerning his life and his interests. His most interesting comment, "White folks says and nigger does,"[4] shows a grudging acceptance of his situation. In the early short story, "Sunset,"[5] (which will be discussed in Chapter III) Faulkner presents a sympathetic portrayal of an ignorant, victimized Negro.

The story entitled "Yo Ho and Two Bottles of Rum,"[6] although it does not involve Negroes, does present a study in race relations in which Faulkner is definitely condemning--through broad irony--white theories of racial superi-

---

[2]A group of short sketches entitled "New Orleans" published in the January-February issue of the New Orleans literary magazine, The Double Dealer; plus sixteen stories and sketches which appeared in the Sunday feature section of the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

[3]One of the sketches from The Double Dealer; reprinted in William Faulkner: New Orleans Sketches (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958), pp. 43-44. Carvel Collins (ed.)

[4]New Orleans Sketches, p. 43.

[5]Published in the Times-Picayune (May 24, 1925): reprinted in New Orleans Sketches, pp. 147-157.

[6]Published in the Times-Picayune (September 27, 1925): reprinted in New Orleans Sketches, pp. 209-233.

ority. The story involves the white officers and the Chinese crew of a small ship. The officers, who consider themselves greatly superior to all Chinese, are described as "The scum and riffraff of the United Kingdom."[7] In this story Faulkner describes for the first time the unfortunate position of a person of mixed blood--a position he was later to present with great power and sympathy:

> the third mate . . . was Eu(ra)sian, and led or was led a dog's life in consequence, being neither one nor the other, yet having a sacred drop or two of British blood to saddle him with the white man's responsibilities while at the same time his lesser strain denied him the white man's pleasures.[8]

The story concerns the death and burial of the Chinese messboy, whom the mate kills, as Faulkner twice tells us, "through an unavoidable accident."[9] The mate Mr. Ayers becomes annoyed when the captain insists that he explain why he killed Yo Ho:

> "Dammit, sir," Mr. Ayers said with justifiable exasperation, "Ain't I a white man? Can't I kill a native if I want to? I ain't the first man that ever did it, any more than I'm the first man that ever made a mistake. I never meant to do the chap in; it was the bosun I was looking for. He had no business popping out on me so suddenly, before I had time to recognize him. His own bloody fault."[10]

---

[7]New Orleans Sketches, p. 212.

[8]Ibid., p. 213.

[9]Ibid., p. 214.

[10]Ibid., p. 210.

Throughout the story the patience and the endurance of the Chinese are contrasted with the ineffective behavior of the officers.

Thus we see one of Faulkner's earliest works of fiction condemning the white theory of racial supremacy and showing the inhumanity, depravity, and ridiculousness of those who act according to that theory. An obvious flaw of the story is that Faulkner is treating the Chinese only as a group, rather than as individuals. He does endow the Chinese with some of the virtues he was later to attribute to the Negro.

In Faulkner's first novel, Soldier's Pay,[11] several minor Negro characters appear. Faulkner portrays them as simple, humble people, yet he sometimes shows the Negroes tolerantly accepting behavior of white persons which they instinctively consider ridiculous.[12] In one scene he contrasts the rudeness of an unpleasant white youth with the politeness of a Negro boy.[13]

Surely Faulkner was thinking of his own mammy, Caroline Barr, when he created the old Negress who had

---

[11]William Faulkner, Soldier's Pay (New York: The New American Library, 1951).

[12]Ibid., pp. 133, 144, 209.

[13]Ibid., p. 101.

raised the dying ex-soldier, Donald Mahon. As "Cal'line" greets Donald, she expresses her devotion to him: "Donald, Mist' Donald honey, here Callie come ter you, honey; here yo' mammy come ter you."[14] Faulkner re-creates the immeasurable devotion and love he received during childhood in the scene in which Bob Saunders, a child, runs home terrified after he has seen Donald Mahon's scarred face:

> --He found himself running suddenly through the hall toward a voice raised in comforting, crooning song. Here was a friend mountainous in blue calico, her elephantine thighs undulating, gracious as the wake of a ferry boat as she moved between table and stove.
>
> She broke off her mellow, passionless song, exclaiming: "Bless yo' heart, honey, what is it?"
>
> But he did not know. He only clung to her comforting voluminous skirt in a gust of uncontrollable sorrow, while she wiped biscuit dough from her hands on a towel. Then she picked him up and sat upon a stiff-backed chair, rocking back and forth and holding him against her balloon-like breast until his fit of weeping shuddered away.[15]

The book ends with a sympathetic description of the singing in a Negro church service.

Faulkner's respect and admiration for Negroes is found in most of his early novels. Mosquitoes[16] (1927) is one of Faulkner's few works in which Negroes receive only brief mention. However, the novel does contain a tribute to the dignity of Negro servants.[17] His third

---

[14] Ibid., p. 117. [15] Ibid., p. 217.

[16] William Faulkner, Mosquitoes (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927).

[17] Ibid., p. 11.

novel, Sartoris,[18] (1929) in which he developed Yoknapatawpha County, contains interesting Negro characters, but lacks the compassion for Negroes which we find in most of his work. In The Sound and The Fury[19] (1929) Faulkner developed one of his most admirable characters, Dilsey, the devoted Negress who is based upon his Mammy Caroline.[20] He has expressed his admiration of his fictionalized Mammy: "'Dilsey is one of my own favorite characters, because she is brave, courageous, generous, gentle, and honest. She's much more brave and honest and generous than me.'"[21] In Sanctuary[22] (1931) Faulkner uses a condemned Negro wife - murderer to re-enforce the pathos of the situation of Lee Goodwin, the man who is about to die for a crime he did not commit. A heaven-tree stands by the jail as an ironical symbol of the despair of both prisoners.[23]

Thus in Faulkner's earliest fiction we find sympathy and respect for the Negro and an interest in Negro

---

[18]William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929).

[19]William Faulkner, The Sound and The Fury and As I Lay Dying (New York: The Modern Library, 1946).

[20]Harry M. Campbell and Ruel E. Foster, William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 145.

[21]Malcolm Cowley (ed.), Writers at Work, Interviews made by The Paris Review (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 130.

[22]William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931).

[23]Ibid., pp. 135-136, 155, 158-159. See William

and white relationships.

This thesis presents a study of Faulkner's portrayal of the Negro and of black and white relationships from Mississippi's earliest history[24] until the present time.

Van O'Connor, The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), pp. 59-60. Hereafter this work will be cited as Tangled Fire.

[24]"Red Leaves" and "A Justice," two of the stories from These Thirteen (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931), are concerned with slavery among the Indians.

CHAPTER I

THE CURSE OF SLAVERY: THE McCASLINS

Much of Faulkner's work--and certainly the best of it--is set in his mythological county of Yoknapatawpha. The name is from two Chickasaw words, Yocona and petopha, and is the old name for the present Yocona River.[1] This imaginary Mississippi county is based upon Lafayette, the county in which Faulkner lives. All of the works in the Yoknapatawpha Saga are part of a pattern which Faulkner has developed into a legend of the South.

Some of the changes Faulkner has made in transforming Lafayette County into his mythical region were apparently in the interest of presenting Yoknapatawpha County as a microcosm of the whole South. Perhaps the most important change is that involving the proportion of white and Negro population. The number of white persons in Lafayette county has always been greater than the number of Negroes. The highest percentage of Negroes was 47.5%, recorded in 1880. The proportion decreased until, by 1940, the Negroes constituted only 40.3% of the population. But only four years

---

[1]Ward L. Miner, The World of William Faulkner (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1952), p. 69. (This work was originally published by Duke University Press.)

before (in 1936) Faulkner set the percentage of Negroes in his legendary county at 59.6%. Faulkner apparently had several reasons for increasing the proportion of Negroes. The percentage of Negroes in the state of Mississippi in 1900 was 58.5%, very close to the figure Faulkner uses. Faulkner is taking his county back to an earlier condition. His population figures are also influenced by the nearness of the Delta. The population of Negroes in some of the Delta counties exceeds 70 and 80% of the total. Thus Faulkner's county presents population characteristics intermediate between those of Lafayette County and those of the Delta. But perhaps a more important indication given by Faulkner's population figures is not historical or geographical, but psychological. The white inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County are so aware of the Negroes that it is as though there were more of them than there really are.[2]

Although Faulkner is writing legend rather than history, the Yoknapatawpha Saga is developed historically. The history of Faulkner's legendary county begins with stories of the Indians and the first settlers. In these wilderness stories Faulkner is not idealizing the Southern social

---

[2]Ibid., p. 88, Faulkner's map of Yoknapatawpha County appeared in Absalom, Absalom! See Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1951).

system. Yoknapatawpha County, from its earliest history, is presented as a land laboring under a curse. Although Faulkner's fiction is explicit in explaining his theme, further proof can be added in the form of an answer which Faulkner made when asked to identify this curse:

> "Mr. Faulkner, throughout your work there seems to be a theme that there's a curse upon the South. I was wondering if you could explain what this curse is . . . .

Faulkner replied:

> "The curse is slavery, which is an intolerable condition--no man shall be enslaved . . . .[3]

Two of the stories in These Thirteen concern the Mississippi Indians after they have been corrupted by the white institution of Negro slavery. "A Justice" concerns the birth of the Negro-Indian Sam Fathers. The injustice of treating human beings as property is clearly shown. In "Red Leaves" we see how the simple, easy life of the Indian has been corrupted by the influences of the white man. The Indians keep slaves for which they have no need or desire. Both the Negroes and the Indians suffer because of this unnatural and inhuman relationship.[4] The Indians are forced to spend days in pursuing a Negro through the swamps who, as the bodyguard of a dead chief, must be buried with him.

---

[3]Fredrick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (ed.), Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 79.

[4]Tangled Fire, p. 69.

The title "Red Leaves" refers to the Indian,

> "It was the deciduation of Nature which no one could stop that had suffocated, smothered, destroyed the Negro . . . the red leaves had nothing against him . . . they probably liked him, but it was normal deciduation which the red leaves, whether they regretted it or not, had nothing more to say in."[5]

Thus Mississippi in its early history is already seen as a land in which human feelings have been corrupted by the sin of slavery.

In Go Down, Moses[6] Faulkner presents his most extensive literary interpretation of the problem of black and white relationships. In this work Faulkner fully explains the curse brought upon the white Southerner by his injustice to the Negro and by his exploitation of the land. The Negroes suffer and the wilderness is destroyed.[7]

Six of the seven stories in Go Down, Moses are concerned with the McCaslin family. The complex and tragic relationships existing among the black and white members of the family are symbolic of the depth of the South's racial dilemma.

The framework of each individual story in Go Down,

---

[5]Faulkner in the University, p. 39.

[6]See note on Go Down, Moses in Appendix A. Faulkner has called the book "a novel . . . composed of more or less complete stories." Faulkner in the University, p. 4.

[7]Walter F. Taylor, Jr., "Let My People Go: The White Man's Heritage in Go Down, Moses," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LVIII (Winter, 1959), 21.

Moses is a ritual hunt.[8] Each hunt illuminates some aspect of Negro and white relationships. The McCaslin plantation is the setting for each of the stories. With a sense of place thus firmly established, Faulkner is able to move freely in time. The rough chronological sequence, beginning with the second generation of McCaslins in "Was" and ending with the fifth generation of Beauchamps in "Go Down, Moses," presents a picture of the changing history of the South. The wilderness retreats and the Negroes leave the plantation, scattering to other states.[9]

In the first story, "Was," we meet Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, who is to be the dominant character in "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn."[10] The story involves Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy (Ike's father and uncle) and is concerned with the effort to recapture a young slave called Tomey's Turl. On the surface "Was" appears as a tall tale; traditional hunting terms are used throughout the story. Faulkner is employing the hunting terms as a device to emphasize the tragic situation of the Negro who

---

[8]Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 124.

[9]Ibid., p. 125.

[10]The story "Was" had been told to Ike by his elder cousin, McCaslin Edmonds. Go Down, Moses, pp. 3-4. See the genealogy of the McCaslin family in Appendix B.

exists on an animal level. Tomey's Turl regularly runs away in order to visit Tennie, a slave girl on Mr. Hubert Beauchamp's plantation. The explanation given for this recurring problem reveals some important facts:

> They couldn't keep him at home by buying Tennie from Mr. Hubert because Uncle Buck said he and Uncle Buddy had so many niggers already that they could hardly walk around on their own land for them, and they couldn't sell Tomey's Turl to Mr. Hubert because Mr. Hubert said he not only wouldn't buy Tomey's Turl, he wouldn't have that damn white half-McCaslin on his place even as a free gift . . . .[11]

From this passage we learn that Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy consider the slaves who provide labor for the plantation as merely "so many niggers." Mr. Hubert's crude opinion of Turl reveals that the slave whom Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy hunt as an animal is really their own half brother. Despite the relationship, Uncle Buck considers Turl simply as "my nigger."[12] After being treated as an animal throughout the story, Turl proves his loyalty to his white half brothers in dealing the cards for the poker game in which Uncle Buddy rescues Uncle Buck from marriage to Mr. Hubert's sister, Miss Sophonsiba. Mr. Hubert asks, "Who dealt these cards, Amodeus?"[13] Not waiting for an answer, Mr. Hubert "reached

---

[11] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[12] Ibid., pp. 10-14.

[13] Ibid., p. 29.

out and tilted the lamp-shade, the light moving up Tomey's Turl's arms that were supposed to be black but were not quite white."[14] Mr. Hubert knows that the slave he has said he wouldn't have "even as a free gift" has beaten him. "'I pass, Amodeus,' he said."[15]

In the second story, "The Fire and the Hearth," Faulkner mingles a great deal of humor with the serious theme of white injustice to the Negro. We meet Lucas Beauchamp, who is proud that he is both the descendant of old Carothers McCaslin through a male line and the oldest person on the plantation "even though in the world's eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves."[16] Lucas is the son of Tomey's Turl and Tennie. Lucas, however, refuses to assume the sub-human role of "a nigger."

We learn of the terrible injustice Lucas received from Zack Edmonds, the father of the present plantation owner. Forty-three years before, when Zack's son was born, Lucas had been sent for the doctor, and returned "to find the white man's wife dead and his own wife already established in the white man's house."[17] Lucas is left alone in the cabin with the fire which he and Molly had made on the

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 36.

[17] Ibid., p. 46.

hearth on their wedding day. After six months have passed he goes to the white man and tells him, "'I wants my wife. I needs her at home'."[18] But Lucas's misery is intensified by Molly's return. "_I will have to kill him_, he thought, _or I will have to take her and go away_."[19] Taking his razor, Lucas goes to Zack Edmonds's house and tells the white man: "". . . You never even thought that, because I am a nigger too, I wouldn't dare. No. You thought that because I am a nigger I wouldn't even mind . . . ."[20] Lucas, refusing to take unfair advantage of Zack, throws his razor out the window. The two men (as two men, not as a white man and "a nigger") wrestle for Zack's gun. The gun misfires, injuring neither of the men. Lucas has proven his courage. He leaves the white man's house and goes to plow his corn. As a youth, Zack's son, Roth, realizes the relationship existing between his father and Lucas:

> --something which had happened between Lucas and his father, which nobody but they knew and would ever know if the telling depended on them--something which had happened because they were themselves, men, not stemming from any difference of race . . . _It was a woman_, he thought. _My father and a nigger over a woman. My father and a nigger man over a nigger woman_ . . . _And by God Lucas beat him_ . . . _Yes, Lucas beat him, else Lucas wouldn't be here. If father had beat Lucas, he couldn't had let Lucas stay here even to forgive him_.

---

[18] _Ibid_.

[19] _Ibid_., p. 48.

[20] _Ibid_., p. 53.

> It will only be Lucas who could have stayed because Lucas is impervious to anybody, even to forgiving them, to having to harm them.[21]

Lucas is a symbol of his race; his inner serenity enables him to endure the hardships and miseries imposed upon him by white society. By his suffering the Negro gains strength which is definitely lacking in the white persons who oppress him.

Much of "The Fire and the Hearth" is concerned with Lucas's humorous hunt for buried treasure. But the situation becomes serious when Molly, Lucas's wife, decides she wants a divorce:

> "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."[22]

Roth Edmonds feels a strong attachment to Aunt Molly, who is the only mother he has ever had.[23] There were no caste barriers in Roth's early association with Molly and her family.

> Even before he was out of infancy, the two houses had become interchangeable: himself and his foster-brother sleeping on the same pallet in the white man's house or in the same bed in the negro's and eating of the same food at the same table in either, actually preferring the negro house, the hearth on which even in summer a

---

[21]Ibid., pp. 115-116.

[22]Ibid., p. 102.

[23]Ibid., pp. 99-100.

> little fire always burned, centering the life in it, to his own.[24]

But this situation was doomed. Faulkner explains why it could not continue:

> One day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him.[25]

Although the affections of a child may be based upon human values, as that child matures he develops the traditional feelings of racial superiority. Faulkner is not only condemning white pride, he is observing that such pride is based merely on a geographical accident.[26]

"The Fire and the Hearth" ends with a simple solution. Roth is able to solve Molly's problem by convincing Lucas that he must stop treasure hunting. But there is no apparent solution to the pathetic racial relationships.

"The Old People"[27] develops the wilderness theme, and gives us an introduction to the magnificent Sam Fathers of "The Bear." Sam is the son of Ikkemotubbe, the Indian chief who named himself Doom, and a quadroon slave woman.[28]

---

[24]_Ibid_., p. 110.

[25]_Ibid_., p. 111.

[26]Miner, p. 149.

[27]The fourth story in _Go Down, Moses_. (The third story, "Pantaloon in Black," will be discussed in Chapter III)

[28]In the earlier story, "A Justice" (mentioned at

Doom sold Sam and his mother to Carothers McCaslin, Ike's grandfather. In this story we see Sam Fathers guiding the boy Isaac:

> At first there was nothing. There was the faint, cold, steady rain, the gray and constant light of the late November dawn . . . .Then Sam Fathers, standing just behind the boy as he had been standing when the boy shot his first running rabbit with his first gun and almost with the first lead it ever carried, touched his shoulder and he began to shake, not with any cold.[29]

The old people are waiting to initiate those who are able to learn the lessons of the wilderness. Sam Fathers is always just behind Ike and ready to help him.[30] When the buck appears, Ike shoots but is never able to remember the shot. The killing of the deer is an indescribable religious experience for Ike. The climax of the symbolic parallel of the hunt with religious rite is reached when Ike is "washed in the blood of the lamb,"[31] as "Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face."[32]

Later that day, Sam shows Ike a magnificent deer:

---

the beginning of this chapter), Sam's paternity was attributed to an Indian named Crawfishford, but called Crawford. _Collected Stories of William Faulkner_ (New York:Random House, 1950), p. 347.

[29] _Go Down, Moses_, p. 163.

[30] Hyatt H. Waggoner, _William Faulkner: From Jefferson To The World_ (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 203.

[31] _Ibid._, p. 204. [32] _Go Down, Moses_, p. 164.

> It just stopped for an instant, taller than any man, looking at them; then its muscles suppled, gathered . . . .
>
> "Oleh, Chief," Sam said. "Grandfather."[33]

That night McCaslin Edmonds[34] tells Ike that Sam had also taken him to see the splendid buck after he had killed his first deer. The magnificent deer represents the spirit of the wilderness and is available to all men who can discover it.[35] The theme of "The Old People" is that if we are to be redeemed from the futility of modern life, we must be initiated into the primitive mysteries of the wilderness as Ike McCaslin is initiated.[36]

"The Bear"[37] is perhaps the best statement of Faulkner's social and moral doctrines. Here Faulkner is saying that if a person develops the right attitude toward nature, he will also develop the right attitude toward his fellow humans.[38] The story concerns the boy Ike McCaslin as he matures and develops consciousness of the primitive values of the wilderness and of the sins of his family.[39] Concerning his use of the wilderness in "The Bear," Faulkner has

---

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 184. [34]Ike's cousin and guardian

[35]*Tangled Fire*, p. 127. [36]Waggoner, pp. 201-202.

[37]The fifth story in *Go Down, Moses*, where Faulkner incorporated an earlier version of "The Bear" and a story called "Lion." See *Tangled Fire*, pp. 127-136; 176.

[38]William Van O'Connor, *William Faulkner* University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 3 (Minneapolis, 1959), p. 34. (Hereafter cited as *Minnesota Pamphlet*.)

[39]Campbell and Foster, p. 111.

said:

> "The wilderness to me was the past, which could be the old evils, the old forces, which were by their own standards right and correct, ruthless; but they lived and died by their own code - they asked nothing . . . . To me, the wilderness was man's past . . . The bear was a symbol of the old forces not evil forces, but the old forces which in man's youth were not evil . . . they were in man's blood, his inheritance his (instinctive) impulses came from that older ruthless malevolence, which was nature. . . . this story was to me a universal story of the man who, still progressing, being better than his father, hoping that his son shall be a little better than he, had to learn to cope with it in terms of justice and pity and compassion and strength.[40]

We see two opposing influences shaping Ike's mind: the plantation economy into which he has been born, and Sam Fathers. The first three sections of the story deal with the hunt. Sam captures and tames Lion, a huge dog used in hunting Old Ben, the giant bear. In the final bear hunt, Old Ben fatally wounds Lion before he himself is killed by the part-Chickasaw hunter, Boon Hogganbeck. The death of the symbolic bear foretells the destruction of the wilderness, and Sam Fathers knows that his own life is drawing to a close. Both Sam and Lion die and are buried in the wilderness.[41]

---

[40]Robert A. Jelliffe (ed.), Faulkner at Nagano (Tokyo: The Kenkyusha Press, 1956), pp. 50-51.

[41]Boon kills Sam at his request; Sam wishes to die quickly, but is too ill and weak to kill himself. Go Down, Moses, pp. 253-254. See also Faulkner in the University, pp. 10, 47.

From Sam, Ike has learned the simple, primitive virtues: courage, pride, humility, and endurance.[42] Ike is so imbued with these qualities that when he reaches the age of twenty-one, he refuses to accept his inheritance. The reasons for Ike's decision show Faulkner's vision of the curse on the South.[43] From casual entries made in the plantation ledger by Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, the boy Ike learns that Carothers McCaslin's relationships with his slaves included both miscegenation and incest. Carothers' first Negro mistress, Eunice, drowned herself on Christmas Day, 1832, because she knew her daughter would give birth to a child who was the result of an incestuous relationship. Eunice's daughter, Tomasina (Tomey) died when the child was born the following June.[44]

The child, named Turl, had been remembered in Carothers McCaslin's will. Thus Carothers admitted the consequences of his act after his death and left the paying of the thousand-dollar legacy to his white sons. "*So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger*,"[45] Ike thought.

---

[42]A brave little mongrel dog also taught Ike courage. *Go Down, Moses*, pp. 211-212. See *Faulkner in the University*, p. 76.

[43]Taylor, 22

[44]*Go Down, Moses*, pp. 267-269. Tomey probably did not know Carothers was her father. See John C. Sherwood, "The Traditional Element in Faulkner," *Faulkner Studies*, III (Summer, Autumn, 1954), 18.

[45]*Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

Ike had felt great compassion for the Negroes mistreated by his grandfather. Thinking of Eunice,

> he seemed to see her actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter's and her lover's (Her first lover's he thought, Her first) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope[46]

The decision which Ike attempts to explain to McCaslin Edmonds is one made inevitable by his association with the wilderness. Ike explains his decision by contrasting the ledgers (the symbol of the guilt of the South) to the Bible.[47]

The whole story of "The Bear" involves Isaac's attempt to atone for the sins of his grandfather. The hunt, to Ike, is a direct means of escaping the curse. In the annual ritual of the hunt is found some survival of primitive virtue. By conquering the bear, the hunters gain some of the courage and endurance which the bear and the wilderness represent. In learning endurance, the chief virtue of the Negroes, the hunters are making some atonement for the sin of slavery.[48]

Section IV of "The Bear" begins with this sentence:

---

[46] Ibid., p. 271. (Faulkner uses no punctuation at the end of this paragraph.)

[47] Vickery, pp. 130-131.

[48] Campbell and Foster, pp. 76-77.

"then he was twenty-one."[49] The lower case "t" indicates that this section is to be intimately related to what has gone before.[50] Through his primitive experiences in the wilderness, Ike has developed a stability of character which is generally lacking in modern society. In his long conversation with his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, he is able to criticize this society both in words and by his action of relinquishing his land.[51] This is Ike's argument:

> "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 . . . because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his . . . ."[52]

Isaac explains that man has disrupted God's plan and destroyed his own proper relationship to God and to nature:[53]

> ". . . He made the earth first and 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 . . ."[54]

---

[49] Go Down, Moses, p. 254.

[50] Campbell and Foster, p. 77.

[51] Ibid. [52] Go Down, Moses, pp. 256-257.

[53] Vickery, p. 131.

[54] Go Down, Moses, p. 257. (Faulkner uses no punctuation at the end of this paragraph.)

From the beginning man failed to live according to God's plan, and after thousands of years the old world had fallen into moral degeneration.[55] God gave man "a new world where a nation of people could be founded in humility and pity and suffering pride of one to another."[56] But again man fails; the land is exploited by individuals rather than used in the "communal anonymity of brotherhood." Connected with land exploitation is the ownership of fellow human beings--the complete opposite of "brotherhood." Thus the land has been tainted.[57]

Ike believes that perhaps his own family was chosen by God to repudiate these evils:

> "Maybe He chose Grandfather out of all of them He might have picked. Maybe He knew that Grandfather himself would not serve His purpose . . . but that Grandfather would have descendants, the right descendants; . . . maybe He saw already in Grandfather the seed progenitive of the three generations He saw it would take to set at least some of His lowly people free--"[58]

In Ike, the curse of the McCaslin heritage has been successfully opposed by the primitive virtues of the wilderness. But McCaslin Edmonds, as the representative of

---

[55]Taylor, 23.

[56]*Go Down, Moses*, p. 258.

[57]Taylor, 24.

[58]*Go Down, Moses*, p. 259.

the McCaslin tradition, is completely unable to understand Ike's feeling toward the Negro:

> ". . . they will endure. They are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion - not laziness: evasion: of what white men had set them to, not for their aggrandisement or even comfort but his own--" and McCaslin
> "All right. Go on: Promiscuity. Violence. Instability and lack of control. Inability to distinguish between mine and thine--" and he
> "How distinguish, when for two hundred years mine did not even exist for them?" and McCaslin
> "All right. Go on. And their virtues--" and he
> "Yes. Their own. Endurance--" and McCaslin
> "So have mules:" and he
> "--and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children--" and McCaslin
> "So have dogs:"[59]

Ike is impervious to his cousin's arguments, because he knows "Sam Fathers set me free."[60]

Ike's protest against wrong may be considered too passive. One critic has charged that he wishes merely to escape.[61] After paying the legacies which Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy had provided for the children of Tomey's Turl[62] and repudiating his inheritance, Ike lives in Jefferson and apparently has no contact with the McCaslin plantation.

---

[59] _Ibid._, pp. 294-295.

[60] _Ibid._, p. 300.

[61] Taylor, p. 281. Vickery, pp. 132-133.

[62] _Go Down, Moses_, pp. 108-109.

Perhaps there is an implication that Faulkner believes the problem is too large for one man to have any hope of prevailing against it."[63]

Faulkner has been asked this question concerning Ike:

> "Mr. Faulkner, do you look on Ike McCaslin as having fulfilled his destiny, the things that he learned from Sam Fathers . . . Do you feel that they stood him in good stead all the way through his life?"

Faulkner replied:

> "I do, yes. They didn't give him success but they gave him something a lot more important . . . They gave him serenity, they gave him what would pass for wisdom--I mean wisdom as contradistinct from the schoolman's wisdom of education. They gave him that."[64]

At another time Faulkner listed three ways in which people may react to problems: one--complete rejection, preferring death; two--rejection and withdrawal; and three--a rejection which includes a decision to do something about the situation. Isaac's action was described by Faulkner as the second type. Mr. Faulkner observed that we need people who decide to change intolerable situations.[65]

We should remember, however, that Ike is humble and sincere, that from the wilderness he has gained the courage necessary to repudiate his inheritance and the wrong and

---

[63] Taylor, p. 28.

[64] *Faulkner in the University*, p. 54.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

shame it symbolizes to him. Ike becomes a carpenter in Jefferson, "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 McCaslin. . . ."[66]

Section V of "The Bear" returns to the wilderness and to Ike's youth. Ike goes back to the camp once more after Old Ben is killed, before the lumber company moves in and begins cutting the timber. But the following year, upon arrival at the log-train junction, Ike

> looked about in shocked and grieved amazement even though he had had forewarning and had believed himself prepared: . . . so that he arranged for the care and stabling of his mare as rapidly as he could . . . and looked no more save toward the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide himself from it once more anyway.[67]

But despite the encroaching destruction, Ike is able to recapture the spirit of the wilderness. He remembers the day Sam marked his face with the blood of his first buck.

The dried leaves of two winters and the floods of two springs have removed all trace of the graves of Sam and Lion. But Ike is able to find them, as Sam had taught him, by bearings on trees. He thrusts his hunting knife into the earth to be certain the tin box is still there--the tin box containing Old Ben's mutilated paw, now resting

---

[66]Go Down, Moses, p. 309.

[67]Ibid., p. 318.

above the bones of Lion. Ike doesn't look for Sam's grave; he doesn't need to. "He probably knew I was in the woods this morning long before I got here."[68] The knoll containing the graves

> was no abode of the dead because there was no death, not Lion and not Sam: not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undiffused of every myriad part, leaf and twig and particle, air and sun and rain and dew and night, acorn oak and leaf and acorn again, dark and dawn and dark and dawn again in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one: and Old Ben too; they would give him his paw back even, certainly they would give him his paw back: then the long challenge and the long chase, no heart to be driven and outraged, no flesh to be mauled and bled--[69]

All things belonging to the wilderness are a part of its great spirit. Ike sees a huge snake, and without premeditation, he speaks the words Sam had spoken when he took Ike into the wilderness and showed him the magnificent deer: "'Chief,' he said: 'Grandfather.'"[70]

The sanctity of the wilderness is disturbed by the sound of hammering which comes from the direction of the clearing and the Gum Tree, where Ike is to meet Boon, the hunter who killed Old Ben. The killing of the giant bear had been performed in a moment of primitive magnificence:

---

[68] Ibid., p. 328.

[69] Ibid., pp. 328-329.

[70] Ibid., p. 330.

"For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man astride its back, working and probing the buried blade."[71] But Boon, who once hunted and killed a huge, semi-legendary bear, is now sitting with his back against the trunk of the tree, hammering "with the frantic abandon of a madman,"[72] with the pieces of his dismembered gun. He is attempting to keep forty or fifty squirrels in the tree from escaping. Without looking up he shouts: "Get out of here! Dont touch them! Dont touch a one of them! They're mine!"[73]

Apparently this final scene is to be contrasted to the heroic scene in which Boon struggled with Old Ben and slew him.[74] With the passing of the wilderness the heroic hunting age has ended. The deeds of men are now futile and lacking in reason.[75]

In "Delta Autumn" Ike is an old man past seventy who still goes on the annual hunt each November. Now the wilderness is two hundred miles from Jefferson. The journey is made by car, and the men are sons and grandsons of the

---

[71] Ibid., p. 241.

[72] Ibid., p. 331.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Faulkner in the University, p. 60.

[75] Ruel E. Foster, "A Further Note on the Conclusion of the Bear," Faulkner Studies, III (Spring, 1954), 5.

hunters who were worthy of pursuing Old Ben. The story involves Ike's meeting with Roth Edmonds's former mistress and her young child. The woman, who has a futile desire to marry Roth, tells Ike that she has been a teacher and lived with an aunt who had a big family and took in washing:

> "Took in what?" he said. "Took in washing?" . . . Now he understood . . . the pale lips, the skin pallid and dead-looking yet not ill, the dark and tragic and foreknowing eyes. 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!" 76

At this point the critics hasten to condemn Ike.[77] One says of him, "What he could not forgive in Carothers McCaslin, he accepts without hesitation in Roth Edmonds."[78] It is true that Roth, in the manner of Carothers McCaslin and Zack Edmonds, has cohabited with a person whom he does not really accept as a member of the human race. Thus the miscegenation is a completely dehumanized relationship. I think, however, that we should remember the differing conditions of the wrongs committed by Carothers McCaslin, by Zack Edmonds, and by Roth. We should, above all, remember that Carothers McCaslin's mistresses were his slaves. We

---

[76]Go Down, Moses, pp. 360-361.

[77]Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York:Random House, 1951), p. 71. Tangled Fire, pp. 133-134. Vickery, pp. 133-134.

[78]Ibid., p. 134.

can assume that neither Eunice nor Tomy had any choice about her relationship with her owner. Carothers, if only indirectly, caused the deaths of both women. A close view of Zack Edmonds's relationship with Molly will prove, I believe, as shocking as the actions of Carothers McCaslin. Zack has no more consideration for the memory of his wife, who dies bearing his son, than to establish Molly in his house on the day of her death. He apparently assumes that since Lucas is just "a nigger" he won't care; and that the marriage of "niggers" is of no importance. Molly appears to play an entirely passive role in the whole matter, apparently accepting without question the directions of the white man to move into his house and then -six months later-to return to her own home and her husband. This passiveness suggests that, despite Molly's technical and legal freedom, she is a slave psychologically. Thus the injustice is much greater both to Molly and to Lucas, than if she were capable of exercising any real thought and free will concerning her own actions. Roth's mistress does, at least, have freedom. She admits to Ike, "I knew what I was doing."[79]

The girl also tells Ike what she had not told Roth-that she is the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim, the son of Tomey's Turl. It would appear that a critical interpreta-

---

[79]Go Down, Moses, p. 358.

tion charging Roth with the sin of Carothers McCaslin is based on the assumption that his relationship with his mulatto mistress is incestuous. But there is no incest involved, because Roth and the girl are only distant kinsmen. (Roth's grandfather, McCaslin Edmonds, was the second cousin of Tennie's Jim, the girl's grandfather.)[80]

Thematically, however, the girl's identity is highly important. Throughout the story of Carothers McCaslin and his descendants we find the recurring pattern of the injustice of the whites toward the Negro members of the family. To Old Carothers a "nigger" is merely personal property to be used as he desired. Buck and Buddy make provisions to free the slaves[81] and are not intentionally unkind, but they consider a "nigger"--even their own half brother--more as an animal than as a human. Ike believes that perhaps God knew it would take three generations "to set at least some of His lowly people free."[82] On Lucas's twenty-first birthday he goes to Ike to claim his legacy, and the two cousins walk together to the bank.[83]

But despite Ike's repudiation, the curse still con-

---

[80]See Appendix B.

[81]The plan is explained in The Unvanquished (New York: The New American Library, 1959), p. 45.

[82]Go Down, Moses, p. 259.

[83]Ibid., p. 109.

tinues; McCaslin Edmonds refuses to accept Ike's beliefs: ". . . I would deny even if I knew it were true. I would have to. Even you can see that I could do no else. I am what I am; I will be always what I was born and have always been."[84] McCaslin takes possession of the plantation:

> --that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery not only to the human beings but the valuable animals too, yet solvent and efficient and, more than that: not only still intact but enlarged, increased . . . and would continue so, solvent and efficient and intact and still increasing so long as McCaslin and his McCaslin successors lasted. . . .[85]

Thus McCaslin has failed to develop a proper attitude toward the land or toward human beings. We see the curse in evidence in his descendants. Although Roth's actions do not involve incest, treating a human as property, or disregard of marriage bonds, he has been responsible for the birth of a child who will have neither a name nor a father. He provides money for the child, but not recognition. His attitude, therefore, is comparable to that of his great-great-great-grandfather who believed that providing a legacy "<u>was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger</u>."[86]

---

[84]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 299-300.

[85]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 298.

[86]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 269. (The phrase is taken from Ike's thoughts concerning his grandfather.)

Moreover, it is quite apparent that Ike does not in the least accept the actions of Roth. When he learns that the girl is a mulatto his voice holds "amazement, pity, and outrage."[87] The amazement is due to his surprise, the pity is for the girl and the child, and the outrage is what he feels concerning both Roth and his own life. Here is that curse again, confronting him in his old age, after he thought he had escaped from it more than fifty years before. Ike has had the courage to repudiate his land but he has not been able to change the beliefs of McCaslin Edmonds. He knows he can do nothing to help this young woman. The first evening in camp, Roth Edmonds expressed his reaction to Ike's philosophy:

> "There are good men everywhere, at all times. Most men are. Some are just unlucky, because most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be. And I've known some that even the circumstances couldn't stop."
>
> . . . .
>
> "So you've lived almost eighty years," Edmonds said. "And that's what you finally learned about the other animals you lived among. I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you been all the time you were dead?"[88]

The curse is still in operation. All Ike can do for the child is to give it the hunting horn he inherited from

[87] Ibid., p. 361.

[88] Ibid., p. 345.

General Compson; just as, when he learns Roth has killed a deer, all he can do is say "It was a doe."[89] Ike realizes that Roth is following the tradition of exploiting both nature and people, and that the curse is still in force:

> This Delta, he thought: This Delta. <u>This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago and live in millionaires' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares.</u> . . . No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! he thought: The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.[90]

In the stories discussed previously the Negroes have been innocent (or, at least, partially innocent) victims. In "Go Down, Moses" the Negro is a criminal. He is not presented as admirable in any way. He is, in fact, a Chicago racketeer who is executed for the murder of a policeman. There must, however, be an explanation for his unfortunate life. Samuel Worsham (Butch) Beauchamp, the grandson of Lucas and Molly Beauchamp, is the victim of modern white civilization.[91]

---

[89] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 365.

[90] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 364.

[91] Campbell and Foster, p. 145.

Five or six years before, Roth Edmonds had caught Butch Beauchamp breaking into his commissary store and had ordered him to leave the plantation and never return. Butch stayed in Jefferson a year. After being caught breaking into a store, he escaped from jail (the place in which he had spent most of his time) and disappeared. Molly senses that the grandson she has tried to raise is in trouble and asks attorney Gavin Stevens to find her boy: "Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him--"[92]

Molly is not told how her grandson died. Gavin Stevens gathers a fund to provide for having the young man's remains brought home and buried properly. Molly knows nothing of the crimes Butch committed in Chicago, and the manner of his death has no significance for her.[93] Symbolically Butch is seen as he appears to his grandmother, as the abandoned Benjamin. He has been corrupted by the city and by white society.[94] He has been destroyed by "'vices aped from white men.'"[95]

---

[92]Go Down, Moses, p. 371.

[93]Taylor, 31.

[94]Peter Swiggart, "Moral and Temporal Order in the Sound and The Fury," The Sewanee Review, LXI (April-June, 1953), p. 234. In a short story, "Elly," (Doctor Martino and Other Stories) Faulkner presents a light mulatto who has entered white society as an extremely repulsive person. Collected Stories, pp. 207-224.

[95]Go Down, Moses, p. 294. See Taylor, 31-32.

A special significance lies in the fact that Faulkner used the name of this story as the title for the entire book. The theme of the "abandoned Benjamin" is the theme of Go Down, Moses.[96] The Negroes have been taken from their natural home and subjected to the horrors of the "middle passage" in order that the ones who survived could be sold to raise cotton for white men to sell to buy more slaves to raise more cotton. The sins of the McCaslin family symbolize the sins of the plantation system. The curse which lies on the family and on the land is found throughout the South. The Negro has been emancipated, but he is still abandoned. Having been brought into white society, he is not accepted by the whites as a human being. The wilderness has been ruined and replaced by cities in which the Negro learns white vices which sometimes cost him his life. The fumbling (and frequently grudging) efforts of the white people to "help" the long abandoned Negro are often merely ridiculous. In his will Carothers McCaslin provided for his abandoned son:

> the thousand dollars which could have had no more reality to him under those conditions than it would have to the negro, the slave who would not even see it until he came of age, twenty-one years too late to begin to

---

[96]"Pantaloon in Black," which will be discussed in Chapter III, presents another version of the abandonment theme. In this story a grief-striken Negro kills in self-defense a white man who has been allowed to exploit Negroes for years. The Negro is abandoned to a lynch mob by a vote-conscious deputy sheriff.

learn what money was.[97]

In fact, Tomey's Turl died without bothering to claim the legacy, just as James, his eldest son, was to disappear without claiming his.[98] Roth Edmonds left an envelope filled with bank notes for his abandoned mistress and son; the girl's reaction was, "That's just money."[99] Gavin Stevens, with the help of Miss Worsham (the elderly woman who had been raised with Molly) and a grudging newspaper editor, is able to bring home the body of Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. When Butch was asked about being taken home, he replied, "What will that matter to me?"[100] But it does matter to Molly; having her grandson buried properly means a great deal to her.

White society has been able to do one thing successfully. After having abandoned, corrupted, and killed a young Negro, it has been able to bring him back home and bury him.

---

[97] Go Down, Moses, p. 269.

[98] Ibid., pp. 106-107; 273.

[99] Ibid., p. 358.

[100] Ibid., p. 370.

CHAPTER II

THE CURSE OF SLAVERY: SUTPEN, COMPSON, SARTORIS

Because Ike McCaslin has developed strength of character through his association with the wilderness, he is able to repudiate

> the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man's money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it and in their sweat scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches in order to grow something out of it which had not been there before and which could be translated back into the money he who believed he had bought it had had to pay to get it and hold it and a reasonable profit too: and for which reason old Carothers McCaslin, knowing better, could raise his children, his descendants and heirs, to believe the land was his to hold and bequeath . . . just as, knowing better, Major de Spain and his fragment of that wilderness which was bigger and older than any recorded deed: just as, knowing better, old Thomas Sutpen, from whom Major de Spain had had his fragment for money: just as Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief, from whom Thomas Sutpen had had the fragment for money or rum or whatever it was, knew in his turn that not even a fragment of it had been his to relinquish or sell [1]

The statement that exploiters do "know better," although made by Faulkner as narrator, is obviously a belief of Isaac's. Because of his own moral awareness, Ike is unable to believe that anyone could possibly be ignorant of the

---

[1] _Go Down, Moses_, pp. 254-255. (Faulkner uses no punctuation at the end of this paragraph.)

moral implications of his own actions. But Thomas Sutpen is completely unaware of the moral implications of his actions; Absalom, Absalom! is the story of a man who did not "know better."

The Sutpen story is told during two days: the dry, hot September afternoon and evening during which Miss Rosa Coldfield (Sutpen's sister-in-law) and Mr. Compson tell the story to Quentin, and the cold New England night in which Quentin and Shreve McCannon retell the story in an attempt to understand it.[2] Quentin tries to understand Thomas Sutpen as a part of his social and historical context. Quentin sees Sutpen as a symbol of the Old South. He attempts to understand his own region through the story.[3]

When Thomas Sutpen, as a young boy, journeys with his family from the mountains of West Virginia down into the Tidewater region, he is bewildered to find the land "all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own."[4] Coming from a mountain region in which all persons lived in simplicity on one social level, the boy Sutpen has no concept of class distinctions. When sent to the plantation

---

[2]Shreve McCannon is Quentin's Harvard roommate. Appendix C contains the chronology of the Sutpen story.

[3]Douglas M. Thomas, "Memory-Narrative in Absalom, Absalom!," Faulkner Studies, II (Summer, 1953),19. Tangled Fire, pp. 94,99.

[4]Absalom, Absalom!, p. 221.

house with a message, he is shocked that a "monkey nigger" orders him to go to the back door. The boy spends hours thinking in order to understand this insult to his fierce mountain pride. Then he realizes that shooting the "monkey nigger" or even the plantation owner would not accomplish his revenge, that his enemy is the whole plantation system. He understands that his father and sisters and the other poor white families have two important reasons for hating the Negroes: the Negroes are the basis of the plantation system and they have better clothes and better homes than the poor whites. He also realizes that the Negroes look down upon the poor whites.[5]

The boy Sutpen forms a grand design. He must own a plantation, a mansion, and slaves. He goes to the West Indies, becomes a foreman on a sugar plantation, suppresses a slave revolt, and marries the daughter of the French planter. After a son is born, Sutpen learns his wife has a small amount of Negro blood. He provides for her and the child and abandons them, apparently believing that any claim can be satisfied by a sufficient money payment. But he does have a certain code of justice. He refuses to say anything in disparagement of his first wife.[6] Sutpen's

---

[5] Ibid., pp. 228-237. Vickery, p. 94.

[6] Ibid., pp. 264-265. Cleanth Brooks, "Absalom, Absalom: The Definition of Innocence," The Sewanee Review, LIX (Autumn, 1951), 547-548.

father-in-law, however, should be recognized as completely unscrupulous. He, too, is established in the tradition of exploiting land and Negroes. We may wonder what treatment his slaves received that they revolted and burned the plantation. The mother of his daughter had been a mulatto. Quite possibly the woman was a slave upon whom the relationship was forced. He wishes his part-Negro daughter to marry a man who will enter into the plantation system and exploit Negroes as slaves. He pretends that the girl's mother was a Spanish woman, thus admitting to himself by his lie that she does not fill the requirements for the position he wishes her to have. Perhaps the girl is unaware of her mother's identity; if not, she is guilty of deliberately misrepresenting herself to the man she marries.[7]

Sutpen appears suddenly in Jefferson and builds a plantation and a mansion with the help of twenty wild Negroes and an unwilling French architect:

> Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light.[8]

---

[7]Absalom, Absalom! , pp.252, 264, 335. Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death In The American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1960), pp. 395-396.

[8]Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 8-9.

As Miss Rosa tells of Sutpen discovering her sister, Ellen, in church, she unknowingly describes the curse brought about by exploiters such as he:

> In church, mind you, as though there were a fatality and curse on our family and God Himself were seeing to it that it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it.[9]

When Sutpen marries Ellen Coldfield, the wedding is virtually unattended. Jefferson is outraged by this man who has invaded the community, apparently coming from nowhere and getting money from nowhere.[10] But Sutpen continues his singleminded efforts to perpetuate his design, completely disregarding the opinion of the community. He becomes the biggest cotton planter in his region, as well as the biggest landowner. He is feared rather than liked, which merely amuses him. But Sutpen is soon accepted. He has too much money to be rejected or even annoyed. He is able to play his role of leisure and ease.[11]

Sutpen is seen as the complete embodiment of the ante-bellum tradition, so complete in fact, that he is rejected by the society from which he copied his design.

---

[9]Ibid., p. 21.

[10]Faulkner in the University, p. 80.

[11]Absalom, Absalom!, p. 72.

Just as Sutpen represents the ruthlessness of the tradition of exploitation, Ellen Coldfield Sutpen represents the complete meaninglessness of the social pattern. She is described as a butterfly who escapes reality through fancy. She visits the women who refused to attend her wedding, and shops without bothering to descend from her carriage, speaking bright, set phrases of complete nonsense "against her background of chatelaine to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate."[12]

Henry, the heir to Sutpen's Hundred, is sent to the University of Mississippi where he becomes friends with Charles Bon. Bon is too old to still be in college, and both too worldly and too wealthy to be in a new small college built in the Mississippi wilderness. He is Sutpen's son by his first marriage and is at the University through the plans of his paranoiac mother and her scheming lawyer--the mother bent upon revenge, the lawyer interested in his client's (and Sutpen's) wealth.[13] Keeping his identity a secret, Bon becomes the close friend of Henry and the fiancé of Henry's sister, Judith.

In the three-cornered relationship involving Bon, Henry, and Judith, there is definitely more attraction

---

[12] Absalom, Absalom!, p. 69.

[13] Ibid., pp. 304-310. Faulkner in the University, pp. 77; 93-94.

existing between Bon and Henry and between Henry and Judith than there is between Bon and Judith. Between Henry and Judith there has been a relationship even closer than the traditional loyalty of a brother and sister, something similar to the impersonal rivalry which exists between two cadets.[14] They are described as "that single personality with two bodies both of which had been seduced almost simultaneously by a man whom at the time Judith had never even seen."[15]

The attraction which Charles Bon holds for Judith seems a reflection or an extension of the attraction he holds for Henry. In their attachment to Bon, Henry and Judith seem to function almost as alter egos:

> She must have seen him in fact with exactly the same eyes that Henry saw him with. And it would be hard to say to which of them he appeared the more splendid--to the one with hope, even though unconscious, of making the image hers through possession; to the other with the knowledge of the insurmountable barrier which the similarity of gender hopelessly intervened. . . .[16]

But Henry's interest in a marriage between Bon and Judith is prompted not only by a homosexual interest in Bon, but also by an incestuous interest in Judith:

---

[14]<u>Absalom</u>, <u>Absalom</u>!, pp. 79-80.

[15]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 91-92. See Irving Malin, <u>William Faulkner</u>: <u>An Interpretation</u> (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 82.

[16]<u>Absalom</u>, <u>Absalom</u>!, p. 95.

> In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. . . .[17]

The narcissism of the great planter families, the inner flaw of a design which is based upon a moral wrong, and the inward decay and instability of the plantation system are all symbolized by the unwholesome aspects of incest and homosexuality in the relationship of Bon, Henry, and Judith.

Sutpen knows Bon's identity and recognizes the doom of his design. If he does nothing, his daughter will enter into an incestuous marriage with his repudiated son and his efforts to found a family dynasty will become a mockery. If he stops the marriage by admitting who Bon is, he will be recognizing a child with Negro blood as his eldest son and heir.[18] Bon desires only the recognition of his father. He would be willing to leave Sutpen's Hundred forever if

---

[17] Ibid., p. 96.

[18] In both Absalom, Absalom! and "The Bear" Faulkner uses the rule of primogeniture to determine the inheritance of estates. In actuality the rule was abolished at the birth of the United States. "Descent and Distribution," The Encyclopedia Americana: The International Reference Work (New York, 1957), VIII, 719. Apparently both Henry and Sutpen dismiss the simple solution of telling Judith who Bon is because they believe she would ignore the fact. Absalom, Absalom!, p. 341.

Sutpen would only recognize him privately as his son. But Sutpen, like Carothers McCaslin, is unable to say "My son to a nigger."[19] He is unable to realize that his own son is re-enacting the role of the boy at the door. His heart remains closed as tightly to his son as the front door of the Tidewater plantation had been to him. The relationship between Bon and Sutpen can be considered a symbol of the racial situation of the South.[20]

Throughout his life, Sutpen has remained ignorant of the moral implications of his design.[21] He tells Quentin's grandfather:

> "You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family--incidentally of course, a wife. . . ."[22]

But "whether it was a good or a bad design" is not at all "beside the point." Sutpen's ambition brings a curse upon him and his descendants, the same curse found in the McCaslin

---

[19]Go Down, Moses, p. 269. Sutpen's refusal to say "My son" to Bon is to be contrasted to David's acknowledgment of Absalom after Absalom's rebellion. Waggoner, p. 165. Second Samuel 19:33. Faulkner has identified this Bible passage as his source for the novel's title. Faulkner in the University, p. 76.

[20]Minnesota Pamphlet, p. 26. Vickery, p. 96. Faulkner in the University, p. 94.

[21]Waggoner, pp. 166-167.

[22]Absalom, Absalom!, p. 263. (Quentin is repeating the story Sutpen told to Quentin's grandfather.)

family--and throughout the whole South.[23]

It is ironic that Sutpen asks "whom or what" he has injured. The term "what" indicates either an animal or an inanimate object, a "thing." We may ask how the possible injury of "what" could be equated with the possible injury of "whom." The answer to this question lies in the list of requirements Sutpen found necessary for the completion of his design. Three of the "things" included in his list would necessarily be human. But Sutpen has no sympathy for his fellow man; to him these items are all just "things." Sutpen does not think of the slaves, the family, or the incidental wife as humans. He is unable to recognize his own son, Charles Bon, as a human with human needs. He is unable to comprehend that a design based upon using fellow humans as "things" is morally wrong and, therefore, cursed and doomed.[24]

Despite lack of recognition, Charles Bon is a part of the tradition of exploitation to which his father belongs. Bon treats people as "things," just as Sutpen does. He becomes engaged to his half-sister in an effort to force recognition from his father.[25] Although Bon has a small

---

[23]Harry M. Campbell, "Structural Devices in The Works of Faulkner," <u>Perspective</u>, III (Autumn, 1950), 215.

[24]Waggoner, pp. 165-167.

[25]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 167.

amount of Negro blood, he exploits Negroes. He has an octoroon mistress and a small son in New Orleans. Faulkner portrays the woman and child with great sympathy:

> the apotheosis of two doomed races presided over by its own victim--a woman with a face like a tragic magnolia, the eternal female, the eternal Who-suffers; the child, the boy, sleeping in silk and lace to be sure yet complete chattel of him who, begetting him, owned him body and soul to sell (if he chose) like a calf or puppy or sheep. . . .[26]

In an effort to prevent Judith's marriage without recognizing Bon, Sutpen tells Henry that Bon is his half-brother. Henry denies what he realizes is true and repudiates home and birthright. Ellen, unable to endure reality, spends the remaining two years of her life in bed. By the time of Ellen's death, Bon and Henry are privates in the Infantry, and Sutpen is a Colonel.

Despite the War, Sutpen continues to pursue his design by obtaining an imported tombstone for the wife who had been merely a necessary part of that design. Sutpen also purchases a tombstone for himself and places it in the hall of his mansion. The tombstone can be regarded as a symbol of his own mortality and the futility of his efforts to escape time by establishing a family dynasty.[27]

---

[26] Absalom, Absalom!, p. 114.

[27] Ibid., pp. 188-190. William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 264.

After four years of the miseries of war, Henry is ready to accept the incestuous marriage as a fitting badge of the awaited defeat.[28] But Sutpen tells Henry that miscegenation would also be involved. Bon, who appears motivated by a death urge, insists on returning to Sutpen's Hundred, and Henry shoots him at the gate. Thus Henry denies his brother by killing him as a Negro.[29]

Miss Rosa arrives at Sutpen's Hundred and is bewildered to find her niece without grief. Judith holds the metal case which Miss Rosa believes still contains Judith's picture--but which now holds a picture of the octoroon and the child. Rosa is barred from climbing the stairs to see Bon's body by Clytie, Sutpen's daughter by a slave:

> _Clytie . . . perverse inscrutable and paradox: free, yet incapable of freedom who had never once called herself a slave . . . who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made of her (Clytie) that which she declined to be just as she had declined to be that from which its purpose had been to emancipate her, as though presiding aloof upon the new, she deliberately remained to represent to us the threatful portent of the old._[30]

Despite Rosa's dislike for Clytie, the barriers of

---

[28]_Absalom, Absalom!_, p. 349. _Tangled Fire_, pp. 97-98.

[29]Vickery, p. 98.

[30]_Absalom, Absalom!_, pp. 156-157. The entire chapter (Chapter V, told by Miss Rosa) is presented in italics rather than in quotation.

color and caste are forgotten as the three women are returned by the hardships of war to a primitive existence in which the struggle for survival is all important. Judith, Rosa, and Clytie live, in Miss Rosa's own words:

> not as two white women and a negress, not as three negroes or three white, not even as three women, but merely as three creatures who still possessed the need to eat but took no pleasure in it, the need to sleep but from no joy in weariness or regeneration . . . we grew and tended and harvested with our own hands the food we ate, made and worked that garden just as we cooked and ate the food which came out of it: with no distinction among the three of us of age or color but just as to who could build this fire or stir this pot or weed this bed or carry this apron full of corn to the mill for meal with least cost to the general good in time or expense of other duties.[31]

When Sutpen returns from war he finds Henry a fugitive from justice, and himself, at almost sixty years of age, without a male heir. The immediate cause of the failure of his design has been his refusal to acknowledge his part-Negro son.[32]

Sutpen, at once, begins a frantic attempt to rebuild his design. He becomes engaged to Miss Rosa, but changes his proposal to a proposition that she produce a male heir before they marry. The genteel Miss Rosa is so outraged at this insult to her honor that she returns to town and spends the rest of her life in seclusion. Sutpen, able

---

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 155. See footnote No. 30.

[32]Waggoner, p. 165.

to retain only a small fragment of his one-hundred square acres, runs a country store, assisted by Wash Jones, a poor white squatter. Sutpen's last efforts to produce a son involve the young granddaughter of Jones. But the child is a girl. The fierce pride of Wash is aroused by lack of acknowledgment and he kills Sutpen.[33] Thus the immediate cause of Sutpen's death is his unwillingness to acknowledge a child who cannot further his design.

Bon's son, Charles Etienne DeSaint Velery Bon, is brought to Sutpen's Hundred, and we see a pathetic conflict operating in the child's mind. The situation of the pale child with his small amount of Negro blood is shown by his sleeping on a cot mid-way between Judith's bed and Clytie's pallet.[34] As a young man, his furious despair drives him to violent fighting. He denies his white blood and marries a "coal-black and ape-like woman."[35] In 1884, Velery Bon contacts small pox; Judith nurses him, and both die of the disease. Only Clytie and Jim Bond (Bon), Valery's idiot son, remain.

Now (in September, 1909) Miss Rosa tells her story

---

[33]Sutpen also kills his granddaughter and her child; he is killed by a posse. See Appendix C.

[34]Vickery, p. 99.

[35]_Absalom, Absalom!_, p. 205.

to Quentin because she knows that Clytie has someone hidden at Sutpen's Hundred. Quentin accompanies Miss Rosa to the decaying mansion, where they find Henry Sutpen. After a life spent in exile as punishment for fratricide, Henry is spending his last days in a state of living death: "the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyelids on the pillow, the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse;"[36]

Clytie emerges as a tragic figure of immense proportions. It is she who has raised and cared for the idiot. For the past four years she has nursed her dying half-brother. Now Clytie thinks that Henry will be hanged for killing Charles Bon forty-five years before. When Miss Rosa gets the ambulance to go after Henry, Clytie sets fire to the house. Perhaps she appeared at the window:

> the tragic gnome's face beneath the clean headrag, against a red background of fire, seen for a moment between two swirls of smoke, looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more of despair than it had ever worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards before the smoke swirled across it again--[37]

Clytie and Henry die in the fire. "Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race,"[38] is capable only of howling his despair. "The house collapsed and roared away, and

---

[36] Ibid., p. 373.

[37] Ibid., p. 376.

[38] Ibid.

there was only the sound of the idiot negro left."[39] It is significant (and ironic) that only an idiot Negro descendant (great-grandson) of Thomas Sutpen survives. Jim Bond is unable to comprehend what color he is--and unable to realize that there are social distinctions dependent upon a person's color. His mind is incapable of developing a conflict between his black and his white blood. Because he exists completely outside the social pattern, he destroys neither himself nor others in attempting to conform to the conventions of society. Thus he alone is able to survive.[40] He is a haunting reminder of the failure of the plantation system and of the injustice of slavery. Shreve says, "You still hear him at night sometimes. Don't you?"[41] Quentin replys simply, "Yes."[42]

The white South built a system which was cursed and doomed because it was based upon injustice and rapacity. Now it is the Negro's turn to create a social order. The future lies with the Negro.[43]

As Quentin tells Shreve, he does not hate the South. It is his home and he loves it. He has recognized the bad

---

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p. 215. Vickery, pp. 99-100.

[41] Absalom, Absalom!, p. 378.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid. Ike McCaslin had made a similar statement. Go Down, Moses, p. 278.

qualities of the South and he does hate them.[44] For this reason he is upset by Shreve's question, "Why do you hate the South?"[45] But Quentin (like Faulkner) knows he does not love because; he loves despite.[46]

When we remember that Quentin Compson is to commit suicide because he is unable to find any positive values in life only a few months after he tells the story of Thomas Sutpen,[47] we can understand his intense desire to discover the meaning of the Sutpen story--and through it the significance of his region and his own life. In both _Absalom, Absalom!_ and _The Sound and the Fury_ Quentin is "'trying to get God to tell him why.'"[48]

Unity is obtained throughout _The Sound and the Fury_ by the use of two effective elements: the moaning of Benjy, the idiot; and the noble figure of Dilsey, the aged Negress. Throughout the tragedy the Negroes function as a Greek chorus, led by Dilsey.[49]

---

[44] _Faulkner in the University_, p. 71.

[45] _Absalom, Absalom!_, p. 378. _Tangled Fire_, pp. 95-96.

[46] William Faulkner, "Mississippi," _Holiday_, XV (April, 1954), 46. See also _Faulkner at Nagano_, p. 26.

[47] June 2, 1910. See _The Sound and the Fury_, pp. 95; 197. Hereafter this work will be referred to as _Sound_.

[48] _Faulkner in the University_, p. 275.

[49] Edwy B. Lee, "A Note on the Ordonnance of The Sound and the Fury," _Faulkner Studies_, III (Summer-Autumn, 1954), 37. See also Waggoner, p. 56.

The history of the Compson family discloses a founder who was an exploiter in the manner of Carothers McCaslin and Thomas Sutpen. Jason Lycurgus Compson had appeared at the Chickasaw Agency at Okatoba in 1811 riding a mare that could run quite fast, for not more than four furlongs. The mare's winnings in short races against horses belonging to Ikkemotubbe's young men enabled Compson, within a year, to own half interest in a greatly expanded store. The next year Compson traded the mare to Ikkemotubbe for a square mile of forested land, which was later to be in the center of Jefferson. Twenty years later the solid square mile contained a columned, porticoed house, kitchen gardens, formal lawns, promenades, pavilions, slave quarters, and stables. The mile became known as the Compson Domain and the mansion as the Governor's house. But the governor was the last Compson to succeed at anything. Brigadier General Jason Lycurgus Compson II put the first mortgage on the square mile in '66 (to a New England carpetbagger) and sold fragments for the next forty years in order to make payments on the mortgage.

By the time of Jason III the remainder of the square mile is known only as the Compson place. The gardens are choked with weeds and the house needs painting. Jason III spends his days sitting "with a decanter of whiskey and a litter of dogeared Horaces and Livys and Catulluses" com-

posing satiric eulogies on his fellow townsmen--both living and dead.[50]

The present-day Compsons "are still living in the attitudes of 1859-'60,"[51] but the family is no longer effective. Despite the moral flaws of the ante-bellum aristocrats, they had strength of character and courage.[52] The Compsons have retained only the traditional concern with honor and pride, which is strangely out of place in their decayed condition. Jason III expounds a philosophy in which life and human endeavors are futile. The wife of Jason III (although a Compson only by marriage) spends her time complaining, insisting that she is a lady and calling Dilsey to wait upon her.

Evidence of the family's decadent state is found in the children of Jason III and Caroline Compson: Quentin III, Candace (Caddy), Jason IV, and Benjamin (born Maury). The pasture Benjy loves is sold to acquire money for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's year at Harvard. But this last vain effort to maintain traditional pride is doomed by the in-

---

[50]William Faulkner, The Portable Faulkner, Malcolm Cowley (ed.), (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), pp. 738-742. The history of the Compson family was written by Faulkner as an "Appendix" to the volume. The "Appendix" is now printed at the beginning of The Modern Library Editions of The Sound and the Fury.

[51]Faulkner in the University, p. 18.

[52]Miner, p. 133.

ternal corruption of the family. Caddy's marriage is very short because she is expecting a child which does not belong to the man she marries. Mrs. Compson disowns Caddy, but allows her to send the child home. The Negro chorus is heard--with Dilsey's common sense subduing superstitions:

> . . . Roskus said. "They aint no luck going be on no place where one of they own chillen's name aint never spoke."
> "Hush." Dilsey said. "Do you want to get him started."
> "Raising a child not to know its own mammy's name." Roskus said.
> "Dont you bother your head about her." Dilsey said "I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more. Hush now. Let him get to sleep if he will."
> "Saying a name." Frony said. "He dont know nobody's name."
> "You just say it and see if he dont." Dilsey said. "You say it to him while he sleeping and I bet he hear you."
> "He know lot more than folks thinks." Roskus said . . . .
> "You take Luster outen that bed, mammy." Frony said. "That boy conjure him."
> "Hush you mouth." Dilsey said, "Aint you got no better sense than that. What you want to listen to Roskus for, anyway. Get in, Benjy."[53]

Quentin struggles against the feeling of futility he has learned from his father and makes a vain attempt to find positive values in life.[54] In his state of semi-madness,[55] Quentin is obsessed with time and the traditional

---

[53]Sound, pp. 50-51.

[54]Waggoner, p. 48.

[55]Faulkner in the University, pp. 95, 119.

concept of personal honor.[56] He feels despair at the loss of Caddy's honor and a desire to commit incest with her. But incest is opposed to family honor, just as the futility of time is opposed to personal honor. Quentin's desire for incest is symbolic of the social disorder and narcissism of the family.[57] After waiting to complete the school year, Quentin drowns himself at Cambridge.[58]

Jason IV completely rejects the traditional concepts of dignity and honor. He assumes the burden of his family upon his father's death because he fears Dilsey, who has sensed that he is stealing the money Caddy sends for the care of her child.[59] Jason is unable to force Dilsey to leave the Compson home; she remains even when he stops paying her wages.[60] Jason provides proof of the final decay of the Compson family. By the end of The Sound and the Fury, he is the only Compson who has not either died or disappeared, except Mrs. Compson and Benjy, both of whom are completely ineffective. But Jason is a Compson in name only--he behaves like a Snopes.[61]

---

[56]Vickery, pp. 38-39. Tangled Fire, p. 40.

[57]Ibid., p. 39.

[58]Quentin knows what Dilsey's common sense reaction to his suicide will be, "What a sinful waste Dilsey would say." Sound, p. 109.

[59]The Portable Faulkner, p. 750.

[60]Ibid., p. 751.

[61]Waggoner, pp. 153-155.

The Compsons have abandoned, not a Negro,[62] but an idiot--"Benjamin, our lastborn, sold into Egypt."[63] Their story, like Benjy's loud and frequent wails, is full of "sound and fury." For the Compsons the story ends in death and decay. They cannot understand the significance of their own lives, just as Thomas Sutpen failed to comprehend the meaning of his own story. But the Compson story, rather than "signifying nothing," means a great deal.[64]

Benjy is a Christ image, not as an allegorical symbol, but as a reminder of Christ and the values associated with Him.[65] Christ was innocent because he did not sin; Benjy is innocent because he is an idiot. Both Christ and Benjy suffer intensely because of the sins of others. Benjy intuitively perceives sin and death, but he is able only to moan and wail.[66] Benjy is a modern Christ, both impotent and helpless;[67] his source of strength is Dilsey, who serves as a "foster-mother of Christ."[68] The Compsons are judged in terms of their relationship to Benjy and

---

[62]See the discussion of "That Evening Sun" (from _These Thirteen_) immediately following the current discussion.

[63]_The Portable Faulkner_, p. 753. Sumner C. Powell, "William Faulkner Celebrates Easter, 1928," _Perspective_, II (Summer, 1949), 195. See also Swiggart, p. 234.

[64]Waggoner, p. 43.

[65]Benjy is thirty-three, the jimson weed he likes to hold is known locally as angel's trumpet, and the story he tells culminates on Easter. _Ibid._, p. 44.

[66]Powell, 196-197. [67]Waggoner, p. 44. [68]_Ibid._, p. 46.

their contrast to Dilsey.[69]

Upon learning the child is an idiot, Mrs. Compson decides he can no longer bear her brother's name. Dilsey reacts to this show of pretentious pride by asking, "He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he."[70] When Mrs. Compson tries to hide her shame for Benjy behind pretensions of mother-love by referring to him as "the baby,"[71] Dilsey replies, "You calling that thing a baby. . . ."[72]

Benjy's moans for his lost Caddy are a judgment on her; she has traded family love for sensual relationships.[73] Quentin feels enough compassion for Benjy that he completes the year at Harvard for which Benjy's pasture was sacrificed. But Quentin lacks the strength necessary to cope with life. Jason considers his younger brother as merely the "Great American Gelding."[74]

After Caddy leaves and Quentin commits suicide,

---

[69]Ibid., p. 45. Vickery, p. 32. Lawrence E. Bowling, "Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence," The Kenyon Review, XX (Summer, 1958), 481.

[70]Sound, p. 77. (The scene is presented through the mind of Benjy). See Tangled Fire, p. 40.

[71]Sound, p. 29.

[72]Ibid. (See footnote No. 70).

[73]Powell, 195.

[74]Sound, p. 280.

only Dilsey remains to love Benjy and care for him. She alone is capable of seeing Benjy as a human, rather than merely as a helpless "thing." She remembers his birthday (significantly, the day before Easter) and buys him a cake.[75]

The contrast between Dilsey and Jason takes the form of actual conflict as she protects others from his anger. She defends Miss Quentin (Caddy's daughter, named for her uncle), although the girl is cruel to her in return. Jason is completely incapable of comprehending anyone who is motivated by love rather than by money.[76] But Dilsey is well able to understand him, "'You's a cold man, Jason, if man you is,' she says. 'I thank de Lawd I got mo heart dan dat, even ef hit is black.'"[77] Old Job, the store handyman whom Jason ridicules, also makes an effective judgment upon Jason:

> "You's too smart fer me. Aint a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself . . .
> . . . .
> Dat's Mr Jason Compson."[78]

Although only Quentin is obsessed with time, the

---

[75] Waggoner, pp. 45-46.

[76] Vickery, p. 47.

[77] Sound, p. 225.

[78] Ibid., p. 267. See Waggoner, p. 54.

whole family is defeated by it. Benjy is unaware of time, but he grieves for what time has taken from him. Jason attempts to catch up with what is past: his stock market losses, the job he never had. But Dilsey is not defeated by time.[79] Her religious faith gives her security and a feeling of belonging in time:

> . . . _My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me._
> _How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said._
> _It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out._
> _Can you read it, Caddy said._
> _Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here._[80]

Dilsey knows all she needs to know about time in order to live her present life. Although the kitchen clock is wrong, it presents no problem to her; she knows that it is three hours slow.[81] Her faith is sufficient for the future.

At the climax of this tale of sound and fury, on the day celebrating the Resurrection, we find the objective fourth section--dominated by Dilsey. In contrast to the disordered and un-Christian lives of the Compsons, Dilsey is truly a heroic figure.[82] She is presented to us as she

---

[79]Vickery, pp. 32, 48. See Waggoner, pp. 50-51.

[80]_Sound_, p. 77. (The scene is presented through the mind of Benjy). See Powell, 213 and Waggoner, p. 58.

[81]_Sound_, pp. 290, 316. See Waggoner, p. 50.

[82]See Powell, 215, and Waggoner, p. 55.

opens the door of her cabin on the bleak and chill Easter Sunday:

> She wore a stiff black straw hat perched upon her turban, and a maroon velvet cape with a border of mangy and anonymous fur above a dress of purple silk, and she stood in the door for awhile with her myriad and sunken face lifted to the weather, and one gaunt hand flac-soled as the belly of a fish, then she moved the cape aside and examined the bosom of her gown.
> . . . She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage and fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being at once fatalistic and of a child's astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed the door.
> . . . The door of the cabin opened and Dilsey emerged once more, this time in a man's felt hat and an army overcoat, beneath frayed skirts of which her blue gingham dress fell in uneven balloonings, streaming too about her as she crossed the yard and mounted the steps to the kitchen door.[83]

The scenes in which Dilsey prepares breakfast amid the idiotic interruptions of Mrs. Compson show Dilsey as the cohesive force holding together the home of a family which neither desires nor deserves it. The common sense of Dilsey is contrasted to the selfish and thoughtless nature of Mrs. Compson. Dilsey, unlike Mrs. Compson, continually thinks of others. When Luster finally brings Benjy downstairs, Dilsey asks, "Is he cold?"[84] Dilsey's loyalty to

---

[83] Sound, pp. 281-282.

[84] Ibid., p. 291.

the undeserving Compsons is shown by her reply to Luster's assertion:

> "Dese is funny folks. Glad I aint none of em."
> "Aint none of who?" Dilsey said. "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em."[85]

The awareness of traditional values which Dilsey and the other Negroes possess is completely lacking in the lives of the Compsons. Dilsey's family will go to church. Jason reacts by asking, "Go where?. . . Hasn't that damn show left yet?"[86] Now Easter takes on a personal meaning for him--it means eating a cold dinner. But the Compson family has no traditional concept of Easter; as Jason observes to his mother, they didn't resurrect Christ.[87]

There is dramatic irony in the scene in which the disappearance of Miss Quentin with Jason's hoarded money (part of which he had stolen) is discovered. Mrs. Compson's self-pity, pride, and pretensions are in sharp contrast to the real condition of her family and her own ineffectiveness. She wails, "But on Sunday morning, in my own house. . . . When I've tried so hard to raise them Christians."[88]

---

[85] _Ibid_., p. 292.

[86] _Ibid_., p. 295.

[87] _Ibid_. See Miner, p. 140, and Waggoner, p. 53.

[88] _Sound_, P. 297. See Powell, 214.

In contrast to the Compsons, Dilsey, Luster, and Frony attend church on Easter. Significantly, Benjy accompanies them. The Negroes couldn't all go to church without taking Benjy, because no one else would take care of him. Even so, there is some disapproval of Benjy's attending the Negro church. But Dilsey effectively dismisses this opinion:

> "I wish you wouldn't keep on bringin him to church, mammy," Frony said. "Folks talkin."
> "Whut folks?" Dilsey said.
> "I hears em," Frony said.
> "And I knows whut kind of folks," Dilsey said. "Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him."
> "Dey talks, jes de same," Frony said.
> "Den you send um to me," Dilsey said. "Tell um de good Lawd dont keer whether he smart er not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat."[89]

Thus Benjy's attendance at the Negro church is symbolic of his alliance with the Negro race and his abandonment by the white.[90]

The endurance of the Negro race is dramatically symbolized by the magnificent preacher whose appearance is shabby and insignificant.[91] The preacher makes no impression on the congregation while he speaks in the cold, level

---

[89] Sound, p. 306.

[90] Swiggart, pp. 234-235.

[91] Ibid., p. 235.

voice of a white man. Then he speaks in a tone,

> . . . with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes. . . . And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words. . . .[92]

In this Easter sermon the necessities of realizing one's place in history and of living an ordered life are re-emphasized.[93] The simple verities of human life arise, "the old universal truths . . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice."[94] In this atmosphere of redeeming love,[95]

> In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bolt upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered Lamb.[96]

In attending the Easter services Dilsey renews and re-affirms the Christian love and faith which she has demonstrated throughout the novel.[97] Her instinctive religious faith is shown by the fact that she uses a phrase from the Bible in speaking of the decay of the family,

---

92 Sound, p. 310. See Vickery, p. 49.

93 Powell, 214.

94 William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Address," The Faulkner Reader (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 3-4. See Vickery, p. 49.

95 Swiggart, 236. 96 Sound, p. 313.

97 Powell, 214. See also Bowling, 482-483.

98 Sound, pp. 313, 316. See Revelation 22:13.

"I've seed de first en de last."[98] The security which her faith gives her is shown when she tells Benjy, "You's de Lawd's chile, anyway. En I be His'n too, fo long, praise Jesus."[99]

The necessity for order and an established pattern in life is emphasized again by the ending of the novel. Benjy wails when Luster starts to pass the Confederate monument on the left side. As traffic is one way around the square in Jefferson, when Luster goes to the left of the monument he is going the wrong way, and things are not in their proper place in Benjy's world.[100] Jason (who is nearby) turns the horse around, striking both Luster and Benjy. Then,

> The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place.[101]

Let us compare this ending to the last stanza of "The Waste Land":[102]

> I sat upon the shore
> Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
> Shall I at least set my lands in order? . . .[103]

---

[98]<u>Sound</u>, pp. 313, 316. See Revelation 22:13.

[99]<u>Sound</u>, p. 333. [100]Miner, p. 104.

[101]<u>Sound</u>, p. 336.

[102]See Powell, 218; Miner, p. 139; Waggoner, pp. 59-60.

[103]T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," <u>The College Survey of English Literature</u>, Alexander M. Witherspoon <u>et al</u> (ed.) (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942), p. 1299.

We can almost hear Dilsey, as Greek chorus, chanting in the background:[104]

Shantih shantih shantih[105]

"That Evening Sun" is a flashback story in which the Compsons abandon Nancy, the Negro woman who does their washing.[106] Nancy becomes helpless with terror as she waits for her estranged husband, Jesus,[107] to appear and kill her.

Faulkner does not present Nancy as an admirable figure. In fact, both she and Jesus are extremely depraved. However, even in comparison to Nancy and Jesus, the white people in the story are most unattractive.

Nancy is a Negro who has been corrupted by white vices. Mr. Stovall, the white man to whom she has prostituted herself and who kicks her in the teeth, is a deacon in the Baptist church. There are two other white persons in the story besides the Compsons and Mr. Stovall: the jailor who beat Nancy after she tried to hang herself;

---

[104]Powell, 218. [105]"The Waste Land," p. 1299.

[106]The story is told by Quentin Compson fifteen years after it took place. As the story happened when Quentin was nine, he would now be twenty-four years old. Quentin, however, committed suicide before he was twenty-four.

[107]Faulkner has said he chose the name "Jesus" to emphasize the point--that the Compsons fail to help the woman who has served them. He did, however, remark that the name is not uncommon among Negroes in Mississippi. _Faulkner in the University_, p. 21.

and Mr. Lovelady, the dirty white man who collects fifteen cents insurance money from the Negroes every Saturday.

The Compsons act in the manner we would expect after meeting them in The Sound and the Fury. Mrs. Compson's usual self-centeredness and self-pity are shown by her complete lack of interest in Nancy's plight. Her reply when Nancy seeks the protection of her home is, "I cant have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms."[108] When Mr. Compson attempts to protect Nancy, Mrs. Compson's reaction is, "I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home."[109] The petty bickerings and uncomprehending comments of the Compson children form a vivid contrast to the indications of Nancy's terror.[110] Dilsey attempts to help Nancy, but is unable to do so. She is the only person in the story who is really concerned about Nancy. Mr. Compson loses interest in protecting Nancy, saying, "Ah, damnation, . . . Come along, chillen. It's past bedtime."[111]

Nancy is seen as a tragic figure facing terror and

---

[108] Collected Stories, p. 299.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Evans B. Harrington, "Technical Aspects of William Faulkner's 'That Evening Sun'," Faulkner Studies, I (Winter, 1952), 56.

[111] Collected Stories, p. 308.

death alone, abandoned by the white family which has depended upon her.[112] Nancy is helpless because she is a Negro in a white society.[113] When Nancy first learns Jesus has returned, she says, "I aint nothing but a nigger . . . It aint none of my fault."[114] In the moments of her greatest terror she makes similar statements.[115] Nancy's excuse for her behavior shows a complete lack of self-respect. White society, which denies the Negro the status of a human being, is responsible for that lack of self-respect. White civilization not only teaches moral depravity to the Negro, it fosters a casual acceptance of that moral depravity by teaching the Negro to place no value upon himself as a member of human society.[116]

Faulkner presents his own family (fictionalized, of course) as the Sartorises, who appear in many of his novels and stories. In a series of stories published as _The Unvanquished_[117] the boy Bayard and his Negro companion, Ringo, have a number of adventures during the Civil War.

---

[112] _Faulkner in the University_, p. 21.

[113] Harrington, p. 54.

[114] _Collected Stories_, p.293.

[115] _Ibid._, pp. 297, 309.

[116] Harrington, 59.

[117] Some critics consider the book a novel. See, _e.g._ Waggoner, pp. 170-183. Faulkner, however, has said that he considers the book as a series of stories, rather than as a novel. _Faulkner in the University_, p. 252.

There is an affection between the two boys which leaves no room for barriers of caste or color:

> "Ringo and I had been born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast and had slept together and eaten together for so long that Ringo called Granny 'Granny" just like I did, until maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore. . . ."[118]

Although the stories in The Unvanquished are romanticized and presented as a boy would see them, the hardships of war are clearly shown.[119] The suffering of the Negroes who leave the homes they had as slaves and follow the Yankee army is presented with pathos. The fact that Southerners (despite their tradition of exploitation) may have more sympathy for helpless Negroes than Yankee strangers (despite their pretensions of desiring to help the entire race) is shown by Drusilla Hawk's conversation with Granny and Aunt Louise:

> "They began to pass in the road yonder while the house was still burning. We couldn't count them; men and women carrying children who couldn't walk and carrying old men and women who should have been at home waiting to die. They were singing, walking along the road singing, not even looking to either side. . . . 'Going to Jordan,' they told me. "Going to cross Jordan."
>
> "That was what Loosh said," Granny said. "That General Sherman was leading them all to Jordan."
>
> "Yes," Cousin Drusilla said. "The river. They have

---

[118] The Unvanquished, p. 16.

[119] Waggoner, pp. 171-174.

stopped there; it's like a river itself, dammed up. The Yankees have thrown out a brigade of cavalry to hold them back while they build the bridge to cross the infantry and artillery. . . . I don't know when they have eaten; nobody knows just how far some of them have come. They just pass here without food or anything. . . .

. . . .

"They are going to mine the bridge and blow it up when the army has crossed," Cousin Drusilla said. "Nobody knows what they will do then."

"But we cannot be responsible," Aunt Louise said. "The Yankees brought it on themselves; let them pay the price."

"Those Negroes are not Yankees, Mother," Cousin Drusilla said.[120]

In the sixth story, "Skirmish At Sartoris," Faulkner burlesques the traditional concept of the sheltered Southern woman. Bayard's maternal aunt (Aunt Louise), with the help of the ladies of Jefferson, forces her daughter, Drusilla, to marry John Sartoris (Bayard's father) because she has been riding with his troop.

The wedding is delayed while John Sartoris shoots

---

[120]The Unvanquished, pp. 75-76. (From the third story, "Raid") In the short story, "Mountain Victory," (published in Doctor Martino and other Stories) Faulkner contrasts the attitude of a returning Confederate soldier and that of a Yankee mountain family toward Negroes. At first the family believes that Sashay Weddel, who is of Indian and French parentage, is a Negro. Weddel's reaction is "'So it's my face and not my uniform . . . And you fought four years to free us, I understand!'" (Collected Stories, p. 751) The family is completely unable to understand the Confederate soldier's concern for the comfort of his Negro servant. One son in the family, who is a former Yankee soldier, wishes to kill Weddel. The Confederate soldier refuses to leave his Negro servant, who has consumed so much corn liquor that he is unable to travel, and both are killed. Collected Stories, pp. 745-777.

two carpetbaggers named Burden. It is true, as Bayard later tells Drusilla, that these men were human beings.[121] But Drusilla's reply is also true--the men were Northerners who should not have been in Jefferson.[122] Colonel Sartoris does not kill the two men merely in order to keep the Negroes from voting. He is preventing the election as Marshal of Jefferson of a Negro who signs his name by making a large awkward X. When John Sartoris had warned the Burdens the election would not be held, they had dared him to stop them. He shoots after one of them has fired at him. The Negroes' lack of preparedness for the responsibilities of voting is clearly shown by the fact that they are in a herd superintended by Northern men.[123] Apparently, in the plans of the

---

[121] The Unvanquished, p. 169.

[122] Ibid. In Light in August the two Burdens are identified as the grandfather and the brother of Joanna Burden. When Joanna is asked why her father didn't attempt to kill the man who had killed both his father and his son, her reply is similar to Drusilla's statement:

> ". . . we were foreigners, strangers, that thought differently from the people whose country we had come into without being asked or wanted. And he was French, half of him. Enough French to respect anybody's love for the land where he and his people were born and to understand that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act. I think that was it." Light in August, p. 223.

[123] The Unvanquished, pp. 152-159. The newly freed Negroes "were woefully deficient in many of the qualities necessary for the exercise of the rights of freedom." Francis Butler Simkins, A History of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 254.

Northern men, the Negro is regarded as a "thing," just as he was under the plantation system.[124]

In the final story, "An Odor of Verbena," Bayard, as a young man, rejects the violence of the Southern code-- but retains the courage-- by going unarmed to meet the man who has killed his father. Bayard is repeating the last action of his father, who had knowingly walked to his death because he refused to kill any more men.[125]

In Sartoris, Faulkner shows the post-World War I family degenerated into moral weakness in the person of young Bayard.[126] Returning from the War, in which his beloved twin brother was killed, Bayard persists in violent attempts to kill himself. Bayard is not heroic. He appears merely foolish in the scene in which two Negroes rescue him following an automobile accident.[127] When Old Bayard (the boy of The Unvanquished) has a fatal heart attack in the automobile, Young Bayard reveals himself as a complete coward by running away.[128] He finally succeeds in killing himself by testing an unsafe airplane. The common sense

---

[124] Miner, p. 79.

[125] The Unvanquished, pp. 175-176. See Waggoner, pp. 171-172.

[126] Faulkner in the University, p. 119.

[127] Sartoris, pp. 205-213. See Vickery, p. 16.

[128] Sartoris, p. 311. See Faulkner in the University, p. 250.

remarks of Old Bayard's Aunt Jenny (although she is a Sartoris, and she loves the family) provide an effective comment on their romantic tradition.[129]

The Negroes provide comic comments and serve as a comic chorus for the actions of the white persons in the novel.[130] Simon, continually interested in upholding the Sartoris tradition, complains because Young Bayard sneaks into town "on de ve'y railroad his own granpappy built, jes' like he wuz trash."[131]

Although many of the incidents involving the Negroes are obviously developed for the purpose of providing comedy, there is no reason to dismiss these actions as non-realistic. There is, however, validity to the charge that Faulkner is presenting comedy at the expense of compassion.[132]

The essential ridiculousness of white actions is often shown by a comic parallel involving the Negroes: as in the Negro gathering in the kitchen during Belle Mitchell's party, the homecoming of Caspey, and the death of Simon.[133]

---

[129]Vickery, p. 15.

[130]*Ibid*.

[131]*Sartoris*, p. 5.

[132]Waggoner, p. 30.

[133]Vickery, p. 15.

In "There Was A Queen"[134] it is the mulatto, Elnora,[135] who is interested in the preservation of Sartoris honor and tradition. Elnora's judgment of Young Bayard's widow, Narcissa, is proven accurate. Narcissa, in order to retrieve obscene letters sent to her anonymously by Byron Snopes thirteen years before, has spent two days and nights in Memphis with a federal agent. She appears to believe that her actions were solely motivated by a compelling wish to obtain the letters in order that no one else would ever see them. But Narcissa obviously had a sub-conscious desire for this affair. Aunt Jenny is so shocked by Narcissa's actions that she puts on her hat, sits looking out the window, and dies. Both the conduct of Narcissa and the death of Aunt Jenny represent the downfall of the honor of the past. The moral virtues of that past (represented by Aunt Jenny) have been defeated by Snopes-like amoralism.

Thus the real theme of Faulkner's work is that of a curse brought upon the South by the double sin of land

---

[134]Published in Doctor Martino and Other Stories

[135]In this story Faulkner tells us Elnora is the daughter of Colonel Sartoris. Collected Stories, p. 727. In Sartoris Elnora, although a mulatto, was Simon's daughter, see pp. 38, 61.

exploitation and Negro slavery. Those who are able to develop the proper relationship toward nature will also have the proper attitude toward their fellow human beings. But only a few can develop this proper attitude; those who have the moral strength of an Ike McCaslin are very rare. The wilderness is destroyed and the Negroes suffer. Faulkner often uses complicated family relationships involving black and white members of one family to symbolize the complexity of the South's racial situation. He sometimes uses incest as a symbol of the narcissism involved in the excessive pride of the great families. Faulkner portrays white society denying human status to the Negroes and abandoning them. He repeatedly emphasizes the virtues of the Negroes by placing an admirable Negro in contrast to depraved and decadent white persons. Faithful Negro servants continue to care for decayed families and for those who--like the Negroes themselves--have been abandoned.

Faulkner's works dealing with the curse of slavery present his version of the Fall of Man. The sin of selfish ambition is not restricted to the founders of ante-bellum Southern families, but is shared by most of the human race.[136]

---

[136]Slavery has existed in many civilations. In our own country, slavery existed in the North until 1804, See Simkins, p. 116.

In his Yoknapatawpha Saga, Faulkner is presenting not merely the disorders of the South, but the disorders of the world. He portrays that world as a place of corruption and decay,[137] in which the weak are oppressed by the strong. Faulkner shows the complete absence of traditional values by presenting a modern Christ symbol who cannot communicate with his society. The Compsons, who geld and mock Benjy, can be considered a symbol not merely for the New South, but for the modern world.[138]

---

[137]Dayton Kohler, "William Faulkner and the Social Conscience," College English, XI (December, 1949), 122.

[138]Powell, 198.

CHAPTER III

THE CURSE CONTINUES: MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

The most horrible result of the curse of slavery is white inhumanity to the Negro. After abandoning the Negro and denying him status as a human, white society refuses to assume any responsibility for the outcast. White civilization is completely oblivious to Negro suffering. Negroes are exploited and killed by almost unbelievable acts of cruelty.

"Sunset,"[1] one of Faulkner's earliest works of fiction, is the story of a rural Negro of low intelligence who attempts to return home to Africa. Arriving in New Orleans he is terrified by the traffic and cursed by most of the people he meets. A white man takes his four silver dollars as boat fare to Africa. Believing he has arrived in Africa when he leaves the small boat, the Negro is victimized by his own imagination. He shoots a man in the darkness, believing him to be a lion. When a group of men tries to capture him the next morning, he believes they are savages who are going to eat him. He shoots a Negro who is preventing his escape. Discovering the wound in his own shoulder, he thinks, "Whew! Dese Af'kins shoots niggers

---

[1]See Introduction.

jes' like white folks does."[2] A National Guard troop arrives. In the ensuing battle the Negro shoots a third man and receives a fatal wound. Amid visions--mostly of his home--the Negro dies, his blood appearing to him as a sunset. "His black, kind, dull, once-cheerful face was turned up to the sky and the cold, cold stars. Africa or Louisiana: what care they?"[3]

The story shows that Faulkner does care--and that he did care as early as 1925. He has taken the story of an ignorant Negro who kills three men, and made that Negro highly sympathetic. This unnamed Negro can be seen as symbolizing his race: kept in ignorance, exploited, lost in a white man's world which he is unable to comprehend, and treated solely as an animal which can be hunted and killed as such.

In "Dry September"[4] the lie of a neurotic woman provides the excuse for lynching a Negro. Racial hatred is inflamed as, after sixty-two hot, dry days, a vague rumor spreads through the "Bloody September twilight"[5] of Jefferson. It is obvious from the beginning of the story

---

[2] New Orleans Sketches, p. 155.

[3] Ibid., p. 157.

[4] Published in These Thirteen; reprinted in Collected Stories.

[5] Collected Stories, p. 169.

that no one knows exactly what has happened; but it is just as obvious that no one cares--no one, that is, except one barber and an unnamed ex-soldier. Because the barber, Hawkshaw, has enough faith in a Negro to believe he is innocent, and enough common sense and decency to want to learn the truth, he is harshly dismissed as a "nigger lover."

Faulkner's portrayal of the three repulsive white men who bring about the lynching--the strange drummer, the hulking, perspiring youth, and McLendon (the leader)--should leave absolutely no doubt concerning Faulkner's opinion of people who incite mob violence. Faulkner also is quite clear in showing the reason that others follow these vicious men: they are so cowardly that they would rather help kill an innocent man than incur the displeasure of the mob leaders. Even the ex-soldier who had wanted to learn the truth joins the mob.

The false story which brings about the death of Will Mayes is told by Miss Minnie Cooper, who appears to have a completely amoral disregard for the consequence of her own actions. The town of Jefferson and the social structure are at least partially responsible for the disintegration of Minnie's personality. Minnie's friends from the "best" families deserted her when they reached maturity. Even so, Minnie is forced to live in genteel idleness because she is a member of a "comfortable" family.

Her life of unreality is symbolized by the movie theater she frequently attends, a glittering fairy-land in which she lives a silver dream.

Minnie, at age thirty-eight or nine, no longer attracts the stares of the lounging men as she walks by in her thin dresses. She invents her story in an attempt to prove that she is still physically desirable, and, apparently, because she does wish to be sexually attacked. Perhaps she chooses to involve a Negro in her story because she knows that a Negro's denial will be completely ignored.

With the exception of Hawkshaw, the white citizens of Jefferson are presented as completely ruthless. We can believe the truth of Hawkshaw's statement, "There aint any town where they got better niggers than us."[6] Obviously, any Negro in Jefferson who is not a "good nigger" will not live very long. Will Mayes, as Hawkshaw says, is a "good nigger."[7] Even so, he becomes a victim of the town's inhumanity. He is especially pathetic because he is not only innocent of any crime; he is completely servile until the men begin striking him. In his desperation he strikes back, hitting Hawkshaw, who he does not know is trying to help him. The inhumanity of the situation influences

---

[6]Ibid., p. 176.

[7]Ibid., p. 169.

Hawkshaw to the extent that he returns the blow. The last representative of decency has been corrupted to the point of striking a man who is to be murdered in a few minutes. But Hawkshaw does retain the moral courage necessary to jump from the speeding car.

It is apparent that only the slightest of excuses is needed in order for white racial hatred to express itself in an act of inhumanity to a Negro. Those who represent justice and decency must either flee or be corrupted by the prevailing cruelity. No Negro is safe, no matter how innocent or servile he may be.

"Pantaloon in Black"[8] is the story of a young Negro who is griefstricken at the death of his wife. He is a large, powerful man, and his frenzied despair drives him to physical activity. At the cemetery he takes one of the shovels and flings the earth with effortless fury,

> until at last the grave, save for its rawness, resembled any other marked off without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read.[9]

---

[8]The third story in Go Down, Moses.

[9]Go Down, Moses, p. 135.

The preceding passage can be used to interpret the entire story. "Pantaloon in Black" is filled with profound and fatal meaning which no white man is able to comprehend.

We see Rider's many futile attempts to find peace of mind. He returns to his home where he imagines he sees his dead wife, Mannie; then he walks out into the hills, and spends the night. The next morning he goes to the sawmill, where he uses his great strength to handle the logs with daring skill. But physical exertion can not make him forget. He goes into the river swamp and pays an unshaven white bootlegger four dollars for a jug of whiskey. Having consummed the whiskey, Rider wanders back to the sawmill. A dice game run by the white night-watchman is in progress. Rider exposes the white man's means of cheating the Negroes (the second pair of dice). As the white man shoots his pistol, Rider strikes with his razor.

Throughout Section One of the story, we have seen not only the deep feelings of Rider, but also the kindness of the other Negroes who try to help him. At the cemetery a member of his sawmill gang attempted to take his shovel, and his old aunt tried to take him home with her. When Rider arrived at the sawmill the next morning he asked the foreman for a biscuit from his bucket of lunch:

> "Eat his all," the fireman said. "Ah'll eat outen de yuthers' buckets at dinner. Den you gawn home and go to bed. You dont looks good."[10]

---

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 143.

At noon the aunt's husband walked to the sawmill carrying a tin bucket and a covered plate:

> The bucket contained a fruit jar of buttermilk packed in a clean damp towsack. The covered dish was a peach pie, still warm. "She baked hit fer you dis mawin," the uncle said. ". . . She wants you to come on home. She kept de lamp burnin all last night fer you."[11]

We have seen the Negroes, who have very meager material possessions, striving in order to make their lives a little better. Within six months Rider and Mannie refloored the porch, rebuilt and roofed the kitchen, and bought a stove. Mannie made soft soap and kept it in a baking powder can. In order to have towels, she scalded flour sacks and sewed them together. The money left when Mannie bought the next week's supplies was banked in Edmonds' safe. The jar of buttermilk which Rider's aunt sent him was packed in a clean towsack. When Rider was a child he played in the grassless yard and in the sandy ditch "with empty snuff-tins and rusted harness-buckles and fragments of trace-chains,"[12] but his aunt and uncle have given him love. Although the aunt and uncle live in poverty, they feel no self-pity; rather, they have a deep faith in God and His help and infinite goodness. They

---

[11] _Ibid._, pp. 144-145.

[12] _Ibid._, p. 149.

persist in vain attempts to help Rider regain faith.

At the beginning of Section Two of the story, we learn what has happened to Rider as punishment for killing a white man (there is no mention of self-defence):

> After it was over--it didn't take long; they found the prisoner on the following day, hanging from the bellrope in a negro schoolhouse about two miles from the sawmill, and the coroner had pronounced his verdict of death at the hands of a person or persons unknown and surrendered the body to its next of kin all within five minutes--the sheriff's deputy who had been officially in charge of the business was telling his wife about it.[13]

The deputy begins by expressing the customary opinion of white society, that Negroes are not deserving of human status:

> "Them damn niggers," he said. "I swear to godfrey, it's a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why? Because they aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes.[14]

The morals of the deputy and his wife are placed in striking contrast to those of the Negroes. Incidentally, the deputy's wife has been caught cheating at a club rook party that afternoon. The deputy explains that it was necessary for him to allow the seizure of the prisoner:

---

[13] Ibid., p. 154.

[14] Ibid.

"It's more of them Birdsongs than just two or three," the deputy said. "There's forty-two active votes in that connection. Me and Maydew taken the poll-list and counted them one day. . . ."[15]

Ironically, the deputy's interpretaion of Rider's story shows that he, himself, is completely lacking in what we at least like to think are "the normal human feelings and sentiments of homan beings":

"His wife dies on him. All right. But does he grieve? He's the biggest and busiest man at the funeral. Grabs a shovel before they even got the box into the grave they tell me, and starts throwing dirt onto her faster than a slip scraper could have done it. But that's all right. . . . maybe that's how he felt about her. There aint any law against a man rushing his wife into the ground, provided he never had nothing to do with rushing her to the cemetery too. But here the next day he's the first man back at work except the fireman. . . . when McAndrews and everybody else expected him to take the day off since even a nigger couldn't want no better excuse for a holiday than he had just buried his wife, when a white man would have took the day off out of pure respect no matter how he felt about his wife, when even a little child would have had sense enough to take a day off when he would still get paid for it too. . . . And then, when everybody had finally decided that that's the way to take him, the way he wants to be took, he walks off the job in the middle of the afternoon . . . gets himself a whole gallon of bust-skull white-mule whisky, comes straight back to the mill and to the same crap game where Birdsong has been running crooked dice on them mill niggers for fifteen years, goes straight to the same game where he has been peacefully losing a probably steady average ninety-nine percent of his pay ever since he got big enough to read the spots on them miss-out dice, and cuts Birdsong's throat clean to the neckbone five minutes later. . . . So we loaded him into the car, when here comes the old woman--his ma or

---

[15] Ibid., p. 155. (The man Rider killed was a member of the Birdsong family.)

> aunt or something--panting up the road at a dog-trot, wanting to come with us too, and Maydew trying to explain to her what would maybe happen to her too if them Birdsong kin catches us before we can get him locked up, only she is coming anyway. . . ."[16]

Of course, the deputy is completely unable to understand why, in a last violent burst of energy, Rider completely demolished his cell without even trying to escape; or why, after being subdued, Rider cried: "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit."[17]

But the deputy's wife is not even interested in this violent tragedy of life and death; she announces that she is going to the picture show.

In _Light in August_ we see a human life first ruined by racial hatred and religious bigotry, then ended by an almost unbelievably brutal act of inhumanity.[18] In this novel Faulkner makes us feel compassion and brotherly love for a man who is presented as most unattractive. Joe Christmas _hates everyone_, yet Faulkner asks us to consider his death as parallel to the crucifixion of Christ. Joe is in every possible way different from Jesus;[19] he is,

---

[16] _Ibid._, pp. 155-157.

[17] _Ibid._, p. 159.

[18] See Phyllis Hirshleifer, "As Whirlwinds in the South: An Analysis of _Light in August_," _Perspective_, II Summer, 1949), 227-229. Miss Hirshleifer discusses Faulkner's use of brutality throughout the novel.

[19] Waggoner, pp. 102-103.

indeed, "one of the least of these."[20] He is not presented as an admirable person, but as one who acts in self-defense against the society which is responsible for his terrible deeds.[21]

Joe Christmas is the grandson of Eupheus Hines, a man obsessed with religious fanaticism and hatred of Negroes. Hines kills his daughter's lover, a circus man, but is acquitted at his trial because "the circus owner come back and said how the man really was a part nigger instead of Mexican."[22] Apparently, Hines is freed not because the man he killed was running away with his daughter,[23] or even because the man he killed was a part Negro who was running away with his daughter, but simply because the man he killed was merely a part Negro. Hines refuses to call a doctor when Joe is born, and his daughter dies. Hines uses the term "nigger" to justify his inhuman treatment of his daughter, her lover, and her child.[24]

Hines, having secured a custodial position at an or-

---

[20]Matthew 25:45. [21]Waggoner, pp. 102-103.

[22]<u>Light in August</u>, p. 330. Hereafter this will be referred to as <u>Light</u>.

[23]See the story "Tomorrow" in <u>Knight's Gambit</u> (New York, 1949), pp. 85-105. In this story a father from the remote Frenchman's Bend area has killed a man who was running away with his seventeen year old daughter. The trial is expected to be only a formality. Although unexpected complications occur, the defendant is acquitted in a second trial.

[24]Vickery, pp. 69-70.

phanage, leaves Joe on the doorstep on Christmas Eve. He hovers at the edge of Joe's life taking every opportunity to frighten or torture him. The child has no concept of race. He is completely bewildered when the other children call him "Nigger,"[25] and when Hines asks him "Why dont you play with them other children like you used to? . . . Is it because they call you nigger?"[26] Joe's curiosity is aroused and he asks the Negro yard man, "How come you are a nigger?"[27] He simply does not realize that the question will be resented. The old Negro, in his anger, makes a reply that is highly significant, ". . . You dont know what you are. And more than that you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know."[28] Joe does not know, and will never know what he is. Society teaches Joe that racial barriers exist, but it cannot place him in either the black or the white category.[29]

---

[25]<u>Light</u>, p. 335.

[26]<u>Ibid</u>. [27]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 336. [28]<u>Ibid</u>.

[29]Faulkner has said of Joe Christmas: ". . . he didn't know what he was. He knew that he would never know what he was, and his only salvation in order to live with himself was to repudiate mankind, to live outside the human race. And he tried to do that but nobody would let him, the human race itself wouldn't let him. . . . his tragedy was that he didn't know what he was and would never know, and that to me is the most tragic condition that an individual can have--to not know who he was." <u>Faulkner in the University</u>, p. 118.

When Joe is five years old the orphanage dietitian, who mistakenly believes he has witnessed her having illicit relations with an intern in her room, tells the matron that he is a Negro in order that he will be sent from the white orphanage. The dietitian has used the term "nigger" in the same way that Hines did, as an excuse for disposing of someone unpleasant to her. Joe is adopted by a stern Presbyterian farmer named McEachern, who is unaware of Joe's supposed Negro blood. The racial problem temporarily subsides, but religious bigotry continues. Joe's pride forces him to reject his pitying foster-mother. He grows up with feelings of bitterness and hatred.[30]

When Joe is eighteen he has an affair with Bobbie Allen, a waitress who is a casual prostitute. As a means of rejecting not only his rural Presbyterian childhood, but his entire background in white society, Joe tells her that he is part Negro. Bobbie ignores Joe's confession until the night McEachern follows them to a country dance. Then, angry that McEachern has called her a harlot, and worried about police investigation (Joe has hit McEachern with a chair) Bobbie uses Joe's information to encourage her friends to beat him. Both she and the dietitian have used the word "nigger" as an aid in escaping from an un-

---

[30]Charles A. Allen, "William Faulkner's Vision of Good and Evil," The Pacific Spectator, X (Summer, 1956), 239.

pleasant situation.[31]

Bobbie's rejection (Joe has believed she would marry him) is the experience which completely destroys Joe's capacity for love. He hates men and women, Negro and white.[32] He wanders aimlessly for the next fifteen years, living sometimes among Negroes, sometimes among white persons. His inner conflict prevents him from accepting either culture. He tells white people he is a Negro in order to be rejected.[33] When a white prostitute refuses to be horrified by his assertion that he has Negro blood, Joe beats her violently. His white consciousness demands that the white theory of racial purity be respected.[34]

Joe arrives in Jefferson and begins having an affair with Miss Joanna Burden, the middle-aged spinster descendant of a Northern family who had appeared during Reconstruction and agitated for Negro rights. Miss Burden is a product of a fanatic upbringing. She says in telling of her grandfather,

> He got off on Lincoln and slavery and dared any man there to deny that Lincoln and the Negro and Moses and the children of Israel were the same, and the Red Sea

---

[31]Vickery, p. 71.

[32]Allen, 239.

[33]See Minnesota Pamphlet, pp. 21-22.

[34]Vickery, p. 71.

> was just the blood that had to be spilled in order that the black race might cross into the Promised Land.[35]

A stern believer in Predestination and the depravity of the world,[36] Miss Burden pursues her duty of helping the Negroes, although she believes their plight is destined to be an unhappy one. Her father had taught her: "'You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level.'"[37] Miss Burden believes that both the curse upon the white race caused by the sin of slavery and the suffering of the Negroes are permanent:

> ". . . I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross."[38]

Joanna had tried to tell her father that she must escape from the curse, but he told her there was no hope:

> ". . . escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because he once cursed Him."[39]

---

[35]Light, p. 220. In fairness to Miss Burden's grandfather, perhaps we should note that he was intoxicated when making these statements.

[36]Faulkner attributes Calvinistic doctrines to Miss Burden's family, although he tells us they were New England Unitarians. Light, p. 211. See Minnesota Pamphlet, p. 20.

[37]Light, p. 222. (Miss Burden is telling Joe Christmas the story of her family.)

[38]Ibid., pp. 221-222.

[39]Ibid., p. 222. (See footnote #37.)

Miss Burden's attempts to help Negroes are connected with fanatic religion, just as Hines's efforts to destroy Negroes are. The duty she follows is abstract and impersonal; she does not have sympathy for Negroes as fellow human beings.[40]

The excessive concern with racial categories of both Joe and Miss Burden is intensified by their affair. Although the town of Jefferson believes he is a white man, Joe rejects the white race by telling Joanna that he has Negro blood. But after deliberately placing himself in the role of a Negro, Joe rejects that role as well. Despite hunger, he throws food she has prepared for him against the wall, "thinking *Set out for the nigger. For the nigger.*"[41] Miss Burden appears fascinated by her close relationship to a member of a race which she has long considered an abstraction. In the dark she whispers, "Negro! Negro! Negro!"[42]

When the affair is ended by Miss Burden's advancing age, fanatic religion again becomes the dominant force in her life. Now seeing Joe as an abstract Negro, she wishes to "help" him by sending him to a Negro college to study

---

[40] *Tangled Fire*, p. 78.

[41] *Light*, p. 208.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 227.

law. Joe's reaction is "Tell niggers that I am a nigger too?"[43] He has told white people he was a Negro as a means of rejecting the white race. To tell Negroes he is a Negro would be to accept the Negro race. Joe's life has been one of rejection, not of acceptance. He is not capable of accepting or loving any of his fellow humans.

Again seeing herself as God's instrument, Miss Burden insists that Joe must pray with her. She says that it is God, not she, who demands Joe's prayers. Joe, who is certainly reminded of his fanatic foster-father, refuses. Miss Burden, apparently intending to kill Joe and then herself,[44] reveals the ancient pistol hidden beneath her shawl. The pistol misfires. Joe kills Miss Burden with his razor--almost severing her head from her body. He then sets fire to the house, as though he wishes to attract attention to his deed in order to be caught and punished.

One of the persons who works very hard to bring about Joe's capture is the disreputable white man with whom Joe has shared a cabin. This man, who is currently using the name of Brown, wishes to escape from suspicion. He also wishes to receive the thousand dollar reward offered by Miss Burden's Northern nephew. Brown uses this means:

---

[43] Ibid., p. 242.

[44] Both chambers of the pistol were loaded. See Light, p. 250.

". . .'That's right,' he says. 'Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that's trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white and let the nigger run.'

"'Nigger?' the sheriff said. 'Nigger?'"

". . . 'You're so smart,' he says. 'The folks in this town is so smart. Fooled for three years. Calling him a foreigner for three years, when soon as I watched him three days I knew he wasn't no more a foreigner than I am. I knew before he even told me himself.' . . ."

"'You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about,' the marshal says. 'I dont care if he is a murderer or not.'"[45]

The marshal's statement reveals what is one of the most ridiculous elements in the theory of white supremacy--the belief that all white persons are superior to all Negroes. Joe's worst crime, in the opinion of Jefferson, is obviously not murder--but the crime of being a Negro who passes as a white person. Although Miss Burden was neither liked nor known by anyone in Jefferson, and there is no question of Joe having sexually attacked her (Brown has told of the affair), Joe is eagerly pursued as a Negro who has murdered a white woman.[46]

The pathetic situation is given universal significance by Rev. Gail Hightower, the defrocked minister who has himself suffered from the inhumanity of the town:

---

[45]*Ibid.*, p. 85.(Byron Bunch tells Rev. Hightower the story of the fire and the search for Joe Christmas.)

[46]Vickery, p. 72.

"Is it certain, proved, that he has Negro blood? Think, Byron; what it will mean when the people--if they catch . . . Poor man. Poor mankind."[47]

Miss Burden has brought about her own death by attempting to force Joe into the role of a Negro. Ironically, her death does force him to accept that role.[48] Joe enters a Negro church, perhaps as a last violent act of rejecting the Negro race before he accepts the inevitable role of a Negro murderer.[49] It is significant that Joe, a human whose life has been ruined by religious fanaticism and racial hatred, interrupts a Negro revival meeting in order to start a fight. This act constitutes a final attempt to gain revenge against the two forces which have destroyed his life.[50] When the Negroes see that Joe's face is white, they believe the devil has entered their church. Surely, there is irony intended in the Negroes' equating white with the devil--Hines has been equating black with the devil since Joe's conception. During the days of flight Joe is able to concern himself only with primitive attempts to keep alive. Society's racial stratification is no longer important. Remembering a cabin

---

[47]Light, p. 87.

[48]Vickery, p. 77.

[49]Ibid., p. 68.

[50]Tangled Fire, p. 78.

in which he has been fed by frightened Negroes, Joe thinks, "And they were afraid. Of their brother afraid."[51] In an early effort to escape the posse, Joe trades his shoes for a pair belonging to a Negro. When he is riding in a wagon on the way to Mottstown to surrender, these shoes become to him a symbol of the role which he is now ready to accept.[52]

Joe arrives in Mottstown and patiently walks the streets until he is recognized and captured. His quiet surrender is resented because it does not fit the pattern of a "Negro murderer":

> "He never acted like either a nigger or a white man That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. . . . It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too."[53]

But Joe does accept the inevitable role. His calmness is contrasted to the excitement of his white capturer, who (thinking of the reward) excitedly strikes Joe in the face.[54] Joe's fanatic grandfather, who now lives in Mottstown, attempts to turn the crowd into a lynch mob.

The various persons who have persecuted Joe throughout his life have been presented in very unpleasant terms. Hines is a furious, dirty old man who depends on the

---

[51]Light, p. 293.

[52]Ibid., p. 297. See Vickery, p. 74.

[53]Light, p. 306. (Faulkner presents the story as it was told in the town of Mottstown.)

[54]Ibid., p. 307.

charity of Negroes for his very food; yet he interrupts Negro church services to preach white supremacy, "himself his own exhibit A in fanatic and unconscious paradox."[55] Faulkner is ironically reversing the theory of white su- eriority by presenting persons who persecute Negroes as inferior to their victims.

Also of significance is the fact that Joe has often been persecuted by people who consider themselves good Christians. Ironically, the religion of Christ, who taught love, has been corrupted into a religion of hatred by persons such as Hines and McEachern.[56] A terrible indictment of this distorted religion is presented in the thoughts of Hightower as he listens to the music of the evening church service:[57]

> the music has . . . a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others; demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon. . . . Listening, he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and

---

[55]*Ibid*., p. 301.

[56]Vickery, p. 262.

[57]Waggoner, p. 101.

praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?[58]

The last person to persecute Joe is Percy Grimm. He pretends to be motivated by patriotism, but Fascism is the correct term for what he represents.[59] A captain in the State National Guard, Grimm ostensibly organizes his men to protect Joe from undemocratic injustice. When Joe escapes (after being returned to Jefferson), Percy Grimm eagerly pursues him, shooting, and then castrating the dying but still conscious man. Joe, at the moment of death, becomes simply "the man," without distinction of race:

> Grimm emptied the automatic's magazine . . . later someone covered all five shots with a folded handkerchief. . . . When the others reached the kitchen they saw. . . Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood

---

[58] Light, pp. 321-322.

[59] See Minnesota Pamphlet, p. 21.

> seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, stedfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant.[60]

Attorney Gavin Stevens makes a rationalization concerning the conflict of Negro and white blood in the mind of Joe Christmas during his last moments of life. Stevens, a member of the race which has just demonstrated its inhumanity by destroying Joe,[61] attributes the victim's "bad" actions to his black blood and his "good" actions to his white blood. After presenting white persons committing deeds of terrible cruelty throughout the novel, Faulkner is surely being ironic when he has Stevens say that Joe's black blood caused him to snatch a pistol and strike Hightower, and that his white blood kept him from firing the pistol.[62]

Joe's tragedy is that of a man who has been corrupted by modern civilization.[63] His death serves as a condemnation of that civilization.[64] Throughout his life he has

---

[60] _Light_, pp. 406-407.

[61] _Faulkner in the University_, p. 72.

[62] Vickery, p. 73.

[63] Allen, 239. [64] _Ibid_.

lacked security, understanding, and love. He has found peace only in death. Joe is a victim of the inhumanity which is an inevitable part of the curse brought upon his society by slavery.[65] The tragedy of Joe Christmas can be summarized by the phrase, "There is no room at the inn."[66]

We see that Faulkner is most explicit in showing his disapproval of inhumanity to the Negro. In "Sunset" the Negro who is hunted and killed as an animal is too ignorant to be held morally guilty of murder. Moreover, the series of tragic events occurs because he is exploited by a white man. In "Dry September" Faulkner is implying that it is possible--and probable--that innocent Negroes are lynched, and that racial hatred can even produce a lynching when no crime has taken place. In the story of Rider, Faulkner presents a Negro who is lynched for killing in self-defense a white man who has exploited Negroes for years. Joe Christmas, a victim of racial hatred and corrupted religion throughout his life, is killed with almost unbelievable brutality for murdering the most disliked white woman in Jefferson.

---

[65] Campbell and Foster, pp. 72-73.

[66] Miner, p. 141.

There are a number of similarities in these works dealing with inhumanity. The Negro in "Sunset" is killed by a National Guard Troop. Joe Christmas is ostensibly protected by the National Guard of Jefferson until he provides their captain with the opportunity of killing him. The captain, Percy Grimm, is very similar in character to McLendon, the ex-army commander who leads the mob in killing Will Mayes. The pattern of exploitation appearing in "Sunset" is repeated in the dishonest crap game of "Pantaloon in Black." "Sunset" begins with a cold, unfeeling newspaper account of the Negro's death; "Pantaloon in Black" ends with a dehumanized version of Rider's story told by the man whose legal and moral responsibilities demanded that he protect the unfortunate Negro. In all these works the white population is presented as completely depraved. In "Pantaloon in Black" the selfishness and coldness of the deputy and his wife are presented in contrast to the simple compassion, goodness, and love of the Negroes. In both "Dry September" and _Light in August_ the town of Jefferson is presented as a place of hatred and cruelty. Joe Christmas and Will Mayes die horrible deaths as a result of actions of neurotic white women. Racial hatred provides that they die as Negro criminals, although one may not even be a Negro and the other has committed

no crime.[67]

In portraying man's inhumanity to man Faulkner is not presenting a condition which exists only in the South, but one which is found throughout the world. Faulkner is not merely presenting a study of his region; he is writing about Mankind.[68] Unfortunately, acts of inhumanity are found in all times and in all places. In portraying Southern white inhumanity to the Negro, Faulkner is presenting a microcosm of religious and racial hatred throughout the world.

---

[67] Simkins discusses the trivial reasons for which Negroes have been killed by mobs. See pp. 509-510.

[68] See Dayton Kohler, 119-122.

CHAPTER IV

FAULKNER REPUDIATES THE CURSE

In recent years the mature Faulkner has re-examined the necessity of accepting the curse. To be sure, the curse is still in force, racial hatred still exists, and acts of inhumanity to Negroes may yet occur. But Faulkner has decided that it is possible for responsible white Southerners to develop sympathy for the Negro as a fellow human being.

Intruder in the Dust[1] presents a Negro, Lucas Beauchamp, in a situation similar to those which produced the deaths of Rider, Will Mayes, and Joe Christmas. As in "Pantaloon in Black," a white man with numerous relatives is murdered. Lucas is found bending over the body and is arrested for murder. While the white population gathers and waits for the Gowrie family to come to town and lynch Lucas for killing Vincent Gowrie, the Negroes avoid trouble by staying in their dark, closed homes.

Lucas, as we learned in Go Down, Moses, is the mulatto grandson of Carothers McCaslin. Unlike Joe Christmas or Velery Bon, Lucas feels no inner conflict between

---

[1]William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948) (Hereafter cited as Intruder).

his black and his white blood. At home he wears a gold watch, the heavy chain looped across the bib of his overalls. When he leaves the plantation he wears a worn black broadcloth suit and an ancient beaver. Lucas does not come to town every Saturday, as do the other Negroes and most of the whites from the country. He comes only once a year to pay his taxes. Even then, he chooses a week-day in imitation of the white planters. By choosing what he will accept from the traditions of each race,[2] Lucas has become dignified, calm, and assured.

Because he does not follow the traditional pattern of Negro behavior, Lucas is considered a threat to the social pattern of the area.[3] The white population is unanimous in its attitude toward Lucas: _We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted._[4]

Jefferson has eagerly pursued Joe Christmas as a "negro murderer" in order to gain revenge upon the "nigger" who has been pretending to be a white man. Now the town

---

[2]See the note on Lucas in Appendix B. Lucas apparently does not know that Carothers McCaslin was his great-grandfather as well as his grandfather.

[3]Vickery, p. 136.

[4]_Intruder_, p. 18.

looks forward to at last forcing Lucas to be a "nigger" by lynching him as a "negro murderer."[5] As in his earlier works portraying inhumanity, Faulkner describes in most unattractive terms those persons who are potential members of lynching mobs:

> --the young men or men under forty, bachelors, the homeless who had the Saturday and Sunday baths in the barbershop--truckdrivers and garagehands, the oiler from the cotton gin, a sodajerker from the drugstore and the ones who could be seen all week long in or around the poolhall who did nothing at all that anyone knew, who owned automobiles and spent money nobody really knew exactly how they earned on week-ends in Memphis or New Orleans brothels--the men who . . . were in every little Southern town, who never really led mobs nor even instigated them but were always the nucleus of them because of their mass availability.[6]

The Gowries and their inlaws and cousins of Beat Four[7] are presented as lawless brawlers and foxhunters and whiskeymakers."[8]

Gavin Steven's nephew, Charles (Chick) Mallison, met Lucas four years before the killing of Vincent Gowrie. Chick, who was then twelve years old, fell into a creek while rabbit hunting with two Negro companions on Carothers

---

[5]Vickery, pp. 136-137.

[6]Intruder, p. 43. Faulkner's description of the type of white persons who participate in lynchings is in keeping with that of historian Frances Butler Simkins, See p. 109.

[7]Mississippi counties are divided into Beats.

[8]Intruder, p. 35.

Edmonds' plantation.[9] Lucas appeared and led the way to his cabin, ordering the boys to follow. Chick, who wanted to return to Edmonds' house,

> could no more imagine himself contradicting the man striding on ahead of him than he could his grandfather, not from any fear of nor even the threat of reprisal but because like his grandfather the man striding ahead of him was simply incapable of conceiving himself by a child contradicted and defied.[10]

Chick's sense of racial superiority caused him to be ashamed when Lucas refused to accept payment for the meal he and the two Negro boys had eaten.[11] Chick sent cigars to Lucas and snuff to his wife, Molly, as Christmas gifts, but he realized he had not proven dominant status for himself. Chick thought "_If he would just be a nigger first, just for one second, one little infinitesimal second_."[12] Chick saved his money, and bought an imitation silk dress which he sent to Molly. In September Lucas sent fresh homemade molasses to Chick. Lucas had not only sent a gift to him, just as a white person would, he had had the molasses brought by a white boy on a mule. The boy realized that he couldn't make Lucas "be a nigger."

---

[9] The McCaslin plantation which Carothers (Roth) Edmonds' grandfather, McCaslin Edmonds, had assumed when Ike McCaslin repudiated his inheritance. See Appendix B.

[10] _Intruder_, p. 8.

[11] See Dayton Kohler, 126.

[12] _Intruder_, p. 22.

Lucas's individualism, although admirable has not provided him with friends. With the possible exception of Carothers Edmonds, Chick knows Lucas better than any other white person does. Lucas proudly says, "I aint got friends. . . . I pays my own way."[13] But Lucas needs friends now. He needs people who have enough faith in him to believe he is innocent and to demand that the murder be investigated. There is, of course, no certainty that anyone can save Lucas. Hawkshaw hadn't been able to save Will Mayes.

Lucas is too proud to accept help from Gavin Stevens, because Stevens believes Lucas is guilty. Even Chick does not doubt Lucas's guilt. When he enters the cell and finds Lucas asleep, he thinks, ". . . Only a nigger could kill a man, let alone shoot him in the back, and then sleep like a baby as soon as he found something flat enough to lie down on;[14] but Lucas apparently does not realize that Chick believes he is guilty. He tells Chick he wants him to go out to Beat Four and retrieve the corpse of Vincent Gowrie, in order to prove that the shot which killed the dead man was not fired from Lucas's gun. Chick, who would prefer to saddle his horse and ride away from the whole problem, knows he must prevent "the death by shameful violence of a

---

[13] Ibid., p. 64.

[14] Ibid., p. 58.

man who would die not because he was a murderer but because his skin was black."[15]

Miss Habersham, the elderly white woman who was raised with Molly, is ready to help Chick prove Lucas's innocence. Although Molly has died two years before, Miss Habersham is intent upon rescuing the husband of her deceased childhood companion. She is, in fact, the only person who really believes Lucas is innocent. When Chick tells her that Lucas said the murdered man was not shot with his gun, she replies simply, "So he didn't do it."[16]

Aleck Sanders, Chick's Negro companion, reluctantly accompanies Chick and Miss Habersham. Aleck believes Lucas is guilty. His reaction when Chick returned from the jail had been completely lacking in sympathy:

> "So they aint come for old Lucas yet," Aleck Sander said.
> "Is that what your people think about it too?" he said.
> "And so would you," Aleck Sander said. "It's the ones like Lucas makes trouble for everybody."[17]

Aleck's attitude toward Lucas is quite understandable. Someone has committed a murder, and Lucas is said to be guilty. Neither Aleck nor any of the other Negroes knows

---

[15] Ibid., p. 72.

[16] Ibid., p. 87. See Vickery, p. 140.

[17] Intruder, p. 85.

Lucas well enough to have any faith in him. The Negroes have been forced to spend the week-end shut in their homes, rather than in their customary pleasures. Racial hatred has been intensified.

Chick and Miss Habersham--both descendants of leading Jefferson families--by retaining the courage and the justice of the old Southern Code, and enlarging the concept of justice to include a Negro, are able to prevent an act of inhumanity and save that Negro from suffering and shame.[18]

The hopeful view Faulkner presents in this novel is emphasized by his portrayal of various minor characters. In Light in August the attitude of the sheriff and his associates toward Negroes is shown by their actions when they learn that someone has been living in a cabin behind Joanna Burden's house: "'Get me a nigger,' the sheriff said. The deputy and two or three others got him a nigger. 'Who's been living in that cabin?' the sheriff said."[19] The sheriff, his deputy, and another white man take the Negro into the cabin and beat him in order to gain information from him, even though he has no connection with the murder. In contrast, the sheriff of Intruder in the Dust protects

---

[18]A second murder is discovered, and the murderer is proven to be Crawford Gowrie, a brother of Vincent.

[19]Light, p. 254.

the two Negro convicts he has taken to the cemetery to open the grave of Vincent Gowrie. When Mr. Gowrie and his twin sons arrive, the Negroes begin to run, but the sheriff grasps them,

> turning his body so that he was between them and the little wiry old man with the pistol, saying in that mild even lethargic voice:
> "Stop it. Dont you know the worst thing that could happen to a nigger would be dodging loose in a pair of convict pants around out here today?"[20]

The jailor, although he does not have sympathy for Lucas as a human, does feel a grudging sense of responsibility which is completely lacking in the deputy who abandons Rider:

> "Me?" the jailor cried. "Me get in the way of them Gowries and Ingrums for seventy-five dollars a month? Just for one nigger? . . . Dont mind me. I'm going to do the best I can; I taken an oath of office too." His voice rose a little, still calm, just louder: "But dont think nobody's going to make me admit I like it. I got a wife and two children; what good am I going to be to them if I get myself killed protecting a goddamn stinking nigger?" His voice rose again; it was not calm now: "And how am I going to live with myself if I let a passel of nogood sonabitches take a prisoner away from me?"[21]

Will Legate, the deer-hunter whom the sheriff hires to sit with his rifle in front of the jail, accepts his responsibility cheerfully: "'Oh I got to,' Legate said in his easy

---

[20]*Intruder*, pp. 160-161.

[21]*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

pleasant voice. 'I got to resist. Mr Hampton's paying me five dollars for it.'"[22]

But many of Jefferson's residents are still laboring under the curse. Mr. Lilley, "a countryman who . . . moved to town a year ago and now owns a small shabby side street grocery whose customers . . . [are] mostly Negroes,"[23] is an example of a white person who still refuses to accept Negroes as fellow human beings. Speaking of the expected lynching mob, he says:

> " . . . It aint their fault it's Sunday. That sonofabitch ought to thought of that before he taken to killing white men on a Saturday afternoon. . . . My wife aint feeling good tonight, and besides I dont want to stand around up there just looking at the front of that jail. But tell um to holler if they need help."[24]

Gavin Stevens effectively explains Mr. Lilley's attitude toward Negroes:

> "He has nothing against what he calls niggers. If you ask him, he will probably tell you he likes them even better than some white folks he knows and he will believe it. They are probably constantly beating him out of a few cents here and there in his store and probably even picking up things--packages of chewing gum or bluing or a banana or a can of sardines or a pair of shoelaces or a bottle of hair-straightener--under their coats and aprons and he knows it; he probably even gives them things free of charge --the bones and spoiled meat out of his butcher's icebox and

---

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 53.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 48.

> spoiled candy and lard. All he requires is that they act like niggers. Which is exactly what Lucas is doing: blew his top and murdered a white man--which Mr Lilley is probably convinced all Negroes want to do--and now the white people will take him out and burn him, all regular and in order and themselves acting exactly as he is convinced Lucas would wish them to act: like white folks; both of them observing implicitly the rules: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks acting like white folks and no real hard feeling on either side (since Mr Lilley is not a Gowrie) once the fury is over; in fact Mr Lilley would probably be one of the first to contribute cash money toward Lucas' funeral and the support of his widow and children if he had them. Which proves again how no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors."[25]

The white people who have gathered to watch Lucas lynched as a "negro-murderer" go home quietly when they learn Vincent Gowrie was killed, not only by a white man, but by one of his own brothers. Chick is ashamed of his white society, but Stevens explains, that by fleeing, the people have expressed both their shame and their disapproval of the fratricide.[26]

Although Faulkner has made the theme of _Intruder in the Dust_ implicit in the story, he includes a series of long speeches by Gavin Stevens to re-enforce that theme. In both the story and the speeches Faulkner is presenting his belief in the South's ability to repudiate the curse.

---

[25]_Ibid._, pp. 48-49.

[26]Robert H. Elias, "Gavin Stevens: Intruder?," _Faulkner Studies_, III (Spring, 1954), 3.

Chick, who had previously felt he must maintain white superiority in his relation to Lucas, has been able to condemn the shameful actions of his own society.[27] He now realizes that inhumanity to Negroes is "not a racial outrage but a human shame.[28] Through Stevens, Faulkner presents his belief that the Negro's situation will soon be much improved:

> "Soon now this sort of thing wont even threaten anymore. It shouldn't now. It should never have. Yet it did last Saturday and it probably will again, perhaps once more, perhaps twice more. But then no more, it will be finished; the shame will still be there of course but then the whole chronicle of man's immortality is in the suffering he has endured; his struggle toward the stars in the stepping-stones of his expiations. Someday Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man's children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it.[29]

The injustice is the responsibility of the South, and they alone can abolish it. Virtue develops within, and it develops slowly.[30] Negroes and whites in the South usually live together in peace now. The efforts of out-

---

[27]Ibid.

[28]Intruder, p. 97.

[29]Ibid., pp. 154-155. See Simkins, pp. 521-536 for a discussion of the progress the Negro has made.

[30]Tommy Hudson, "William Faulkner: Mystic and Traditionalist," Perspective, III (Autumn, 1950), 233.

siders to bring radical changes upon two unprepared races destroys that peace.[31] Gavin Stevens tells Chick:

> "I'm defending Lucas Beauchamp. I'm defending Sambo from the North and East and West--the outlanders who will fling him decades back not merely into injustice but into grief and agony and violence too by forcing on us laws based on the idea that man's injustice to man can be abolished overnight by police. Sambo will suffer it of course; there are not enough of him yet to do anything else. And he will endure it, absorb it and survive because he is Sambo and has that capacity to endure and survive but he will be thrown back decades and what he survives to may not be worth having because by that time divided we may have lost America."[32]

Stevens' many tributes to the endurance of the Negro are followed by a vivid portrayal of that endurance. Lucas, after his terrifying experience, emerges from the jail with his usual calmness, assurance, and dignity. He goes to Gavin Stevens' office, and not only insists on paying for legal services, but demands a receipt.

In 1951 there appeared Notes on a Horsethief,[33] a long fragment of a forthcoming novel, which was published in 1954 as A Fable.[34] In this story a Negro, similar to Lucas in age and dignity, is set free by a mob.[35]

---

[31]Mary Cooper Robb, William Faulkner: An Estimate of His Contribution to the Modern American Novel (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957), p. 43.

[32]Intruder, pp. 203-204.

[33]William Faulkner, Notes on a Horsethief (Greenville, Miss.: The Levee Press, 1951).

[34]William Faulkner, A Fable (New York: Random House 1954).

[35]Robert Coughlan, The Private World of William Faulkner (New York: Harper & Bros., 1953), p. 170.

Requiem for a Nun[36] is a novel-play involving Temple Drake and Gowan Stevens of Sanctuary, now married and the parents of two children. Temple, bored with her conventional life, has chosen Nancy Mannigoe,[37] a former drug addict and prostitute, as a nurse for her children so that she may have Nancy's companionship. Temple makes plans to take her baby and leave town with the brother of a former lover. Nancy, after other attempts to dissuade Temple have failed, strangles the baby. Apparently she kills the child in order to save it and Temple from a sordid life such as she has known.[38] Faulkner feels no anger toward Nancy.[39] He portrays her as an "oddly saint-like figure,"[40] who readily accepts the responsibility of her guilt. (The book is, however, weakened by the incredibility of Nancy's action.)[41] From Nancy, Temple learns

---

[36]William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York: Random House, 1951).

[37]Faulkner has identified the Nancy of Requiem for a Nun as the Nancy of "That Evening Sun," adding, "These people I figure belong to me and I have the right to move them about in time when I need them." Faulkner in the University, p. 79.

[38]William Van O'Connor, "Faulkner on Broadway," The Kenyon Review, XXI (Spring, 1959), 335. See also Carlos Baker, "William Faulkner: The Doomed And The Damned," The Young Rebel In American Literature Carl Bode (ed.) (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), p. 164.

[39]Robb, p. 42.

[40]Baker, p. 164.

[41]"Faulkner on Broadway," 335.

that she must bear the burden of past sins and that by suffering and by believing in Jesus and heaven she has a chance for salvation.[42]

In 1954 Faulkner wrote an article for Holiday entitled "Mississippi," in which he paid warm tributes to two Faulkner family servants, Mammy Caroline Barr and Uncle Ned. Uncle Ned, who served three generations of the Faulkner family, was possibly the basis for the character of Lucas Beauchamp.[43]

In recent years Faulkner has made a number of speeches and statements concerning the problem of racial relations. He has defined his position as mid-way between the Citizens Council and the NAACP.[44] Although Faulkner is not alone in this position, it is certainly not a popular one. It is, therefore, unlikely that Faulkner would assume this position if he were not sincere about the opinions he professes to hold. Faulkner has said that he and other Southerners are willing to accept their unpopular position in order to help "our native land which we love to accept a new condition which it must accept whether it wants to or not."[45]

---

[42] Ibid., 334.

[43] Tangled Fire, p. 174 (footnote #3).

[44] William Faulkner, "A Letter to the North," Life, XL (March 5, 1956), 51.

[45] Ibid.

In "A Letter to the North" Faulkner states that he opposes both continued compulsory segregation and forced integration.[46] In this article Faulkner emphasizes that the North completely ignores the emotional aspects and believes the problem to be a simple legal and moral one.[47] He advises the groups attempting to compel integration to go slowly, and warns that if the white South is pushed into the handicapped position which the Negro now holds, the white South will gain the sympathy of those who now wish to help the Negro.[48]

In 1956 Faulkner wrote an article, "On Fear: The South in Labor," discussing the economic oasis of racial tensions in the South:

> . . . what the Negro threatens is not the Southern white man's social system but the Southern white man's economic system--that economic system which the white man knows and dares not admit to himself is established on an obsolescence--the artificial inequality of man--and so is itself already obsolete and hence doomed. He knows that only 3 hundred years ago the Negro's naked grandfather was eating rotten elephant or hippo meat in an African rain-forest, yet in only 300 years the Negro produced Dr. Ralph Bunche and George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. The white man knows that only 90 years ago not 1% of the Negro race could own a deed to land, let alone read that deed; yet in only ninety years although his only contact with a county courthouse is the window through which he pays the taxes for which he has no representation,

---

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 51-52.

[48] Ibid., 51.

> he can own his land and farm it with inferior stock and worn-out tools and gear--equipment which any white man would starve with--and raise children and feed and clothe them and send them North where they can have equal scholastic opportunity and end his life holding his head up because he owes no man, with even enough over to pay his coffin and funeral.[49]

While Faulkner was at the University of Virginia in 1958, he gave a speech, "A Word to Virginians," in which he called upon Virginia to take the lead in integration and in preparing the Negro for equality:

> . . . this nor any country or community of people can no more get along in peace with ten percent of its population arbitrarily unassimilated than a town of five hundred unbridled horses loose in the streets, or say a community of five thousand cats with five hundred unassimilated dogs among them, or vice versa. For peaceful coexistence, all must be one thing: either all first-class citizens or all second-class citizens; either all people or all horses; either all cats or all dogs.
>
> Perhaps the Negro is not yet capable of more than second-class citizenship. . . . But even if that is so, the problem of the second-class citizen still remains. It would not solve the problem even if the Negro were himself content to remain only a second-class citizen even though relieved of first-class responsibilities by classification. The fact would still remain that we are a nation established on the fact that we are only ninety percent unified in power. With only ninety percent of unanimity, we would face (and hope to survive it) an inimical world unified against us even in inimicality. We cannot be even ninety percent unified against the inimical world which outnumbers us, because too much of even that ninety percent of power is spent and consumed by the physical problem of the ten percent of irresponsibilities.
>
> It is easy enough for the North to blame on us, the South, the fact that this problem is still unsolved. If I were a Northerner, that's what I would do: tell

---

[49] William Faulkner, "On Fear: The South in Labor," _Harper's_ Magazine, CCXII (June, 1956), 30-31.

> myself that one hundred years ago we, both of us, North and South, had put this to the test and had solved it. That it is not us, the North, but you, the South, who have refused to accept that verdict. Nor will it help us any to remind the North that, by ratio of Negro to white in population, there is probably more of inequality and injustice there than with us.
>
> Instead, we should accept that gambit. Let us say to the North: All right, it is our problem, and we will solve it. For the sake of the argument, let us agree that as yet the Negro is incapable of equality. . . .
>
> So we, the white man, must take him in hand and teach him that responsibility; this will not be the first time nor the last time in the long record of man's history that moral principle has been identified with and even inextricable from practical common sense. Let us teach him that, in order to be free and equal, he must first be worthy of it, and then forever afterward work to hold and keep and defend it. He must learn to cease forever more thinking like a Negro and acting like a Negro. This will not be easy for him. His burden will be that, because of his race and color, it will not suffice for him to think and act like just any white man: he must think and act like the best among white men.[50]

Both Faulkner's recent fiction and his non-fiction statements reveal his beliefs concerning the present-day racial situation in the South. He stresses the economic basis of racial tensions and the emotional problems (of which the North is oblivious) involved. As Faulkner shows in _Intruder in the Dust_, the Negro's situation has improved, and it is continuing to improve. Faulkner has repudiated the curse.

---

[50] _Faulkner in the University_, pp. 209-211. (Speech given February 20, 1958.)

CONCLUSION

The sketches and stories Faulkner wrote in 1925 are the experimental work of a young writer. But by 1929--only four years later--Faulkner had developed his mythological Yoknapatawpha County, based upon Lafayette, the county in which he lives. A few years ago, someone (observing that Faulkner is a regional writer) asked, "Do you feel that your characters are universal?" He replied,

> "I feel that the verities which these people suffer are universal verities--that is, that man, whether he's black or white or red or yellow still suffers the same anguishes, he has the same aspirations, his follies are the same follies, his triumphs are the same triumphs. That is, his struggle is against his own heart, against --with the hearts of his fellows, and with his background. And in that sense there's no such thing as a regional writer, the writer simply uses the terms he is familiar with best because that saves him having to do research. . . . he might write the book about the Chinese but if he does that, he's got to do some research. . . . But if he uses his own region, which he is familiar with, it saves him that trouble."[1]

American literature has been greatly enriched because Faulkner, after writing an experimental story about the Chinese, has chosen to place most of his works in a setting he thoroughly understands. But Faulkner has used his own region merely as a background for presenting his study of humanity. He is interested in portraying "the truth and the human heart."[2] In his portrayal, Faulkner does not

---

[1] _Faulkner in the University_, p. 197.

[2] _Writers at Work_, p. 138.

think in terms of virtues but of

> "the verities of the human heart. They are courage, honor, pride, compassion, pity. . . . they are not virtues, or one doesn't try to practice them, in my opinion, simply because they are good. . . . they are the verities to be practiced not because they are virtue but because that's the best way to live in peace with yourself and your fellows. . . ."[3]

In his Yoknapatawpha Saga, Faulkner is concerned with these "verities of the human heart." They are found in his most admirable characters: Sam Fathers, Ike McCaslin, Lucas Beauchamp, Judith Sutpen, Clytie, Dilsey, Aunt Jennie Sartoris Du Pre, the boy Bayard in The Unvanquished, Elnora in "There Was A Queen," Charles Mallison, and Miss Habersham. Of these characters, Sam Fathers, Lucas, Clytie, Dilsey, and Elnora are either Negro or part-Negro. Ike McCaslin and Charles Mallison develop these qualities through their relationships with Sam Fathers and Lucas Beauchamp. Miss Habersham shows courage, honesty, compassion, and pity in helping Lucas, because she has been raised with Molly.

His characters who lack these verities are not able to live in peace with themselves and their fellow humans. Man's inhumanity to man, which Faulkner shows in his powerful portrayal of white cruelty to Negroes, is caused by

---

[3] Faulkner in the University, p. 133.

people completely lacking these verities. McLendon in "Dry September," the deputy sheriff in "Pantaloon in Black," and Hines, McEachern, and Percy Grimm in _Light in August_ are among Faulkner's most unpleasant characters.

Faulkner also presents characters who possess courage and pride, but who are lacking in honor, compassion, and pity. These are the people who achieve status within their own society, but who oppress those weaker than themselves. Carothers McCaslin and Thomas Sutpen represent the ruthlessness of the plantation system, and the plantation system represents all societies which oppress the weak.

By showing the double sin of land exploitation and Negro slavery, the curse which slavery brought upon the land, and his own repudiation of the curse, Faulkner is presenting his version of the Fall of Man and the possibility of Redemption.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Books, Articles, Statements, and Speeches by Faulkner:

"A Letter to the North," Life, XL (March 5, 1956), 51-52.

Absalom, Absalom! New York: The Modern Library, 1951.

A Fable. New York: Random House, 1954.

Collected Stories of William Faulkner. New York: Random House, 1950.

Faulkner at Nagano. Tokyo: The Kenkyusha Press, 1956.

Faulkner in the University. Edited by Frederick L Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1959.

Go Down, Moses and Other Stories. New York: Random House, 1942.

Intruder in the Dust. New York: Random House, 1948.

Knight's Gambit. New York: Random House, 1949.

Light in August. New York: The Modern Library, 1950.

"Mississippi," Holiday, XV (April, 1954), 33-47.

Mosquitoes. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927.

"Nobel Prize Address," The Faulkner Reader. New York: Random House, 1954, pp. 3-4.

Notes on a Horsethief. Greenville, Miss.: The Levee Press, 1951.

"On Fear: The South in Labor," Harper's Magazine, CCXII (June, 1956), 29-34.

Requiem for a Nun. New York: Random House, 1951.

Sanctuary. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931.

Sartoris. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1929.

Soldier's Pay. New York: The New American Library, 1951.

The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying. New York: The Viking Press, 1946.

The Unvanquished. New York: The New American Library, 1959.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Allen, Charles A. "William Faulkner's Vision of Good and Evil," The Pacific Spectator, X (Summer, 1956), 236-241.

Baker, Carlos. "William Faulkner: The Doomed And The Dammed," The Young Rebel In American Literature. Carl Bode (ed.). New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960. 169 pp.

Bowling, Lawrence E. "Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence," The Kenyon Review, XX (Summer, 1958), 466-487.

Brooks, Cleanth. "Absalom, Absalom! The Definition of Innocence," The Sewanee Review, LIX (Autumn, 1951), 543-558.

Campbell, Harry M. "Structural Devices In The Works of Faulkner," Perspective, III (Autumn, 1950), 209-226.

Campbell, Harry M. and Ruel E. Foster. William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951. 179 pp.

Coughlan, Robert. The Private World of William Faulkner. New York: Harper and Bros., 1953. 151 pp.

Cowley, Malcolm (ed.). Writers at Work. Interviews made by the Paris Review. New York: Viking Press, 1943. 309 pp.

"Descent and Distribution," The Encyclopedia Americana: The International Reference Work (26th ed.), VIII, 719.

Elias, Robert H. "Gavin Stevens: Intruder?" Faulkner Studies, III (Spring, 1954), 1-4.

Eliot, T. S. "The Waste Land," The College Survey of English Literature. Alexander M. Witherspoon et al. (ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942. (Shorter edition, revised), 1290-1299.

Fiedler, Leslie A. Love and Death In The American Novel. New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1960. 603 pp.

Foster, Ruel E. "A Further Note on the Conclusion of 'The Bear,'" Faulkner Studies, III (Spring, 1954), 4-5.

Harrington, Evans B. "Technical Aspects of William Faulkner's 'That Evening Sun,'" Faulkner Studies, I (Winter, 1952), 54-59.

Hirshleifer, Phyllis. "As Whirlwinds in the South: An Analysis of Light in August," Perspective, II (Summer, 1949), 225-238.

Howe, Irving. William Faulkner: A Critical Study. New York: Random House, 1951. 203 pp.

Hudson, Tommy. "William Faulkner: Mystic and Traditionalist," Perspective, III (Autumn, 1950). 227-235.

King James Bible.

Kohler, Dayton. "William Faulkner and the Social Conscience," College English, XI (December, 1949), 119-127.

Lee, Edwy B. "A Note on the Ordonnance of The Sound and the Fury," Faulkner Studies, III (Summer-Autumn, 1954), 37-39.

Malin, Irving. William Faulkner: An Interpertation. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957. 99 pp.

Miner, Ward L. The World of William Faulkner. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1952. (Originally published by Duke University Press.) 159 pp.

O'Connor, William Van. "Faulkner on Broadway," The Kenyon Review, XXI (Spring, 1959), 334-336.

________. The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954. 164 pp.

________. William Faulkner. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 3. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959. 40 pp.

Powell, Summer C. "William Faulkner Celebrates Easter, 1928," Perspective II (Summer, 1949), 195-218.

Robb, Mary Cooper. _William Faulkner: An Estimate of his Contribution to the American Novel._ Critical Essays in English and American Literature, No. 1. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957. 64 pp.

Sherwood, John C. "The Traditional Element in Faulkner," _Faulkner Studies_, III (Summer-Autumn, 1954), 17-23.

Simkins, Francis Butler. _A History of The South._ New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959. 615 pp.

Swiggart, Peter. "Moral and Temporal Order in _The Sound and the Fury_," _The Sewanee Review_, LXI (Spring, 1953), 221-237.

Taylor, Walter F. Jr. "Let My People Go: The White Man's Heritage In _Go Down, Moses_," _The South Atlantic Quarterly_, LVIII (Winter, 1959), 20-32.

Thomas, Douglas M. "Memory-Narrative in _Absalom, Absalom!_," _Faulkner Studies_, II (Summer, 1953), 19-22.

Tindall, William York. _The Literary Symbol._ New York: Columbia University Press, 1955. 278 pp.

Vickery, Olga W. _The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interperation._ Baton Rouge: Louisana State University Press, 1959. 269 pp.

Waggoner, Hyatt H. _William Faulkner: From Jefferson To The World._ Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959. 266 pp.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

WORKS BY WILLIAM FAULKNER[1]

<u>The Marble Faun</u>. Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1924. (Preface by Phil Stone.) Poetry.

**<u>Soldiers Pay</u>. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.

<u>Mosquitoes</u>. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927.

**<u>Sartoris</u>.[Y] New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929.

*<u>The Sound and the Fury</u>.[Y] New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929.

<u>As I Lay Dying</u>.[Y] New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930.

**<u>Sanctuary</u>.[Y] New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931.

<u>These Thirteen</u>. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison smith, 1931. (Contains "Victory," "All the Dead Pilots," "Crevasse," *"A Justice,"Y "Mistral," "Ad Astra," *"Red Leaves,"Y "Divorce in Naples," "Carcassone," "A Rose for Emily,"Y "Hair,"Y *"That Evening Sun,"Y and *"Dry September."Y)

<u>Idyll in the Desert</u>. New York: Random House, 1931. (A limited edition of 400 copies; never reprinted.)

<u>Miss Zilphia Gant</u>.[Y] The Book Club of Texas, 1932. (A limited edition of 300 copies; never reprinted.)

*<u>Light in August</u>.[Y] New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1932.

<u>Salmagundi</u>. Milwaukee: The Casanova Press, 1932. (Contains early essays and poems, mostly from <u>The Double Dealer</u>.)

<u>A Green Bough</u>. New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1933. Poetry.

APPENDIX A (page 2)

Doctor Martino and Other Stories. New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1934. (Contains "Black Music," "Leg," "Doctor Martino," "Fox Hunt," "Death Drag," **"There Was a Queen,"Y **"Smoke,"Y "Turn About," "Beyond," "Wash,"Y "Elly,"Y *"Mountain Victory," "Honor.")

Pylon. New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1935.

*Absalom, Absalom!Y New York: Random House, 1936.

**The Unvanquished.Y New York: Random House, 1938.

The Wild Palms. New York: Random House, 1939.

The Hamlet.Y New York: Random House, 1940.

*Go Down, Moses and Other Stories.Y New York: Random House, 1942. (In subsequent printings and other editions, "and Other Stories" was omitted from the title, thus emphasizing the unity of the collection.)

*Intruder in the Dust.Y New York: Random House, 1948.

Knight's Gambit.Y New York: Random House, 1949. (Contains **"Smoke," reprinted from Doctor Martino, "Monk," "Hand upon the Waters," "Tomorrow," "An Error in Chemistry," and "Knight's Gambit.")

Collected Stories of William Faulkner. New York: Random House, 1950. Reprints all of the stories except "Smoke" from These Thirteen and Doctor Martino as well as "Artist at Home," "The Brooch," **"Centaur in Brass,"Y "A Courtship,"Y "Golden Land," "Lo!"Y **"Mule in the Yard,"Y **"My Grandmother Millard and General Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Harrykin Creek,"Y "Pennsylvania Station," "Shall Not Perish,"Y "Shingles for the Lord,"Y "The Tall Men," "That Will Be Fine,"Y "Two Soldiers,"Y and "Uncle Willy."Y

**Notes on a Horsethief. Greenville, Miss.: The Levee Press, 1951.

*Requiem for a Nun.Y New York: Random House, 1951.

Mirrors of Chartres Street. Minneapolis, Minn.: The University of Minnesota Press, 1953. (Contains eleven of the stories and sketches published in the Times Picayune, 1925.)

APPENDIX A (page 3)

**A Fable. New York: Random House, 1954.

*Big Woods.[Y] New York: Random House, 1955. (A collection of earlier stories: "The Bear," "The Old People," and "A Bear Hunt" plus "Race at Morning.")

New Orleans Sketches by William Faulkner. Tokyo, Japan: the Hokuseido Press, 1955. (Contains the "Mirrors of Chartres Street" sketches which appeared originally in the Times-Picayune.)

The Town.[Y] New York: Random House, 1957.

New Orleans Sketches. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958. (Contains the group of short sketches entitled "New Orleans" which Faulkner published in the January-February, 1925 issue of The Double Dealer and the sixteen "Mirrors of Chartres Street" stories and sketches from the Times-Picayune.)

The Mansion.[Y] New York: Random House, 1959.

[1]Minnesota Pamphlet, pp. 41-42. Poems and stories by Faulkner have been reprinted in various magazines; many of these have been reprinted (sometimes after revision) in later collections.

[Y]Novels and stories set in Faulkner's mythological Yoknapatawpha County. The works in the Yoknapatawpha Saga which do not involve Negroes are those dealing with poor whites: As I Lay Dying is a story of poor hill farmers, the Bundrens; The Hamlet, The Town, and The Mansion form Faulkner's Snopes trilogy.

*Works which deal thematically with Negro and white relationships.

**Works which, although not dealing thematically with Negro and white relationships, involve important or highly sympathetic Negro characters.

APPENDIX B

A McCASLIN-EDMONDS-BEAUCHAMP GENEALOGY*

Family founder: Lucuis Quintus Carothers McCaslin (1772-1837). Pioneered from Carolina and established plantation near Jefferson on land purchased from the Chicasaws.
Legitimate children: Twin sons, Amodeus and Theophilus; daughter (name not given) who married a man named Edmonds.
Illegitimate children: Daughter, Tomasina (Tomey), by a negro slave named Eunice; son, Terrel (Tomey's Turl) by Tomey. Left $1,000 to Tomey's Turl in will.

McCaslin branch:

Theophilus and Amodeus (Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy), sons of Carothers McCaslin. Developed a system through which their slaves earned freedom by working on the plantation. Uncle Buck married late in life, had one son, Isaac McCaslin.

Isaac McCaslin (Ike) (1867-?). Son of Theophilus McCaslin. Gained proper attitude toward nature and toward human beings through his association with Sam Fathers and the wilderness. Married, no children.

Edmonds branch:

Daughter of Carothers McCaslin (name not given). Married a man named Edmonds.

Grandson of Carothers McCaslin (name not given). Father of McCaslin Edmonds.

McCaslin Edmonds (Cass) (1850-?). Reared Isaac McCaslin. Received the repudiated land. Had one son, Zack Edmonds.

Zack Edmonds. Had one son, Carothers Edmonds.

Carothers Edmonds (Roth) (1898--). Had an illegitimate son by the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim.

APPENDIX B (page 2)

Beauchamp branch:

Tomasina (Tomey) (1810-1833). Daughter of the slave, Eunice, and Carothers McCaslin.

Terrel (Tomey's Turl) (1833-?). Son of Tomey and Carothers McCaslin. Married Tennie, a Beauchamp slave girl in 1859. Three surviving children: James (Tennie's Jim), Sophonsiba (Fonsiba), and Lucas.

James Thucydides Beauchamp (Tennie's Jim) (1864-?). Son of Tomey's Turl and Tennie. Disappeared on twenty-first birthday.

Sophonsiba Beauchamp (Fonsiba) (1869-?). Daughter of Tomey's Turl and Tennie. Married and moved to Arkansas in 1886.

Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp (Lucas instead of Lucius because he took his white grandfather's name and made it his own by using three quarters of it.) (1874--) Married Mollie (last name not given). Had one son, Henry; one daughter, Nat.

Henry Beauchamp (1898-?). Son of Lucas and Mollie Beauchamp.

Nat Beauchamp. Daughter of Lucas and Mollie.

Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. Grandson of Lucas and Mollie. (Name of parents not given). Electrocuted in Juliet, Illinois at age twenty-six, for the murder of a policeman.

Infant child (name not given) of Carothers Edmonds and the granddaughter of Tennie's Jim.

* Taken largely from Walton Litz, "Genealogy as Symbol in Go Down, Moses," Faulkner Studies, I (Winter, 1952), 49-53.

APPENDIX C

CHRONOLOGY OF SUTPEN FAMILY*

1807 Thomas Sutpen born in West Virginia mountains.

1817 Sutpen family moved down into Tidewater Virginia.

1820 Sutpen ran away from home.

1827 Sutpen married first wife in Haiti.

1829 Charles Bon born, Haiti.

1831 Sutpen learns his wife has negro blood, repudiates her child and her.

1833 Sutpen appears in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, takes up land, builds his house.

1834 Clytemnestra (Clytie) born to slave woman.

1838 Sutpen married Ellen Coldfield.

1839 Henry Sutpen born, Sutpen's Hundred.

1841 Judith Sutpen born.

1859 Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon meet at the University of Mississippi. Judith and Charles meet Christmas.

1860 Christmas, Sutpen forbids marriage between Judith and Bon. Henry repudiates his birthright, departs with Bon.

1861 Sutpen, Henry, and Bon depart for war.

1862 Ellen Coldfield dies.

1865 Henry kills Bon at gates. Rosa Coldfield moves out to Sutpen's Hundred.

1866 Sutpen becomes engaged to Rosa Coldfield, insults her, and she returns to Jefferson.

1867 Sutpen takes up with Milly Jones.

1869 Milly's child is born. Wash Jones kills Sutpen.

APPENDIX C (page 2)

1871 Clytie fetches Charles E. St. V. Bon to Sutpen's Hundred to live.

1881 Charles E. St. V. Bon returns with negro wife.

1882 Jim Bond born.

1884 Judith and Charles E. St. V. Bon die of smallpox.

1909 or 1910**

September Rosa Coldfield and Quentin find Henry Sutpen hidden in the house.

December Rosa Coldfield goes out to fetch Henry to town; Clytie sets fire to the house.

* Based upon Faulkner's "Chronology" in _Absalom, Absalom!_

**Faulkner uses the year 1910 in his chronology. However, on page 11 of _Absalom, Absalom!_ he says Miss Rosa is telling her story to Quentin on "this September afternoon in 1909." In _The Sound and The Fury_ Quentin's freshman year at Harvard begins in September, 1909 and he commits suicide in June of 1910. Thus, according to the date used in _The Sound and The Fury_, 1909 would be the correct year.