EVIL AND VIOLENCE IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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Thesis Abstract

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The concern of this essay is to prove the thesis that Faulkner is more than a sensationalist when writing of violence, and more than a regionalist when staging his plots in the South; Faulkner is, in my opinion, a universalist concerned with the odds faced by modern man in overcoming the evil which is ensnaring him. To support this theory I have analyzed Faulkner's fiction under the chapters, "A Deterioration of Morality," "A Misconceived Morality," and "Amorality."

"A Deterioration of Morality" deals with the decay of the Southern aristocracy--the Sartorises, the Sutpens and the Compsons--resulting from a degenerated code of morality. For Faulkner, evil originated in man's sin of pride when man set himself up as master over his black brother, and called land "his" which God created for the communal use of all. On this false foundation the Southern gentleman based his honor and pride, not realizing that the double curse of slavery and authoritarianism which he inherited from his father had already doomed his code of living to failure.

"A Misconceived Morality" traces the development of evil in the lives of the poor whites and the Joe Christmases (tainted by miscegenation), whose immorality is a negative assertion of their manhood.

Betty P, Dickinson

"Amorality" analyzes the evil present in Faulkner's view of modern times. Modern violence arises from a situation in which all values of human meaningfulness are disappearing, leaving man a dehumanized mechanical robot which Faulkner labels a Snopes.

The final chapter is a summing up of the decisions tested under the above divisions, coming to the conclusion that evil as Faulkner sees it is man-begun and man-developed, and can be rectified only if man is made to recognize his original sin of pride, and will repudiate his mistake.

R.B.M.

EVIL AND VIOLENCE IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

The Problem

The origin, the development, and the purpose of the existence of evil and violence in the fiction of William Faulkner is the problem proposed for study. The two, evil and violence, must of necessity be handled together since the latter is merely the outward expression of the inner evil which in itself is presented only through implication. That violence does exist in Faulkner's work is clear to even the superficial reader; that it is evil which motivates Faulkner's characters to acts of violence demands a deeper reader participation in the role of interpreter. It is this role that I have assumed in writing this essay, aware of the critics' pitfall of reading too much between the author's lines. If I should fall into this error, it will be due to a straining for understanding an oft-times difficult writer.

Faulkner is the sensitive artist aware of a decadence in the world which is particularly obvious to him in the land he knows, the South. His function as an artist is to recreate impressions that will effect a picture in the reader's mind similar to that in the author's mind. He does not tell the reader what he wishes him to conclude from the picture, but through slanted distortions Faulkner implies that the portrait drawn is depicting evil. His purpose in writing is similar to Caldwell's in Tobacco Road in that it is the reader who must do the interpreting.

The author does not tell the reader that the conditions portrayed are bad as Steinbeck does in Grapes of Wrath who goes even further to the point of designating the desired reform.

A Faulknerian character is a psychological product of his heritage of environment and genes. Any interpretation of Faulkner's writing must be deduced from an understanding of these people who are composites of the acts, feelings and passions of their ancestors. Faulkner works under the theory that in the present exists the past; and furthermore, the present does not exist until it becomes the "was" of the past; nor does the future exist until it passes through the stage of being present and becomes past. An acceptance of Faulkner's mystique of the simultaneity of all experience clarifies the maze of his ungrammatical style in which the conventional grammatical tenses of past, present and future hold no meaning for him and therefore are not used. This continuity of culture is felt more acutely by the Southener than by us of the newer hodge-podged middle west. Faulkner as chronicler of the Southern tradition can be compared with the New Englander Hawthorne, both of whom are concerned with the culture of their respective sections.

Human behaivor for Faulkner then is the sum of past human behaivor registered on a continuum of experience. Along this continuum, evil appears not as black and white but in varying shades of grey deepening as one evil begets the next evil. This determinism of past actions appears

in Faulkner as fatal as that of the doom-shaking determinish of Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan remonstrator. The difference seems to be that Faulkner's determinism is man-made; whereas that of Edwards' originates in God's election and damned. With neither writer does free will exist although man may feel that he has a choice because he is unaware of the social forces which are motivating his decisions. The question arises: is free will inevitably a hoax? For Jonathan Edwards it is because God has elected and damned, and any straining on Edwards' part to make it appear that man has a type of free will amounts to paradoxical reasoning. In William Faulkner there is a hint that if man can become aware of his psychological heritage as well as his physical inheritance, he will have the capacity to correct past errors which are responsible for present evils. That is why Gavin Stevens exhorts Chick in Intruder in the Dust to never stop struggling against the evil of slavery. Redemption is possible for Faulknerian man because his doom of evil is a result of his own making not of God's, and the maker can rectify the error, in this case man. Faulkner says in "The Bear" that God set man on earth capable of doing good and bad. Man in the beginning chose bad trapping himself in his own web of evil which can now only be unraveled by an undoing of his original mistake.

Because of the Southern geography of his settings, Faulkner has often been labeled as a mere regional writer. A thematic interpretation of Faulkner's fiction, such as

this essay undertakes, denies the truth of this category. The theme of evil and violence is universal. Faulkner makes it meaningful by portraying it within a provincial geography. Yoknapatawpha County with its village of Frenchman's Bend and its town of Jefferson is a piece of land mythically created by Faulkner to present his thesis that any section of land is a summation of the human things that has taken place on it. Yoknapatawpha County is a result of the Indian civilization, the usurping of the land from the Indians by the white pioneers who also usurp the negro's freedom, the Civil War, and the ensuing machine age which initiates modern times. The human actions which create the psychological environment are more important than the actual physical geography.

Faulkner traces the growth of his country from pioneer times into a cultural aristocracy of plantation owner and finally into its present breakdown due to the South's inability to keep pace with the quanitatively great America of which it is a part. The gigantic tragedy is the American tragedy not the deteriation of Yoknapatawpha County which is merely a recapitulation of the American breakdown which in turn is symbollic of the degeneration of all of modern civilization, more apparent in America since this country has advanced the most rapidly into the atom age. Quanitatively bragging America with its millions of bathtubs, telephones and automobiles is forgetting why they invented the bathtubs, telephones and automobiles. Not what you produce but how

much of it for how little you can produce has become the important criterion. Progressing quanitatively man has regressed qualitatively to a world absent of human values and codes of relationships. The evil of modern times has ceased to be a problem of immorality in which wrong choices are consciously made; it is a problem of amorality in which man is denied the categories of good and bad by which he can base his decisions. The money value of production over cost is controlling man as if he were a robot. The eternal verities of truth, honor, pride, humility, respect are disappearing as the Snopeses conquer the Compsons, the Sutpens, the Sartorises and even the Bundrens. It is not that truth no longer exists; it is that man has lost sight of truth by replacing humaneness with machineness. Faulkner is writing of a universal problem in terms of experiences he knows without which his novels do not come off as can be testified by Pylon and Mosquitoes, both placed outside his Southern county.

Just as Faulkner's geographical settings reinforce his theme of evil, so does his associative stream of consciousness technique in which the past, present and future intermingle into one. Whether a straight forward chronological approach, which he can and does use in stories like "Shingles for the Lord" and "Mule in the Yard," would subtract from his desired effect of the simultaneity of experience is not to be debated by this essay.

William Faulkner is a product of his age, of the depression and disillusionment of the thirties in which optimism and the belief in illimitable progress was swept away leaving an intellectual and moral confusion. The bewilderment of T. S. Eliot in Wasteland; the tough-guy fiction of Hemingway; the social consciousness in Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath, Caldwell's Tobacco Road and Farrel's Studs Lonigan; the seeking of new values in the writings of Marx; and the criticism of old values and obsession with evil in the fiction of William Faulkner reflect this confusion. It is Faulkner's obsession with evil and its violent manifestations that caused early critics to dismiss Faulkner as a sensationalist and a member of the "cult of cruelty" school. As Faulkner gains maturity in his later writings, the critics are revising their opinions placing Faulkner along with the best of American authors.

The concern of this essay is to substantiate the theory that Faulkner is not the mere writer of violence and negation, but that his real interest is in probing beneath the violence into the evil that motivates it. In importance of theme Faulkner ranks with the Biblical Prophets and with Dante and Milton and Shakespeare; in importance of treatment Faulkner cannot yet be adequately judged until time renders the correct perspective.

Malcolm Cowley in his introduction to the Portable Faulkner links Faulkner to the tradition of psychological horror, "often close to symbolism, that begins with Charles

Brockden Brown, our first professional novelist, and extends through Poe, Melville, Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Hemingway."[1] In the role of Gothic writer, Faulkner experiments in words and sounds as they reflect emotions of horror. As the Poe detective, Faulkner analyzes words for their connotations of terror. However, he is closer to Hawthorne and Melville in his main concern which is not Poe's calculated telling of a story to induce an objective realization of fear but is the relating of a story to arrouse the same subjective fear that the character feels. Faulkner is not interested in leaving the reader with a mere logical analysis of the emotion; he is more concerned with the evil underlying the emotion, the evil that causes the fear which results in violence.

Just as Faulkner cannot be separated from his age or his Southern background, so cannot one of his themes be segregated from another. His theme of the negro, of the decaying Southern aristocrat, of the grasping Snopeses are all interludes of his evil motif. Faulkner is a chronicler of the South, a writer of allegory and symbollism, and a portrayer of violence and evil. The student of Faulkner must read with a childlike eagerness and continue to reread with a Methusala-like patience. He must understand Faulkner as a whole which is a composite or a summation

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[1] Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction," The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951), p. 22.

of all his themes. If in this essay I seem to be taking Faulkner in parts and not in totality, it is for the purpose of seeing the whole more clearly by an understanding of its components such as a doctor studies an x-ray of the lungs to determine the disease of the body.

I arbitrarily divide Faulkner's writings into three sections for the purpose of study: "A deteriation of Morality," "A Misconceived Morality," and "Amorality." I say "arbitrarily" because any division of Faulkner would be such. Under each section I propose to handle Faulkner work by work, again realizing that even the division of Faulkner into novels and short stories is misleading. In my final chapter I will bring back into an overall view the whole of Faulkner's fiction as far as it has gone. The philosophy which I develop from such a perspective is my own, not Faulkner's.

Chapter II

A Deteriation of Morality

The evil responsible for the violence which has brought and is still bringing the decay of the Southern aristocracy is the main concern of this chapter. Included are the cycles of the Sartoris, Compson, and Sutpen dynasties along with their slave element.

The Southern aristocracy seems to be inevitably doomed from the beginning of its "dream" incorporated in the plantation plan. The "dream" consists of a little kingdom of master, slaves and land, similar to a middle ages manor. The inevitable ruin of such a scheme is inherent in the economics on which it is founded. John Sartoris's dream for his people, Sutpen's design for his aristocracy, the Compson family ambitions all have in common the God-like scheme of the all-commanding white ruler, a position of which only God is capable but which man blinded by his pride usurps in order to be the ultimate father of his domain. Working toward the dream of ruler, the white man subordinates his black brother to slavery violating the original conditions of morality laid down by God which state that man should do unto others as he would have them do unto him. The white man commits the sin of pride by enslaving his black brother and calling land "his" which was made for the communal love and contemplation of all men. The curse of slavery initiated by the father is inherited by the son, and thus

begins the blood guilt which Chick of Intruder is to feel.

The tragic flaw of the situation is that the Southern noble is unaware that his code of honor and respect is built on a quick-sand foundation of false morality, and that despite any amount of philanthropy on the part of Colonel Sartoris and his co-defenders of Southern honor, their aristocracy is doomed to destruction. The only hope for the Southern aristocrat is to repudiate the land and the curse of slavery as Isaac McCaslin does in "The Bear," and in so doing relinquish their dream of becoming ruler. Such a self-annihilation of their own aristocracy would redempt them in the eyes of God, but whether man in his flesh cage of physical desires to hunt, kill and own will ever be capable of the unselfish love relationship demanded by God's creation is an unanswered question. Faulkner himself admits that he cannot bury his pride in his Southern aristocratic beginnings.

The Southern decadence has stemmed from a deterioration of the original morality under which man was created, a morality best epitomized in the golden rule of Christian ethics: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The basic evil is Southern man's violation of this code. The too much killing, the lust, the miscegenation and the murder are manifestations of this underlying evil, and to outlaw the violence will be possible only when the original evil is understood and attacked.

The violence destroying the Southern families does

not result from a lack of morality. The code of honor and pride in the Southern noble is almost insuppressible, but it is a pride without humility and an honor without integrity. When man makes himself master and his brother slave, he denies his humbleness to God.

Although there is overlapping, especially in the case of the last Jason Compson who embraces Snopesism, the evil of this chapter differs from the evil of modern times in that the former can be judged as immoral because it is within the framework of morality; whereas the latter evil exists outside the sphere of morality and moral consequences resulting in a dehumanized state of amorality.

Sartoris[2]

Sartoris introduces the "glamorous and disastrous" Sartoris genealogy which pictures the Sartorises as "pawns shaped too late and to an old dead pattern, and of which the Player Himself is a little wearied. For there is death in the sound of it, and a glamorous fatality, like silver pennons down rushing at sunset or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux" (p. 380). The old grandfather Bayard dies taking his dreams of pre-Civil War South. Young Bayard commits suicide in a test plane escaping his hell on earth, and only the baby, Benbow Sartoris, remains of

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[2] William Faulkner, Sartoris (New York, 1929). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

of the men, and perhaps without the name of John or Bayard he will escape the obsession for glory which doomed the Sartoris blood. That story is yet to be told by Faulkner.

Sartoris with its abundance of characters and seemingly irrelevant exposition told in flash backs was not clearly understood until with Faulkner's later writing it was recognized to contain the seed of his Southern legend revealing the writer's mystic perception into the ruin of the South and the evil of modern wars which profit on the greed and lust in mankind.

This work is not the best of William Faulkner, but it cannot be dismissed as a mere historical romance despite its nostalgic moonlight and mockingbird passages and its courageous indomitable Southern ladies, as Miss Jenny, who betray Faulkner's deep love of the old South of "roast turkey and a smoked ham and a dish of quail and another of squirrels and a baked 'possum in a bed of sweet potatoes and squash ... and stewed cranberries and pickled peaches" (p. 290). Sartoris begins the Faulknerian theme of evil which is destroying the Sartorises, the Sutpens and the Compsons in the face of the fatality of modern civilization, leaving only the solid, enduring, patient negro who has outlasted slavery and may outlast freedom by prevailing despite the speed of automobiles and airplanes. Faulkner's apostrophe to the mule may be interpreted as an eulogy on the patience and endurance of the negro: "He it was more than any other one creature or thing, who, steadfast

to the land when all else faltered before the hopeless juggernaut of circumstance, impervious to conditions that broke men's hearts because of his venomous and patient preoccupation with the immediate present, won the prone South from beneath the iron heel of Reconstruction and taught it pride again through humility, and courage through adversity ... by sheer and vindictive patience ... he performs his humble monotonous duties without complaint, and his meed is blows ..." (p. 288). The negro retains humility with his pride, the twin virtues which to endure cannot stand alone. The Southern noble retains only pride. Speaking in reference to the terrifying speed of young Bayard's automobile, Simon the negro says, "'I ain't got so much time I kin hurry it'" (p. 220).

Young Bayard's tragedy is that of the Southern youth who inheriting the vestiges of the old aristocratic code of honor and dignity, must compete against the codeless, crude and blatant modern times of the Snopeses, and who as he reaches adulthood realizes that his inherited values are already too decadent to withstand Snopesist amorality. Lenied the glory of being killed by war as his twin brother John was, Bayard is trapped into living in a postwar valueless world in which he must choose either to embrace Snopesism or rediscover meaningful values. Unable to succomb to the first because of his heritage of humaneness and frustrated in his search for the latter, Bayard courts death in the speed of cars and airplanes. Paradoxically,

only death can sublimate his frustration to find a purpose in living.

Modern civilization proves the vainglory of the Sartoris genealogy and at the same time denies them any replacement of values other than the inhuman Snopesist money value which a Sartoris cannot accept because he demands humanity. Old John Sartoris who built the railroad for his Jefferson community once said, "'Genealogy is poppycock particularly in America, where only what a man takes and keeps has any significance and where all of us have a common ancestry .... Yet the man who professes to care nothing about his forbears is only a little less vain than the man who bases all his actions on blood precedent. And I reckon a Sartoris can have a little vanity and poppy cock; if he wants it'" (p. 92). A Sartoris denied the vanity and poppy cock must commit suicide.

Sartoris is a novel of the lost generation of soldiers returning from war, from the Civil War to World War I. The difference between the two wars is that the violence of the Civil war which killed an early Bayard Sartoris was for the purpose of protecting Southern honor, fallacious as it might be; whereas the violence of modern war is purposeless refusing even glory to young Bayard's courageous flesh. The evil of war is deepening in grey on the continuum.

Sartoris is also significant for introducing the Snopes family whose third rate businesses of grocery stores and barber shops at first only amuse the old Jefferson aristocrats,

and not until the Snopeses' parasitic growth strangles the town do the old patricians become alarmed, but already it is too late. The cultureless Snopeses of the new South have paralyzed the Southern aristocrat into inaction. Money has come to dictate control, not position. The calling of the Southern gentleman for honor and respect is futile; the Snopeses are not motivated by human instincts. They represent a reversion of man into his animal beginnings: "crouching, panting and snarling ... writhing and making smothered, animal-like moanings ..." (p. 267) describes the Snopes who drools into the soft undergarments he finds in Narcissa Benbow's bureau. Physical reactions unqualified by moral considerations are all that the Snopesist man is capable of. To him, the leader who deserves courting is the one with the most bathrooms, the most televisions, the most automobiles in the four-car garage. In opposition to the animal Snopes is young Bayard who yet possesses the qualities of fulfilling his manhood but is prevented the channels for doing so by modern competitive relationships which call for grab-and-git economy.

The Southern aristocrat is guilty of the evil that is destroying him. He based his code of honor on a false morality of master and slave, and until he realizes his original mistake he cannot outlast the consequences of his own actions and will be conquered by the Snopeses. Young Bayard says of himself, "'You, who deliberately do things your judgment tells you may not be successful, even possible are afraid

to face the consequences of your own acts'" (p. 311).

The Unvanquished[3]

This novel consists of a series of stories devoted to the Sartoris cycle during the Civil War and reconstruction. Young Bayard Sartoris of The Unvanquished is the old Bayard of Sartoris. Although Faulkner is again guilty of over glamorizing when dealing with the Sartorises, he draws a hard and realistic portrait of the town sovereign, Colonel John Sartoris, who builds the railroad for the good of his people even though his means for doing it are at shotgun point. The construction of the railroad is a component of the Sartoris "dream" to make Jefferson a center of civilization. If killing a carpet bagger or Northener or lynching a negro seems expedient to the "dream," colonel Sartoris does so, not realizing as young Bayard had begun to that the carpet bagger or the Northener or the negro was a human being too with the right to his own decision however adverse in the eyes of the Southern gentleman. When it came time to call an end to the too-much killing which caused Colonel Sartoris' statement, "'I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end'" (p. 260), it was already too late because the dream had been founded on authoritarian economics which divided the people into rulers and ruled. The dream itself

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[3] William Faulkner, The Unvanquished (New York, 1935). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

must be destroyed if the evil is to be repudiated.

But the dream is not destroyed. With his death "Marse" John bequeaths "his dream ... which we could never forget" (p. 291) to young Bayard who although he is aware of the foolishness of being a hero such as Drusilla pictures: "'How beautiful ... to be permitted to kill, to be permitted vengeance ..." (p. 308), feels compelled to live by the simple code of courage demanded of all Sartorises. Bayard unarmed lets his father's enemy take a shot at him, and in so doing he accepts his destiny although not through violence as his ancestors had done, but through resignation indicating that the Southern noble is beginning to recognize his guilt. However, the progress is cut short when in the next generation of Sartorises another Bayard, the twin in Sartoris, is corrupted by the killing of war. As a means to peace, war will always be incompatible with its goal.

The Unvanquished fills in some of the missing links and details of Faulkner's Southern legend hinted at in Sartoris. Beneath the surface of romantic adventure is unfolding the history of man's evil which began when the white man arrogated the function of master to himself and slave to his black brother. Man's ignorance of his original mistake does not excuse him from guilt which is visited upon his son. Whether the son can atone for the sins of the father remains unanswered. Young Bayard of Unvanquished is, at least, aware of his father's mistake even though his environmental prejudices paralyze him into inaction.

Absalom, Absalom![4]

"'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee. O Absalom, my son, my son!'"[5] Faulkner, inspired by the tragedy of the great but human Hebrew King David who sinned by taking to bed another man's wife and conceiving by her a son Absalom who was his undoing, wrote this tragedy of Sutpen whose "design" was his undoing because of its unnaturalness to God's code of morality which demands the rights to humanity for all men. There is no prophet Nathan to explain a parable to Sutpen so he might say as David did and be redemoted, "'I have sinned against the Lord'"[6] by denying my fellow man his rights. Sutpen's sin consists of his refusal to recognize the rights of his first wife as a woman, of his repudiation of the sonship of Charles Bon, and of his denial to infuse humanity into the expedience of his "design" for building a greater mansion house than the one that turned him as

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[4] William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1951). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

[5] "The Second Book of Samuel," The Bible; Designed to be Read as Living Literature; The Old and the New Testaments in the King James Version, ed. Ernest Sutherland Bates (New York, 1943), p. 295.

[6] Ibid, p. 280.

an innocent mountain boy away from its door, and for beginning an aristocratic line to carry on his "design."

The unraveling of Sutpen's mistake of which he himself was unaware forms the plot of Absalom. Sutpen is not the devil which Miss Rosa Coldfield demonizes him into, a figment of her own prejudices and idolizing fascination, but is the innocent boy-symbol corrupted by the evil of an adult world in which "there were so many objects to own and that the ones who owned the objects not only could look down on the ones that didn't, but could be supported in the down looking not only by the others who owned objects too but by the very ones that were looked down on that didn't own objects and knew they never would" (p. 221). The boy Sutpen did not realize until he knocked on the outside of a white door and was told to go to the back that "there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided ... because of what color their skins happened to be ... and where a certain few men had the power of life and death and barter and sale over others ..." (p. 221). Where he had lived as a mountain boy "the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'this is mine' was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had anymore of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to keep ..." (p. 221). Sutpen's trouble was his innocence which prevented him from recognizing

that the white world of mansions was built on the curse of slavery, and that the world closest to the true morality was the mountain world of his boyhood.

If Sutpen's cruelty had been the premeditated violence of a demon, Absalom would not be the tragedy that it is. What makes it a tragedy is that Sutpen is a man who in his desire to belong in the adult world denies himself, as well as his fellow man, humanity. Sutpen is not guilty of meanness even when he says to Milly, the poor-white granddaughter of Wash by whom he has his last child which turns out to be a girl, "'Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable'" (p. 286). He is a man who at last realizes that his scheme to beget a son has failed, and as a man he is to be pitied and admired. His statement to Milly is an objectification of his own failure in life.

Nor is Wash who murders Sutpen guilty of his crime. His act of violence was an assertion of his own human dignity. The tragedy is that of two men whose worlds and meanings were at opposite poles of society but whose need to be acknowledged as a man was the same. Both failed: the poor-white who climbed the ladder to the rung of Southern aristocrat, and the poor-white who accepted his servile station in life's society.

The devil's heritage is none other than the evil begun by man himself. Miscegenation is wrong not because black flesh is crossed with white but because the white branded

the black with slavery cursing its own race. The white man is the guilty party. It is he who has been the actor; the negro the acted-upon. The Southern gentleman is unaware of his crime because he inherits along with his guilt a pride which has long ago buried the shame of the act into his unconsciousness, and unless he can unearth his original mistake and admit to his guilt the day may come that the Northener Shreve predicts when he says to Quentin, the narrator of Absalom, "'the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere ... and so in a few thousand years, I ... will also have sprung from the loins of African kings'" (p. 378). The negro with his patience and endurance may outlast his white master.

Faulkner's children live close to the eternal verity of truth. The child Judith who sleeps with her negro half-sister does not realize that "a little spot of negro blood" (p. 308) can make such a difference until she is initiated into adolescence and comes into her heritage of adult prejudices. The evil Faulkner writes of is a component of maturity.

Absalom also depicts Faulkner's theme of the simultaneity of past, present and future. Judith says, "'You get born and try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and others all

trying ... only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying ..." (p. 127). Although determined by the past, man's make-up demands that he assert his manhood whether it be positively or negatively.

If there is no free choice, then why is man frustrated with desires? It is this question that Quentin, the narrator of Absalom, cannot resolve. He identifies himself with his ancestors' misfortunes: "'Maybe we are both Father!'" he says to his roommate Shreve. "'Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool ... or maybe Father and I are both Shreve ... or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us!'" (p. 261). This mystic feeling with the past motivates Quentin to protest his love for the South: "'I don't hate it. I don't! I don't!'" (p. 378). In The Sound and the Fury Quentin's frustration culminates in his suicide.

The actions of the other main characters of Absalom can be explained briefly: Henry is the most normally motivated. He kills Bon through a moral obligation to prevent a marriage of two, Judith and Bon, who were already joined in blood as brother and sister. Bon's demand to be

recognized as Sutpen's son is the expression of a natural desire to define his manhood. Velery Bon's marriage to a black woman is a negative assertion of this same need for manhood. The negro idiot Jim Bond closes the Sutpen cycle.

The Sound and the Fury[7]

The Sound is divided into four parts which record the going-to-pieces of the Compson family: part one is told through the mind of the thirty-three year old idiot Benjy who loved his sister Caddy and had no conception of the passing of time in which Caddy married to father her illegitimate child and later was divorced by the deceived groom, but to Benjy, who followed the golfers around when they called "caddy," she remained the little sister; the second part is narrated through the associative stream of consciousness of Quentin Compson, brother to Caddy and self-appointed protector of her Southern honor, who frustrated in his effort to resolve the modern amoral forces of society with his inherited Compson code of honor, commits suicide; the third section is rendered in the first person narrative of Jason Compson and reveals the corruption of the last

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[7] William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York, 1929). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

male Compson who embraces the amorality of Snopesism; the fourth part is in the omniscient third person and portrays the relation of the patient all-enduring negro toward his modern degenerate master.

Faulkner introduces his story of Southern decadence through the intermingling of present, past and future by the idiot Benjy who gives the reader no guide posts of grammatical tenses. Whether this technique is more effective than the straight forward chronological narrative is a debatable point but is not the concern of this essay. Faulkner's purpose for violating convention is to reinforce his theory of the simultaneity of all experience in which events of the past are social forces of the present, and in which all events occur in a timelessness. Man, not God, created the limits of time to confine his actions, and it is this cage that Quentin Compson tries to escape by breaking his watch, but even without the hands it keeps on ticking.

Quentin's desire to escape the present, results from his inability to cope with his environmental heritage. He identifies his own history with that of his ancestors, as was noted in Absalom. This empathy with the past calls for a protection of human honor in a modern honorless culture. Quentin accepts Caddy's guilt as his own but cannot redeem it. He is living in a society which rejects the old Southern code of courage and honor but does not replace it with any human values of its own. Sutpen, at least, had moral values to defy, but Quentin's time is without moral judgment.

Quentin recognizes his choice as either to accept the Snopesist world of amorality which his brother Jason does, or to escape into timeless eternity. His suicide is based on the latter decision.

Jason and Quentin come from the same family, but Jason can accept Snopesism, whereas Quentin's humanity must reject it. Despite the disintegrating love relationship of the Compson family, Quentin feels the strong blood connection with his ancestors which demands an assertion of manhood. When the present disasters--the loss of family wealth which forces them to sell their estate to a golf club, the alcoholism of his father and the hypochondria of his mother--sweep Quentin's security away, he cannot face Caddy's dishonor which epitomizes for him the whole of the Southern decay.

Jason Compson, probably Faulkner's most despicable character, develops in quite a different strain. His adult depravity can be traced from his childhood "fraidy-cat" role in which he tattle-taled on Caddy and Quentin if they did not pay him off. Money early became the only value in Jason's life. He rationalized his actions on the basis that he had to make his way financially because his family denied him the opportunity for college given to Quentin. To Jason his family's loss in position is synonymous with their loss in wealth, and it is the wealth, not the honor, which he is concerned in redeeming. Jason's loyalty to his family is on the unthinking level of conventional habit.

Incapable of any feeling of love, he takes a fiendish delight in blackmailing his sister Caddy who is forced to trust Jason with the care of her child. Snopesism in which money is the end to barter not the means is readily received by Jason whose only kickback from his ancestors is a beastly headache symbollic of a frustration whose meaning is already lost.

Benjy Compson, even in his idiocy, is not as degenerate as Jason. Benjy retains the human emotions of grief, pain and love despite his mental inability to relate them in any framework. Benjy's world of loss and shining bright yellow fire is as real to him as the hypochondriac Mrs. Compson's is to her. Her headaches, Benjy's idiocy, the father's alcoholism, Quentin's suicide, Caddy's incest, Jason's acceptance of Snopesism are all sublimations of the fear-produced anxieties, phobias and perversions produced by modern civilization. Mrs. Compson, Benjy, the father, Quentin, and Caddy resolve their frustrations negatively but in a human manner. Jason rejects humanity for a world of mechanical competition. And, ironically, it is Jason whom society accepts as the most normal.

The patient negro prevails through the decay of his white master. With more insight than the white actors, Dilsey says of the Compsons, "'Ise seed de first and de last, I seed de first en de last,'" (p. 371). The negro is the spectator at the white man's tragedy. Yet similar to the spectator who sat on the edge of the Elizabethan

stage, he is as much a part of the action as the white players. His black presence is a symbol of the white man's guilt for cursing the black with slavery.

The Sound symbolizes in the break down of the Compson family, the decadence of the Southern chivalric code of courage, honor, pride, pity and family love. The climax of the ruin is the disappearance of these values altogether in Jason, the last of the Compson male line.

"The Bear"[8]

"The Bear," one of the longest and best of Faulkner's short stories, consists of five parts: the first three and the last making one of the finest hunting stories in American literature, the fourth part an attempt on Faulkner's part "toward putting the whole world into one sentence, between one capital letter and one period,"[8] the sentence running to more than sixteen hundred words.

The evil dealt with in this story concerns man's original mistake in cursing the land with slavery. God created man "out of the primal Absolute which contained all" (p. 316). He knew man was capable of any height or depth of good and evil for in Heaven hell was also created. Once man was

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[8] William Faulkner, "The Bear," The Portable Faulkner, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York, 1951). Subsequent references to "The Bear" will appear in parentheses in the text.

[9] Malcolm Cowley, "Editor's Note," Ibid, p. 226.

created with the capacity for good or evil, God was not responsible for man's acts. Man chose evil by enslaving his black brother and calling land "his" which was meant for his use not his ownership. Isaac McCaslin, who feels a mystical union with God's creation, says, "'He told in the Book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and 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 ... but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread" (p. 291). God asked man to practice the virtues He had given man to distinguish him from animal, but man chose pride without humility. He defiled God's creation of love by placing himself in the role of God over his black brother and owning land that was meant for the contemplation and participation of all men.

This curse which man blasphemed on himself destroying the "humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another" (p. 292) which God had given him is the evil responsible for the decay of the Sartorises, the Sutpens and the Compsons. A "complexity of passion and lust and hate and fear" (p. 295) replaces the virtues of humanity, driving truth from the heart of man. "Truth is one. It

doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart--honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love ... and what the heart holds to becomes truth as far as we know truth" (p. 330). Man is out of touch with the eternal verity of truth, and for modern man truth has become pragmatic, that which works. Man chose evil and passed his mistake on to his descendants until "The whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it" (p. 312) because the father's sins are visited on his sons.

"God created and man himself cursed and tainted" (p. 295). Once put into motion, man is responsible for his own actions. Why, then, did man choose evil instead of good? Isaac McCaslin explains, "'Apparently they can learn nothing save through suffering, remember nothing save when underlined in blood'" (p. 319). And further, "'Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license'" (p. 323). Faulkner is implying that man has not suffered enough to bear freedom. He must relearn the twin virtues of humility and pride which Sam Fathers personnifies and Isaac McCaslin spends his life seeking as he says, "'I'm trying to explain to the head of my family something which I have got to do which I don't quite understand myself, not in justification of it but to explain it if I can ... in order to live the rest of my life in peace'"

Faulkner worries the evil from all angles. He probes

into the evil of miscegenation which is not the result of a crossing of skin color but the product of the white man's curse of slavery on his black brother. The white man is guilty because he is the perpetrator of the crime. In his innocence, the black man is morally superior to the white who covers his shame for his guilt with a pride which no legal government act forced by "outlanders" or Northeners will pierce. The equalizing of black and white must come as a part of the Southern culture.

Man's only hope for redemption from evil lies in the correction of his original sin. Man must repudiate his ownership of the land and relinquish his mastery over his brother. He must begin again from nothing as he was created. This is what Isaac McCaslin is doing by repudiating his inheritance of land and negroes.

"The Bear" serves as a touchstone for Faulkner's apocalyptic revelation of his theme of evil.

"Red Leaves"[10]

This short story, from Faulkner's Indian cycle, is a study of fear and terror distilled of human reason and judgment. It is a primitive fear which calls for animal flight of a black slave, servant of a dead Indian chief,

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[10] William Faulkner, "Red Leaves," The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951). Subsequent references to "Red Leaves" will appear in parentheses in the text.

who as the Indian civilization rules must be buried with his master as a part of his master's belongings. The Indian custom in the light of modern civilization appears to lack humanity, but Faulkner's writings of present human justice, as in Sanctuary, appears to lack just as much humanity, only in a more sophisticated manner. "Red Leaves" is an excellent description of man's fear of death. "He began to run at top speed, breasting his panting chest, his broad-flaring nostrils through the choked and whipping darkness" (p. 94) as the fleeing negro realizes, "It's that I do not wish to die" (p. 97).

"That Evening Sun"[11]

This story also examines the emotion of fear, only on different levels of understanding. The negro woman, like the black slave of "Red Leaves," is hysterically afraid of death symbollized by the razor which hangs by a string inside the shirt of her husband whom she has cuckolded. The Compson children fear because the strangeness of Nancy's actions and the weird sounds she makes, not singing nor unsinging, are unfamiliar to them. The fear emotion produced in the reader is a reaction to that part of the negro which has not been assimilated into the white culture. The motivation that causes fear differs on the child and adult level; but the physical fundamentals of the emotion are the

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[11] William Faulkner, "That Evening Sun," The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951).

same despite race or age. It is this impersonal study of the elements of fear which is the end result of Poe's writing and the beginning of Faulkner's analysis of evil as a springboard to violence.

"Ad Astra"[12]

This story of the adventures of Bayard Sartoris's twin grandsons in the Royal Air Force of World War I, deals with the evil of war and could be included under modern times as well as under the Sartoris sequence.

The German prisoner whom Bayard and his drinking companions invite to their victory party expresses the mockery of war as he says, "'I am German: that iss beyond the I, the I am. Not for baron and Kaiser .... There wass a Germany before there wass barons ... and after, there will be .... You say fatherland; I, brotherland. I say, the word father iss that barbarism which will be first swept away; it iss the symbol of that hierarchy which hass stained the history of man with injustice of arbitrary instead of moral; force instead of love'" (p. 476). Faulkner implies a simile between the German totalitarian hierarchy and the unnatural ranking of master and slave levied on the

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[12] William Faulkner, "Ad Astra," The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951). Subsequent references to "Ad Astra" will appear in parentheses in the text.

South by the white man. Both initiated forces of evil which motivated the violence that followed, and both doomed the leaders to defeat. That which cannot be conquered is the German culture which will endure all wars, and it is this that Faulkner is championing in America when he calls for a Southern culture which can outlast defeats and can endure the materialism of modern civilization.

The German continues, "'The body settles nothing. It iss of no importance. It iss just to be kept clean when possible .... All this generation which fought in the war are dead tonight. But we do not yet know it!" (p. 478). Modern mechanized war denies the spirit even the thrill and glory associated with former wars, and the soldier devoid of soul is a mere debris of debilitated flesh.

"A Rose for Emily"[13]

The old order must be inevitably invaded by the new.

"The Fire and the Hearth"[14]

The negro Lucas Beauchamp with his lineage from his

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[13] William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," The Portable Faulkner (New York, 1951).

[14] William Faulkner, "The Fire and the Hearth," Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories (New York, 1942). Subsequent references to "The Fire and the Hearth" will appear in parentheses in the text.

white grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, represents the composite of two races, a sort of "combination of the spirit of ten thousand undefeated confederate soldiers" (p. 108). The story of the adolescent Roth Edmonds coming into his adult heritage of guilt for his black brother's slavery is very similar to the Intruder in the Dust tale of Chick's unnamed guilt for the same Lucas's condition. Of Roth's realization Faulkner writes: "Then 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" (p. 111). No longer could the boy eat at the same table with his black brother Henry or sleep in the same bed as the child had done. Roth experienced a "grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit" (p. 112), and when he was older and ready to admit the shame, it was too late because his adult pride had already hidden the guilt. "So he entered his heritage" (p. 114). Lucas, out of a mixture of blood, is above all blood, contemptuous of black, white, yellow or red, and therefore cannot be made to act his part of "nigger" and "sir" the white master.

"Pantaloon in Black"[15]

The incident of the black man who sublimates his grief

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[15] William Faulkner, "Pantaloon in Black," Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories (New York, 1942).

in action resulting in murder, is skillfully written on three levels; that of the black man whose sorrow has erased his sanity, that of the white to whom the black murderer is just another nigger to be lynched, and that of the reader who realizes the negro's grief is too deeply human for the understanding of the white.

"The Old People"[16]

This narrative, preliminary to "The Bear," is concerned with the boy Isaac McCaslin's initiation by Sam Fathers into his reverence for the land and creation.

"Delta Autumn"[17]

This is Isaac McCaslin's story of his return as an old man to DeSpain's hunting camp, not to hunt but to pay again his respect to the repudiated land which he loves and does not want to own because to own the land is violating God's conditions. "This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in Millionaires' mansions on Lake Shore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers

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[16] William Faulkner, "The Old People," Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories (New York, 1942).

[17] William Faulkner, "Delta Autumn," Ibid. Subsequent references to "Delta Autumn" will appear in parentheses in the text.

crop on shares and live like animals ... 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 .... 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" (p. 364). The people must suffer the consequences of their own acts, the violence of their own evil.

"Go Down, Moses"[18]

The patience of the negro will endure.

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[18] William Faulkner, "Go Down, Moses," Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories (New York, 1942).

Chapter III

A Misconceived Morality

The place of the Bundren world on the continuum of evil is somewhere between the false morality of the Sartoris aristocrat and the amorality of the Snopes invader. If we judge the actions of the poor whites by a civilized standard of good and evil, then they live in an immoral state. Yet if we understand As I Lay Dying within its own framework of meaning, we realize that the judgment of immorality is an interpretation of a civilization which we have already discovered to be based on false values. The Bundrens themselves are unconscious that there actions are wrong. The distortion of their living, which is comic to the reader, is a result of their abject poverty forcing them to base their decisions on the expedience of physical necessity amounting to animalism.

Despite their innocence of civilized mores, the poor white does have a code of values as impelling as that of the Southern aristocrat. The Bundrens, although they differ in motivation, would never think of failing in the fulfillment of the dead Addie Bundren's wishes. The funeral march, a grotesque farce if viewed from the outside, is to the Bundrens a matter of proving their human dignity. Lena Grove is immoral only when judged by social values of which she is unaware, but Lucas Burch who deliberately chooses evil is to himself immoral as well as to the outsider.

Ignorance of the rules, in Lena Grove's case, seems to imply innocence. Yet the ignorance of Sutpen did not excuse him of his responsibility when he made himself master. Perhaps the difference is in the integrity of the rules themselves. The morality Lena Grove violates is false, and therefore she is above the morality when not aware of it. The morality Sutpen transgresses consists of the original conditions set down by God demanded of all men, that they respect the right of their brother to humanity. A violation of this morality is the tragic flaw which damns man.

The poor white either as a result of miscegenation or poverty, is forced by society to assert his manhood negatively. Denied constructive outlets to express his human dignity, Joe Christmas vindicates his rights in acts of violence. The same explanation holds true in Wash Burn's murder of Sutpen.

Therefore, the immorality of the poor whites is a consequence of an incorrectly interpreted morality by those initiated into the social complexities of modern civilization. The poor whites are denied humanity by the very society which judges them as immoral. Their violence is more villainous than that of the Sartorises, but it is not the Bundrens or the Lena Groves or the Joe Christmases that the continuum is recording in a deeper shade of evil. It is civilization itself which in denying a class of people their rights to be recognized as men, is departing further from God's creation of the brotherhood of man.

As I Lay Dying[19]

"'Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint.'" Cash is commenting on Darl's being taken away for criminal insanity. "'Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it'" (p. 226). It's the way you look at As I Lay Dying, that makes it a comedy of incongruity or a tragedy of human poverty. Faulkner, as Caldwell does in Tobacco Road, is portraying a group in society whose existence is so sub-human that their motives and reasoning seem to be completely outside the sphere of civilized understanding. The nonconformance to convention makes the Bundrens appear in the eyes of the casual reader who judges people on the basis of his own idea of right and wrong, as ridiculous caricatures of human nature.

However, the Bundrens are not mentally degenerate as the idiot Benjy of The Sound or the Snopes idiot in The Hamlet. Within their own frame of reference, neither are they immoral. They have a code of dignity which demands as strict an adherence as the mores of civilized society. They would never

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[19] William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York, 1930). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

refuse help or hospitality to another poor white; nor would they ever go back on their word. They live outside the accepted morality not because they chose to do so, but because society placed them in a world so poverty struck that their first concern must be to satisfy their physical needs. They very seldom rise out of their caste because they do not have time to think how to do so; they must be always acting to obtain today's meal.

As I Lay Dying is no longer referred to as the writing of a lurid sensationalist but is recognized as one of Faulkner's best novels both in construction and experimental characterization. The French critic Rabi finds in As I Lay Dying real matter for tragedy.[20] In my opinion, here is a chance to study the workings of human nature denude of the complexities of society. The evil portrayed is inherent in society's demand that the Bundrens act conventionally while at the same time denying them the rights of humanity. This paradox produces a tragi-comedy of distortion.

The novel is divided into chapters of viewpoint, each chapter entitled by the name of the character who is seeing the action. Vickery explains Faulkner's experimentation in characterization as existing on four levels; action; words; conscious thought; and unconscious thought--each

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[20] Rabi, "Faulkner and the Exiled Generation," Two Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman & Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing, Michigan, 1951).

character a symbol of one or a combination of levels. Death is real only as it is a matter in the minds of those bereaving. Each character's tragedy is inherent on his level of life: Anse capable only of the meaningless level of words; Darl knowing all levels but unable to integrate them; Cash living only on the level of action; Jewel acting from emotions not thoughts; Dewey Dell conscious only of her thoughts; and Vardaman reacting from a level of unconscious associations and emotions. The characters form a wheel spoked together by their own peculiar relationships with Addie who is the hub of the wheel. For Vickery, the internal violence of the relationship of character and bereaved causes the action of the story.[21]

If the reader does not become blocked by these experimental detours, he recognizes a keen revelation of the workings of human nature. Tull's reaction to living is, "'Now and then a fellow gets to thinking about it. Not often, though, which is a good thing. For the Lord aimed for him to do and not to spend too much time thinking, because his brain it's like a piece of machinery: it wont stand a whole lot of racking ... that's ever living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much'" (p. 66). Tull is saying that a violation of the harmonious proportion of acting and thinking causes a man to lopside into insanity.

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[21] Olga Vickery, "As I Lay Dying," Two Decades of Criticism.

Cash, the doer, the carpenter, explains the world's evil in his own variation of the golden rule: "'Folks seems to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it'" (p. 226).

Darl's insane hallucinations almost appear at times to be lucinations: "'When something is new and hard and bright, there ought to be something a little better for it than just being safe, since the safe things are just the things that folks have been doing so long they have worn the edges off and there's nothing to the doing of them that leaves a man to say, That was not done before and it cannot be done again'" (p. 121).

Anse, to whom evil is the lack of material things, consoles himself: "'It's because there is a reward for us above, where they cant take their autos and such. Every man will be equal then and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord'" (p. 101).

Light in August[22]

Evil breeding evil in "practically every character in a small, isolated community" is F. Thompson's interpretation.[23]

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[22] William Faulkner, Light in August (Duenewald Printing Corporation: United States, 1932). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

[23] Frederick Thompson, "American Decadence," Commonweal (Nov. 30, 1934), 139.

In my opinion, this hardly explains the characterization of the serene, always confident Lena Grove whose actions are above and beyond the terror of the story despite her unmarried pregnant state which initiates much of the violence. Neither does it adequately include the steadfast and dependable Byron Bunch and his advisor the minister Hightower who is more of a receptor of evil than a stimulus to evil.

In order to understand these people who are neither good nor bad, the action of the plot must be broken down into its three components: one part centering around Lena Grove; another around Joe Christmas; and a third around the minister Hightower. All three of these stories are distinct within themselves, interwoven loosely by the geography of Lena Grove's travels.

Lena Grove, an unmarried pregnant woman of the poor white class, comes walking and hitchhiking from Alabama to Jefferson, Mississippi, in search of her husband-to-be, at least as far as she is concerned, who is the father of her unborn child. She never once doubts that Lucas Burch wants to marry her as much as she does him because her faith in God's power to make all things come out right is conclusive. Accepting everyone with a childlike trust, she believes that all people are kindly, oblivious "that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names" (p. 65). To her, Byron's love is to be taken for granted as a natural reaction to her own faith

in people. Evil does not exist for Lena, because it is not a part of her character--a reflection of the old truism that we see in others what is in ourselves. Ironically, Lena's faith in humanity results in bringing out people's kindly side although in a shamed face manner.

Conceiving a baby is not a sin to Lena who did not act according to any choice of morality but to a natural instinct to love and reproduce. Lena is ignorant of society's code of morality which labels her act as incest. This seems to say that man's actions in themselves are not evil until society judges them as such. However, the second chapter concluded that civilized morality was based on a false groundwork of values, and therefore society's judgment would be invalid. Is Faulkner implying that it is society which is guilty for Lena Grove's condition, not Lena Grove?

Such an explanation of evil is too simple. Lena Grove, despite her heroic dignity and self-confidence, is not a mature person. Her ignorance of the existence of evil does not nullify its presence, and her oblivion of adult prejudices creates for the reader a "dumb-dora" impression.

Lucas Burch, alias Brown, is in direct contrast to Lena. He is quite aware of his deliberate choice of wrong when conceiving a baby by Lena, but what makes him more despicable is his lack of any human conscience. He is completely Sophesist in that the only motivating force he feels is that of money.

The story of Joe Christmas is quite another matter. He

does not lack humanity. To the contrary, the tragedy which develops is due to a psychopathic reaction of a man forced by social prejudice to assert his manhood negatively. If he were not moved by human motivations, Joe Christmas would be incapable of tragedy, and the reader would not participate in Joe's frustration as he does. Certainly, the reader feels no pity for Lucas Burch.

Joe's mental environmental heritage pivoting on his conviction that he possesses "nigger" blood determines his fate. It is not important whether the conviction is true or not, since to Joe it is. Joe early becomes aware of the cultural prejudices of the adult world against miscegenation which changes "God loves me too" into "the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard" (p. 98). Unlike Lena Grove whose innocence is never penetrated by adult misconceptions, Joe is early initiated into the fact that "though children can accept adults as adults, adults can never accept children as anything but adults too (p. 131). Adults punish the child for their own sins. The child, Joe Christmas, is not chastised for the crime he believes he committed when eating someone else's toothpaste, but for watching an illicit love affair of which he was not as yet even capable of defining as sex, let alone as illicit.

In the home of his foster parents, more of the attributes of an adult are foisted on him without an accompanying adult understanding on his part. This contradiction produces in him a frustration which culminates in his murder of his

foster father. He experiences a physical relief by this act of violence which induces him to enter the road of evil engendering evil where "his own flesh as well as all space was a cage" (p. 98). One crime leads into another. "The thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene, broken by intervals of begged and stolen rides" (p. 211). Not knowing where he belonged since white and black both rejected him, he felt he did not belong at all. "Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them .... Now he fought the negro who called him white" (p. 212). The child who too early became the adult was not so much afraid of hard work as he was of kindness; the former he did not need to understand, the latter he had learned to mistrust. Joe Christmas is not inherently evil. His psychopathic sensitivity which releases itself in violence is a development caused by the forces of social prejudice. More evidence piles up in favor of the deduction that it is society which is inherently bad, not human nature.

If one man in Light in August symbolizes pure evil, it is the completely dehumanized fascist Grimm who after shooting Christmas finishes his body with a rape job using a butcher knife. Faulkner himself says, reported by Cowley in an editor's note to The Portable Faulkner on page 652, "'I invented Grimm in 1931. I didn't realize until after Hitler got into the newspapers that I had created a Nazi before he did.'"

For Christmas, death is the only satisfactory affirmation of his human dignity. In death, he no longer "'must carry my life like it was a basket of eggs'" (p. 319). At last he can "become one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted ... for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years'" (p. 313). The black blood rushing out of its pale cage of flesh is "of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant" (p. 440).

Hightower meets death along with Christmas. Society had denied them both humanity. In the minister's case, he had wanted peace to enjoy his life in reliving his ancestor's glory. Fleeing the evil of society does not make you immune to evil's thrusts. Flight, Faulkner implies, is not the answer. Hightower through Byron Bunch is constantly being brought back into contact with the living, but he seems impotent to cope with evil despite his insight into the situation. Hightower says, "'Pleasure, ecstacy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and 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?'" (p. 347). Religion as a sect, a product of man's making, cannot solve society's evil since by definition it partakes of the same evil.

Light in August, although it does not reveal a constructive solution to evil such as Isaac McCaslin's repudiation of the

land in "The Bear," is significant in eliminating several ineffective solutions: living in a state of ignorance as Lena Grove does; returning evil for evil as Joe Christmas tries; and fleeing evil which is Hightower's answer. Lena Grove in her state of innocence comes closest to a constructive life. However, she does not actively combat evil, and her oblivious attitude implies that to solve evil in her manner it would be necessary for us all to remain as nonthinking children. Christmas and Hightower's solutions destroy their own lives.

Chapter IV

Amorality

Amorality refers to a state outside the sphere of moral distinctions or judgments. In this chapter amorality describes the evil of modern times as symbolized by the Snopes machine. Modern depravity results not from a deteriation of values or a misconception of values as in the case of the two previous sections, but from a complete absence of human values. Honor and respect for the individual do not exist for a Snopesist man. His crime is not the sin of pride in which man violates God's condition of humility one man to his brother as the Southern aristocrat did. The Snopesist man is guilty of denying the very existence of a God, and replacing God's world with his own mechanical creation which makes money its deity.

If we were all Snopesist, we would be incapable of tragedy just as an inanimate object does not merit human pity. But there are men who retain the possibilities of fulfilling their manhood, and it is these people who are worthy of pity and terror as they search the emptiness of modern Snopesism for some set of values that will make life meaningful. Some of these men sublimate their frustration in a mechanical world of speed as those in Pylon and young Bayard of Sartoris did, but in adopting materialism these men lose their ability to fear and become dead in spirit.

Others flee evil by living in the past or in an imaginary

world of their own, as the minister Hightower in Light in August, and Harry and Charlotte of The Wild Palms. Or some feel, as the convict of The Old Man, that security exists only within the walls of authoritarianism where your rules for living are dictated to you, and you need not think of what is right or wrong. There are others who have accepted evil as a necessary prerequisite to living, the Goodwins of Sanctuary for instance. But the hope of civilization rests with the boys who become the men that stay and fight the evil: the Chicks of Intruder who believe as Horace Benbow did in Sanctuary that man can be good, but who, unlike Benbow, never give up trying to prove that belief.

The evil of modern times is a summing up of the mistakes of the past, in accordance with Faulkner's theory of the simultaneity of all time. It is evil which touches the Southern aristocrat, the poor white, the middle class farmer, and the businessman climaxing in a Snopesist dehumanized man who not only assumes God-like powers as the Southern aristocrat did when he classified society into master and slave, but considers himself as God capable of creating a world of his own. The flaw is that man in his physical limitations can never be God. Man can invent machines, but he cannot bring life into being.

Soldiers' Pay[24]

This novel, Faulkner's first, is significant in revealing ideas that later develop into mature themes. The theme of evil is reflected in the embryonic idea of the viciousness of small town tensions and superficiality which causes neighbors and gossips to come to see Donald out of their curiosity for the grotesque not out of any sympathetic kindness. The interest of the adult is on the level of the child who pays out his licorice stick for the privilege of looking at his pal's pus-infected finger.

Soldiers' Pay cannot be categorized as a mere "lost generation" novel. Its theme of "tomorrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation" (p. 319) has universal ramifications. Although its romantic handling of the sympathetic Mrs. Powers, the terse Joe Gilligan and the sex-guilty Cecily Saunders reveals an immaturity of authorship, it introduces Faulkner's concern with character above plot. Man's inhumanity becomes an important thread in the Faulknerian legend. The rector ironically describes a future paradise in which there "would be no troubling physical things such as sunlight and space and birds in the trees--but only unimportant things such as physical comfort: eating and sleeping and procreation" (p. 50). This paradise of unimportant things seems to be

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[24] William Faulkner, Soldiers' Pay (New York, 1926). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

the goal of modern materialism, and it is the falsity of this illusion that Faulkner dwells on in his later writings.

Mosquitoes[25]

This novel, Faulkner's worst, should be overlooked. It consists of an endless amount of sophisticated Bohemian chatter revealing Faulkner's enthusiasm over the New Orleans Sherwood Anderson group. It is not significant in the development of the Faulknerian theme of evil and violence, and mention of it is included only because it is one of Faulkner's longer works, and the reader may wonder about its place in the scheme of things.

The Hamlet[26]

This narrative is a horror tale involving arson, rape, incest, murder, sexual perversion and comedy for the purpose of revealing a parasitic evil, characterized by the Snopeses, which is attacking the middle class mainstay, the small business man and the hard-working farmer, of our civilization. The Hamlet is not meant to sell as a two-bit thriller--for proof, it didn't; it is an artistic tale in which even the humor is unpleasant, man laughing at his fellow man's incongruities--Ike Snopes' love scene with the

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[25] William Faulkner, Mosquitoes (New York, 1927).

[26] William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York, 1940). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

cow--not man laughing with man. The characters are often distorted for effect as the artist Velasquez lenghthens his Christ to emphasize suffering. The story put together by tortuous, lofty sentences is artistry not photography.

The evil manifested by the Snopeses is the vilest type yet studied because it exists without a moral framework of good and bad. It denies humaneness; it repudiates all standards of human value substituting a business expediency which measures all efforts in ratio to their dollar-production. It is impossible to reason with this kind of evil because there are no values on which to base arguments. The Snopeses are impervious to all persuasion except jail and execution--the legal limits having weight only because they are not on the production side of the ledger. It is an evil summarized by the word amorality.

How has this dehumanization taken place? The explanation is implied in the whole of Faulkner's writings. It has come about as the result of social forces which man himself put into play when he built his modern economy on the dollar sign. Man in producing more and more bathtubs, forgot why he produced the first bathtub--quantity replaced quality. The depravity of human quality evolved a generation of man lacking the capacity of humaneness, the Snopeses. The disuse of sympathies, feelings and dispositions which previously had distinguished the nature of man, seemed to result in the absence of such human qualities,. Snopesist man differs very little from the machine he invents.

Flem Snopes is a product of this evolution, perhaps not quite the end product but certainly several links in the chain beyond the pleasant, inscrutable, shrewd but always amused Ratliff. It is significant that Flem beats Ratliff in the sale of the Old Frenchman's Place--Ratliff's gullibility proving he still belongs to humanity. Is Faulkner implying by this incident that the new-type salesman, born of the dollar-worshipers, will inevitably win over mankind? Perhaps Faulkner is warning that this will happen if man does not become aware of the situation and fight against it.

Flem Snopes is the pivot for the Snopes clan which moves one by one into the little hamlet of Frenchman's Bend until the villagers refer to a stranger in town as "another one of them" (p. 93). As Flem grasps more power, he doles out subordinate positions to his relatives; Eck Snopes becomes blacksmith; I.O. Snopes school teacher; Flem's cousin becomes store clerk; and as a finishing touch Flem himself marries the pregnant Eula Varner in order to inherit as dowry the last bit of Varner property. After conquering Frenchman's Bend, the Snopeses begin their parasitic move to Jefferson, hinted at in Sartoris and other stories but as yet never completely told.

The idiot Ike Snopes, an embodiment of the world of the senses--feeling, hearing, smelling seeing--unorganized by any mental categories of time or space, is less degenerate than his cousin Flem whose senses are not innocently undirected

but purposely misdirected. Ike with his "pale eyes which seemed to have no vision in them at all, and the open drooling mouth encircled by a light fuzz of golden virgin beard" (p. 93) calls forth the reader's pity. An object to be pitiable must contain some humanity. Flem deserves only the contempt we feel when walking over a pie of cow's dung.

Mankind is responsible for the development of the Snopeses. Ratliff says of Flem's father, Ab Snopes, that he isn't naturally mean but has just gone soured. His rancid state is due to man's living not under the conditions of God's creation which call for brotherhood, but under his own scheme of grab-and-git for yourself. The disuse of man's human capacity has evolved an organism which does not even possess the capacity. When all men become such organisms as the Snopeses, then mankind will have completely reverted to his animal state, and the world will be such as Ratliff describes in which "the gods themselves had funnelled all the concentrated bright wet-slanted unparadised June onto a dung-heap breeding pismires" (p. 182).

The reading of <u>The Hamlet</u> is not pleasant. Even the humor of the tall tales and country store gossip and the love scene of Ike and the cow gag us to vomit. Humor is the result of incongruities, but man has carried the incongruity too far until he has mortified himself by humiliating his race of mankind.

Sanctuary[27]

"Popeye, the impotent killer with his tight black clothes and his eyes like rubber pushbuttons was the symbol of the time."[28] The time was "the age of machines and of persons who reacted like machines, in spastic patterns of stimulus and response."[29] Despite Faulkner's own statement that Sanctuary was written as a shocker in order to take advantage of the commercial market, it is much more than this as Cowley's comments indicate. The horrors of violence, rape, murder indicate an underlying evil of misdirected values and of no values at all.

Temple Drake is not the naive child of innocence caught in the corruption of adult life as Lena Grove of Light in August was. Temple, despite chances to do so, does not leave the scene of her ultimate ruin. She seems obsessed to stay, to dart from kitchen door to rat-infested corn crib. From her stems the violence of the plot; the murder of Tommy, the murder of Red, as well as her own rape with a corncob. Temple is the product of a depraved family life.

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[27] William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Signet Book edition, 1950). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

[28] Malcolm Cowley, "Editor's Note," The Portable Faulkner, p. 651.

[29] Malcolm Cowley, Ibid, p. 651.

Her judge father dumped her onto college society without fortifying her with any solid values on which to guide her independence. She chooses sensation in preference to a dull, commonplace life because only in sensation--slipping out at nights with town boys--does she find interest. Life has become dull to children of modern culture which has given them too many gadgets and replaced their childhood too soon with the superficiality of a sophisticated adulthood.

Faulkner's characters are vehicles for his ideas, not people we would necessarily meet on the street. Temple's caricature is a comment on the youth of an adult modern world, a youth deprived of any code of values by which it can find itself in the dizzying current of modern life, a youth doomed to disillusionment and recognizing its disillusionment as inevitable takes pleasure in finding the most exciting way to it. Gowan Stevens, another moderninity, satisfies his frustration with danger but lacks the courage that Temple has to stay with the danger. Society has distilled out of their lives the human values of respect, honor, courage leaving youth with a human frustration which they attempt to fulfill by danger either vicariously or actually. Temple's complete ruin can be seen when she goes abroad with her father after her false testimony which lynches Goodwin. In Europe, Temple is devoid even of the desire for sensation. Before at least she existed; now she endures.

Popeye is the completely corrupted adult without even

the human equipment to commit his own rape. Evil has become a robot in control of its inventor. Faulkner gives full play to a sustained emotional horror which is literally inhuman in every respect.

Through this horror move the hardened characters of Goodwin and Ruby. They have long since accepted the disillusionment of reality and have ceased to struggle to satisfy their feelings as Temple and Cowan, the children of the old Southern aristocracy, continue to do. They are not empty of feeling as Popeye but are in control of their feeling because they see no hope.

In contrast is Horace Benbow who still believes that "perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right, necessary to the harmony of things that it be done" (p. 163). Lee Goodwin who has faced the evil and the injustice admits "that there is a logical pattern to evil" (p. 130) which you cannot fight. Goodwin is a realist; Benbow an idealist, as we suspect Faulkner is himself. The realists in accepting life as it is given to them, have ceased to fight the Snopeses who are filling our law courts and senates. The future safety of mankind must depend on the struggle of the idealists. Benbow failed to save Goodwin, but it is not the idealist in Benbow who failed but the human temptation for the idealist to stop struggling and flee back into the safety of convention, back into the arms of sister Narcissa. It is this temptation that Gavin Stevens warns his nephew, Chick, in Intruder against giving in to.

Critics have fallen into an error of over-simplifying Faulkner by reducing him into dichotomies of good and evil: Benbow the good, Popeye the evil. However, Faulkner is portraying a society of paradoxes and complexities much too involved to be so boiled down. Benbow is not the ideal man as can be seen in his human frailities. Popeye comes closer to symbolizing pure evil but it is the evil of society not man.

Faulkner realizes the material advantages of airplanes in that they get you to where you are going. He is not a crier for the days of old. Rather he is crying against man's abuse of himself which is due to his fast progress into the age of machines without an equal development of his moral self in finding human values to replace obsolete ones and therefore losing his moral self altogether. By imitating the machine, man's mind is refusing to exercise its human qualities. Such a disuse is prophetic of an age in which the human qualities will be absent entirely.

Pylon[30]

Pylon is narrated through the eyes of an alcoholic literary reporter and is the story of two barn-storming pilots, who mutually own one wife and one child, and their

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[30] William Faulkner, Pylon (New York: Signet Book edition, 1951). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

drunken mechanic. The plot consists of cheap danger, an air race in New Orleans, in which the pilot Shuman risks and loses his life, not for the prize money as much as for the thrill of the danger involved. If money had been his only goal, he could have found a safer way to get it, back on his father's farm. But he was obsessed with the necessity for danger, and the reason for his obsession makes this story more than just a suspenseful sensation which, in truth, it also is.

Laverne, the wife, and her two consorts, Roger, the pilot, and Jack, the parachutist, are living a life of danger, not of indiscriminate danger which would make them run in front of a car for the thrill of it, but of chosen danger that calls for a code of courage and respect for each other. Roger wants the prize money for a baby Laverne is to have by Jack. The code, although as inflexible as a Benedictine monk's, is a faulty one because it is built on empty values. Laverne, Roger and Jack trapped in a modern civilization of machines in which the human element is being deposed, try to retain some of their human feeling for honor, glory and respect by choosing a life of speed and courting death. Danger to them has become the only tangible way of life, just as it had become to the twin Bayard of Sartoris.

We can compare Laverne, Roger and Jack to the torreadores and gangsters of Hemingway. Both sets of characters live according to codes of honor and danger. The difference is

that Hemingway's characters meet death because they fail the demands of their code; whereas, Faulkner's people meet fatality because the codes themselves are at fault. Man invented the airplane to transport himself speedily to a destination, but in inventing it he confused the means to be the end, and speed became the only object. An air race has no destination, only around the pylon and around the pylon. Man has enslaved himself to his own servant.

The characters of Pylon have not accepted the amorality of the Snopesist regime. They are human and possess values although the values are misdirected and therefore immoral. However, despite their blundering they are human enough to be pitied. Their evil results from flight from the modern life of the Snopeses into a life of action and thrills. In danger they can escape the frustration of thinking and deciding. However, the substitution of acting for thinking causes unnatural human relationships. "The voice of the amplifier, apocryphal, sourceless, inhuman, ubiquitous and beyond weariness or fatigue" (p. 26) announces the accidents of death and the next race of events all in the same breath. A newspaper headlines births and deaths "profoundly and irrevocably unimportant" (p. 68). The people, "the refuse of man's twentieth century clotting into communities large enough to pay a mayor's salary" (p. 142) live on "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow; not only not to hope, not even to wait: just to endure" (p. 171).

After the speed of machines has dehumanized man, he

will not even have to suffer endurance because he will have no feeling. He will only have to exist in order to invent better machines. Those of the old generations of humans, like Dr. Shuman, will no longer ask for justice or happiness, but only for peace from thinking.

The Wild Palms[31]

In explaining the theme of this novel, Cowley writes, "a man sacrificed everything for freedom and love, and lost them both."[32] Love itself becomes an emotion of freedom in that the love must retain a romantic thrill of the flesh unconfined by the sober responsibilities of marriage and children. Love is a flight reaction from modern culture. Harry and Charlotte defy conventional tenets to set up their own living centered on what they feel to be the true meaning of love. The misery and defeat which result, is the answer to flight as a solution of evil.

Harry and Charlotte are children foisted into an adult world who defy the adult world but in so doing ignore their physical needs for eating and living. Love becomes synonymous

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[31] William Faulkner, The Wild Palms (Camden, N. J., 1939). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

[32] Malcolm Cowley, "Editor's Note," The Portable Faulkner, p. 540.

with a sexual compulsion, and it is sex that brings their downfall because they refuse the natural fruits of their action. Charlotte having conceived demands that Harry perform an abortion on her. She is afraid to have a child because modern culture has made it a labor of pain instead of a labor of nature. As a result of the abortion, Charlotte contracts an infection which kills her, and Harry is sent to prison. While in confinement, Harry comes to the conclusion that life with grief is better than death in which everything, even grief, would cease. "So it is the old meat after all, no matter how old. Because if memory exists outside of the flesh it wont be memory because it wont know what it remembers so when she became not then half of memory became not and if I become not then all of remembering will cease to be-- Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief" (p. 384). To Harry, the reality of life is physical. Death equals nothingness.

The Wild Palms is a love story featuring the typical Faulknerian masculine woman who flouts convention. But it is also significant in the development of his theme of evil and violence. The violence is, again, the result of an evil civilization which forces the child to conform to a dull valueless adult life. The child flees from this life into its own code of living but is defeated because the substituted code is also false.

The Old Man[33]

Although this novel was published as part of the novel Wild Palms, it is a distinct story in itself and will be handled as such. The Old Man deals with the 1927 Mississippi flood in which a nameless convict serving as an emergency worker tries to carry out his orders to rescue a pregnant woman in a tree and a man in a cotton house. Despite the thwarting of the "old man river," the convict succeeds in bringing back the woman who has had her child by then, delivered by himself, but failed in finding the man in the cotton house. He says to the sheriff as he turns himself in, "'Yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cotton house'" (p. 637). The returning of the boat signifies the convict's faultless integrity.

In reward for his service, the warden and the deputy charge the convict with attempted escape from the penitentiary and put through a judgment for ten years' additional sentence. Their only concern is to save their own faces in view of the mistake they had made in believing the prisoner dead and discharging him. The warden and the deputy are aware that the prisoner voluntarily surrendered himself, but they are controlled by a machine of political justice rather than any set of human values.

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[33] William Faulkner, The Old Man (New York: The Portable Faulkner reprint, 1951). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

Again, Faulkner seems to imply that innocence is synonymous with goodness. Even the convict's first act which put him in prison, the robbing of a train inspired by comic book reading and his girl friends's hero worship, was a child's act of innocence, the guilt belonging to the adult who raised the child on a comic book education.

However, the innocence of the convict, as that of Lena Grove, appears on the side of stupidity instead of goodness. Faulkner's good characters never seem to reach the mental maturity necessary for a choice between good and evil. The fact that they do act virtuously is not a result of any reasoned decision.

The convict gave up freedom for the security of the prison's womanless walls where all that was required of him was to follow the rules, not make his own rules. Perhaps Faulkner is ironically commenting on the creed of democracy which assumes that man's deepest desire is for freedom. History has not proven this assumption in recording man's search for a leader who will assume the parent-role and make the children's decisions. The path of Hitlerism was the easier way for the German people after the first World war. However, history also records the leader's inability to serve mankind implying that no human being is capable of being God, and that all men were created in brotherhood. Such a deduction leads us to the conclusion that evil must be a result of a misconceived culture which allows man the freedom of choice but denies him any set of values by which

to govern his choice. This contradictory state prompts man to hunt for security in dictatorships and prison walls.

Intruder in the Dust[34]

On the surface Intruder is a best selling detective story; underneath it is a summing up of the guilt of the white man for the burden of enslaving a human being just because his skin happens to be black. The young inherit this guilt and will continue to do so until enough Chicks face the guilt and admit their shame becoming the moral equal to the brother they have enslaved. The black skin is not the cause of the negro's inferiority in economic position but the slavery that manacled the black skin. The outlanders cannot free the negro. The North failed despite the Civil war, and the Federal government will always fail if they try to do it by law because a law cannot annihilate the human emotions and prejudices involved. The change must come as a part of the Southern tradition, a part of its culture, which may take eons of time, especially if the outsiders interfere. The Southern child must "not in heat or anger, nor even regret but in one irremediable invincible inflexible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame" (p. 75) struggle, a repudiation of the very basis on which the economy of the South was founded,

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[34] William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Signet Book edition, 1950). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

a repudiation of a "human shame."

Chick first feels his heritage of guilt when he offers to pay for the negro meal he eats from Lucas Beauchamp's table. Lucas, who refuses to be either white or nigger, shuns the coins for the payment of his hospitality. Chick's shame manifests itself in rage when he realizes he cannot pay off in money for his responsibility of evil done to the negro. The rage subsides and leaves only the shame which he tries to renounce by seeing that justice is done to Lucas by solving the crime which saves Lucas from lynching. It is then Chick becomes aware of the adult white prejudice he must combat, the prejudice that demands the negro to act according to his white man made role of "nigger."

Chick's own relationship to the negro as he comes into adolescence is a mixture of love and contempt such as the boy feels who loves his mother but defies the childlike obedience she still requires resulting in a guilt complex toward the protective parent. This guilt feeling can be resolved only by a mature humbling of pride and admission of love. The white man has not reached this maturity and is still attempting to buy off his guilt even though the black refuses the gift. Lucas says to lawyer Gavin Stevens' offer of free service, "'I said I pays my own way'" (p. 50) and demands a receipt for fees paid.

Slavery is one of those "things" that uncle Gavin Stevens tells Chick "'you must always be unable to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter

how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them'" (p. 157). Only in struggle against these "things" does hope for the endurance of the Southern culture rest. On the struggle of the young and the old, the South must depend for "'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings and old ladies comes truth'" (p. 149), his uncle paraphrases. But the middle aged adult does not like to receive the truth which undermines his honored age-old prejudices, especially to be taught it by the Chicks and Miss Habershams.

The South to preserve its homogeneity of culture must hope that the Chicks as they become men will accept the responsibility for the guilt of their heritage and struggle against the evil, not accept the evil and flee to safer paths of inaction and convention as Gavin Stevens admitted he had done. They must continue as men to defend the homogeneity of the South, the only thing "of durable and lasting value--the literature, the art, the science, that minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty, and perhaps most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis--that crisis we shall face some day when we meet an enemy with as many men as we have and as much material as we have" (p. 118), defend it against "the mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of a failure of national character which they hide from one another

behind a loud lip service to a flag" (p. 120). Slavery is only a part of that evil which has resulted in a modern Snopesist economy of "neat small new one-story houses designed in Florida and California set with matching garages in their neat plots of clipped grass and tedious flower beds ... where the prosperous young married couples live with two children each and ... an automobile each and the memberships in the country club ... and the junior rotary and chamber of commerce ..." (p. 241). Against this stagnant materialism the young Chicks must struggle to rediscover and preserve the humanly meaningful values of honor, humility, respect and courage as represented in a culture of art and literature worthy of being defended by an atom bomb, a culture similar to that of Germany which cannot be defeated despite losses in wars.

The negro even more than the white represents this Southern culture: the negro, as Gavin Stevens says, "'who has a better homogeneity than we have and proved it by finding himself roots into the land where he had actually to displace white men to put them down: because he had patience even when he didn't have hope, the long view ... because he loved the old few simple things which no one wanted to take from him: not an automobile nor flash clothes nor his picture in the paper but a little of music (his own), a hearth, not his child but any child, a God, a heaven which a man may avail himself a little of at any time without having to wait to die ... '" (p. 120). Stevens continues, "'Not

all white people can endure slavery and apparently no man can stand freedom .... But the people named Sambo survived the one and who knows? they may even endure the other!" (p. 115). What we need is a confederation of the two, the white and the black--"'swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive!" (p. 120).

Perhaps Gavin Stevens' solution is not Faulkner's, but we may surmise from previous reading of Faulkner that he is an idealist similar in make-up to this "abnegant and rhetorical self-lacerating" (p. 102) Gavin Stevens, and although we cannot claim that Faulkner is any one of his characters, his thinking whether positively or negatively is reflected in all his characters.

"Knight's Gambit"[35]

"'The one thing age teaches you is not fear and least of all more of truth, but only shame'" (p. 178) is another of the garrulous Gavin Stevens' elucidating comments on the world--the Phi Beta Kappa "who had always something curiously truthful yet always a little bizarre to say about almost anything that didn't really concern him" (p. 124)--the uncle whom Chick felt a closer soul affinity to than

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[35] William Faulkner, "Knight's Gambit," Knight's Gambit (New York: Signet Book edition, 1950). Subsequent references to "Knight's Gambit" will appear in parentheses in the text.

his own father. This county attorney seems to reflect some of Faulkner's own philosophic philandering, such as "'money was the cheapest thing you could spend or lose; which was why civilization invented it; to be the one substance man could shop with and have a bargain in whatever he bought'" (p. 151). When man forgets how cheap money is, suicides and violence result.

"Smoke"[36]

Gavin Stevens says: "'But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?'" (p. 23). And further: "'I have noticed how non-smokers are apt to go off half cocked about tobacco, the same as the rest of us go off half cocked about what we do not ourselves use, are not familiar with, since man is led by his pre-(or mis-)conceptions'" (p. 24). Part of the world's evil, Stevens is saying, is due to interpreting the other person's actions through a blind of our own prejudices which accrue with age getting us farther from the truth. The uninhibited simplicity of Faulkner's children indicate in their desire to believe that they are closer to the eternal verities than the adults who are always ready to disbelieve.

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[36] William Faulkner, "Smoke," Knight's Gambit. Subsequent references to "Smoke" will appear in parentheses in the text.

"Monk"[37]

"Monk" is the short story of the backhills idiot who was too innocent to commit the crime of which he was accused, but he was convicted because "politics of the twentieth century are a sorry thing" (p. 46).

"Tomorrow"[38]

Gavin Stevens comes to this observation on human nature: a human being is the sum of a "'complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice'" (p. 68)--an heritage of traits and environment that determines man's future actions. That is why Bookwright killed Buck Thorpe who had victimized his daughter into bigamy and why Stonewall Jackson Fentry hung Stevens' jury with his negative vote in order to protect not the man Thorpe but the little boy whom he had raised as a baby.

"An Error in Chemistry"[39]

Another crime is unearthed which infers that human justice is the sum of man's frailities.

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[37] William Faulkner, "Monk," Knight's Gambit.

[38] William Faulkner, "Tomorrow," Knight's Gambit. Subsequent references to "Tomorrow" will appear in parentheses in the text.

[39] William Faulkner, "An Error in Chemistry," Knight's Gambit.

"The Tall Men"[40]

McCallum's sons and grandsons embody true human dignity. They come from the hard-working small-farmer hill class. The Marshall aptly contrasts the real worth of mankind represented in the McCallums with the rules and regulations of city living as he says to the government investigator: "'You just went and got yourself all fogged up with rules and regulations. That's our trouble. We done invented ourselves so many alphabets and rules and recipes that we can't see anything else; if what we see can't be fitted to an alphabet or a rule, we are lost. We have come to be like critters doctor folks might have created in laboratories, that have learned how to slip off their bones and guts and still live ... maybe even without even knowing the bones and guts are gone'" (p. 59).

And further, the Marshall says: "'Life has done got cheap, and life ain't cheap. Life'sa pretty durn valuable thing. I don't mean just getting along from one WPA relief check to the next one, but honor and pride and discipline that make a man worth preserving, make him of any value. That's what we got to learn again ... grown men the McCallums kissing one another without hiding and without

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[40] William Faulkner, "The Tall Men," Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York, 1950). Subsequent references to "The Tall Men" will appear in parentheses in the text.

shame!" (p. 60). In the Marshall's expository dialect, Faulkner is perhaps supplying the small piece of the jigsaw that makes the whole puzzle of evil meaningful. Man by inventing inflexible machines of rules and regulations is dehumanizing and therefore destroying himself.

"Shall Not Perish"[41]

The trouble is that men must learn again the ccurage and honor and sacrifice and grief that make men human. Until then, wars will always be valueless.

Faulkner implies that men are still capable of relearning these lost human values.

"Dry September"[42]

Town gossip and prejudice create the town mobs which lynch innocent negroes. As an individual, man thinks; as a part of a mob, man only acts.

"Death Drag"[43]

The speed and thrill of money is greater than that of the airplane.

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[41] William Faulkner, "Shall Not Perish," Collected Stories.

[42] William Faulkner, "Dry September," Ibid.

[43] William Faulkner, "Death Drag," Ibid.

"Elly"[44]

"Elly" is an example of the violence fear produces as a result of the complexity of modern culture.

"Uncle Willy"[45]

The insight of a child is more humanly valid than the judgment of maturity.

"That Will Be Fine"[46]

Faulkner writes this story from the child's viewpoint resulting in the reader's participation in perceiving adult misconceptions which corrupt the confidence of children.

"Victory"[47]

The valueless victory of war rewards an officer the peace of becoming a beggar.

"All the Dead Pilots"[48]

The fighting of the soldier is an undirected effort. Wars have meaning only in the "pentagons" of politicians.

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[44] William Faulkner, "Elly," Collected Stories.

[45] William Faulkner, "Uncle Willy," Ibid.

[46] William Faulkner, "That Will Be Fine," Ibid.

[47] William Faulkner, "Victory," Ibid.

[48] William Faulkner, "All the Dead Pilots," Ibid.

"Dr. Martino"[49]

"And to be afraid is to know you are alive, but to do what you are afraid of, then you live" (p. 577). When man ceases even being afraid he has already lost the human quality of being alive and must replace the living with the excitement of speed, and when speed no longer thrills the physical, then man must commit suicide of his flesh, as young Bayard of Sartoris did.

"Golden Land"[50]

The father of modern family living substitutes money for family affection and family responsibility, and wonders why when he has given his children so much, automobiles and formals, that they turn out badly. The pioneer grandmother knows why; American life has become too easy to make money; the younger generation is deprived of the hardships and suffering that taught their ancestors honor and pride and human dignity. The protective parent is denying his son the right to his manhood.

"Mountain Victory"[51]

Defeat, peace, home, victory are synonymous to the

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[49] William Faulkner, "Dr. Martino," Collected Stories.

[50] William Faulkner, "Golden Land," Ibid.

[51] William Faulkner, "Mountain Victory," Ibid.

returning soldier. The intensity of war eventually burns out even the emotion of fear.

"Black Music"[52]

"'Because nothing ever looks the same to two different people ... depending on which side of it he looks'" (p. 814), the maniac tells the narrator. Because he knows, "'I aint as evil to God as I guess I look to a lot of folks. And I guess that demons and such and even the devil himself aint quite as evil to God as lots of folks that claim to know a right amart about His business would make you believe ... '" (p. 814).

"The Jail"[53]

"The Jail," an excerpt from Faulkner's forthcoming novel, Requiem for a Nun, telescopes the whole of the Southern legend of Yoknapatawpha County into one synoptic view symbolized by the apotheosis, to use a Faulknerianism, of the county jail from its original chinked logged center of town to its brick facaded position on a by-passed side street as it watches the settlement of Jefferson by the

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[52] William Faulkner, "Black Music," Collected Stories.

[53] William Faulkner, "The Jail," Partisan Review (Sept.-Oct., 1951). Subsequent references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

husbandmen who dispossess the Chickasaws and are in turn dispossessed by the land speculators and traders in slaves and whiskey whom the politicians and suburban middle class of modern culture replace as "the long invincible arm of Progress hurled America faster and faster toward the plunging precipice of its destiny" (p. 505), a destiny involving electric lights and running water, paved streets and screens at the windows, formal shrubbed lawn squares and "the patter of comedians ... the babbling pressure to buy and buy and still buy ... " (p. 598). The Sutpens, the Compsons and Sartorises disappear into the integration of one nation of machines in which the ancestors of the cotton fields live "in automobile trailers or G.I. barracks on the outskirts of liberal arts colleges" (p. 599) leaving their fathers and grandfathers in the remodeled "farmhouses glittering and gleaming with automatic stoves and washing machines and television antennae" (p. 599). As civilization progresses, the automobiles take over the country by speed, and the people may "have to move underground to make room for, get out of the way of, the motor cars" (p. 600).

But the jail endures, and if the stranger stays long enough to feel the mystique of the past, perhaps "through the rubbledross of fact and probability" (p. 608) he will still be able to distill the "truth and dream" (p. 608) which will allow man to assert his human dignity. Is Faulkner's new book the opening of sunlight after the blackness in his tunnel of evil and violence?

Chapter V

The Denouement

This essay is a thematic study of evil and violence in the fiction of William Faulkner, in terms of Faulkner's concept of the origin of evil, and of its development as Faulkner portrays it in acts of violence. It includes, as well, my interpretation of Faulkner's purpose in writing of evil and violence. The treatment for the most part is creative, with conclusions based on evidence from Faulkner's works.

This essay presupposes several assumptions. That evil is a basic Faulknerian theme was assumed from observing the obviously violent actions of Faulkner's characters, who seem to be motivated by an inner force of evil. That this violence does not appear merely to shock the reader is a conclusion reached on the ground that, if this were so, Faulkner would have been more concerned about the market sales of his books, which until the appearance of Intruder in the Dust, and his Nobel Prize popularity, did not sell, and for which the demand is still mainly literary. If Faulkner had wanted his work to compete with cheap thrillers, it seems reasonable to assume that he would have long ago simplified the tortuous style and back-tracking dialogue which drive away the escapist reader.

Neither is Faulkner's violence a pure study of fear, such as Poe undertook. After finishing a Faulkner book,

our admiration is not so much for his logical development of fear, as it is for his ability to instill in the reader an empathy with the people he creates. This subjective reaction motivates the Faulknerian student to probe beneath Faulkner's treatment of fear to the underlying evil eliciting the violence, which in turn causes the fear. As young Isaac in "The Bear" is obsessed with tracking down Old Ben for the sake of observing him in isolation, so does the reader snare himself in Faulkner's trap of violence in order to define the evil which springs the trap shut; whether evil is inherent in man's nature and therefore God-determined; or whether it is a result of man-made civilization. And as Isaac realizes Old Ben must be viewed as a part of the whole creation, so must the Faulknerian student understand that the evil Faulkner writes of cannot be identified as one thing, because it is not one but a part of the whole of living. For example, the immorality of slavery in Faulkner's work is only one factor in the decay of the South, which in turn is merely the foundation upon which is built the later amorality of a new Southern Snopesism, which denies humanity to white as well as black. For Faulkner, evil does not exist at one end of a dichotomy of good and bad; evil is a continuum composed of deepening shades of grey as civilization progresses.

The evil Faulkner perceives differs from that described by the Puritan Jonathan Edwards in that Edwards defines evil as God-determined and inevitable; Faulkner sees evil as man-begun and man-developed, and implies that evil

can be rectified through man's awareness of his original mistake and subsequent correcting of it. Man's ignorance of the beginning of evil results in futile blunderings to outlaw violence without eliminating the cause of the violence.

The three divisions of the essay--"A Deteriation of Morality," "A Misconceived Morality," and "Amorality"--attempt to establish the theory that the evil Faulkner portrays in his writing is a product of civilization, which is the pattern man constructed for him to live by. Under each division, with as little distortion as possible, I divided Faulkner's works. "A Deteriation of Morality" deals mainly with the decay of the Southern aristocracy: the Sartorises, the Sutpens and the Compsons. "A Misconceived Morality" concerns itself with the poor white Bundrens, with Lena Grove and with Joe Christmas: characters who are pawns of society. "Amorality" analyzes the evil present in Faulkner's view of modern times. This final chapter is a summing up of the decisions tested under each of the above divisions, and a condensing of the results into an over-all view of the origin, development and purpose of Faulkner's theme of evil and violence.

"A Deteriation of Morality" describes the decadence of the Southern aristocracy as the result of a degenerated code of morality. Honor and pride the Southern aristocrat had in abundance, but they were an honor and pride based on false values of human relationships. Unknowingly, the Southerner inherited the double curse of slavery and

authoritarianism on which the whole economic structure of the South had been built; the Sartorises, the Compsons, the Sutpens as the masters; the black Joe Christmases and the poor white Bundrens as the subjugated. Sutpen's "Design" recapitulates the growth of the Southern evil from man's original mistake. Sutpen commits the sin of pride when he usurps God-like powers to establish himself ruler over his black brother and to call land "his" which was created for his contemplation and participation, not for his possession. Sutpen was not aware that God, who did the creating, is the only One capable of owning and ruling.

Isaac McCaslin is the only one of Faulkner's characters who senses man's original mistake. In "The Bear" and later as an old man in "Delta Autumn," Isaac explains that God made man capable of all things, good and evil, truth and falsehood. He made men equal, and the land He created for everyone's equal pleasure. Man, once set into being, was held responsible for his own acts, when he chose evil by enslaving his black brother and dividing land into "his" and "yours"--initiating the fight to increase "his" at the expense of "yours." The father's mistake was visited on the son, until the great-great-great-grandson became unaware that his honor and pride were based on a false foundation, and he cursed the new world with the evil of slavery and plantation ownership.

Faulkner does not state why man originally chose evil (probably not a choice but an unconscious action), but he

implies, through McCaslin's mystic insight, that man can learn only through suffering, and as yet man has not suffered enough.

Oblivious of his evil heritage, the Southern aristocrat cannot undo the evil of his excess of killing and ruling, despite earnest vows to never use another gun. The Southerner does not comprehend that violence is the overt manifestation of an underlying evil, and until this evil is recognized and corrected, the murders, suicides and sexual outrages will continue to repeat themselves. Isaac McCaslin points out that man's only possibility for redemption is through a reversal of man's original choice of evil, which would constitute a repudiation of the land and slavery. Redemption, McCaslin realizes, cannot come through civil wars whose killing contradicts the end of peace, but must result from a love of God's creation--a love of white for black, and black for white on an equal footing. Whether man, caged in his selfish desires to own and rule, is capable of redemption Faulkner does not say, but Isaac McCaslin realizes that the ransom man must pay to deliver him from his bondage of sin is the disowning of all the material things that man now holds dear.

Chapter III, "A Misconceived Morality," considers Faulkner's view that evil has been furthered by civilization into an incorrectly interpreted morality. The Bundrens and Lena Grove are not consciously immoral. They are not guilty of being born under the poor white taint, as Joe Christmas

is not to be blamed for his black blood. Civilization, in classifying people, denies some of them the rights to their humanity. The immorality of the poor whites and of Joe Christmas is not due to honor based on false values (as it was in the decay of the Southern aristocracy), but is the consequence of honor being altogether denied a class of men. However, these people are not amoral, living outside of any values of right and wrong. They have their own codes, misconceived as they may be--codes which, paradoxically, come closer to God's original concept of the brotherhood of man than do the accepted social mores of modern culture. When these misconceived codes conflict with civilization's ruler and ruled strata, violence results, the violence of Nash Burns and Joe Christmas when they commit murders in order to be recognized as human beings. The murders are acts of violence and are wrong, but it is society which is guilty of the indictment that she refused the Nash Burnses and the Joe Christmases constructive means to fulfill their manhood because these men happened to be born poor or be colored black.

Deepening the grey along the continuum of evil is Faulkner's presentation of modern times, analyzed in the chapter "Amorality." The violence of the present age results not from wrongly-based values (as in the degeneration of the Southern aristocrat) nor from wrongly-found values (as in the immorality of the poor whites and the Joe Christmases), but rather from a situation in which all

values of human meaningfulness are disappearing. Violence itself is losing its purpose. The Sartoris's killing of the Civil War and Reconstruction was for the preservation of Southern honor and pride, despite their falsity; the murders committed by the poor whites were to assert negatively their rights to humanity; but the rapes and lust of the Snopeses, as those of Popeye in Sanctuary, are for violence's sake alone. Within Popeye's mechanized mind rape is not labeled as wrong, because he lacks all values on which to base a moral judgment; Popeye is a machine which measures its actions by the yardstick of expedience in production, a production not for an end, but production as the end.

Faulkner's writing testifies that modern culture is distorting the means to be the end. Money is no longer to obtain something but is valued for itself, as the speed of the airplane in Pylon is not to deliver you to a destination more quickly, but is considered for itself. Even war has lost its purpose. To endure, the soldier must become so dehumanized that he lacks the emotion of fear itself and is, like Donald Mahon of Soldiers' Pay, already dead in spirit although alive in flesh. The business man, to compete in modern Snopesist grab-and-git economy, must become no more human than the cash register he operates, reacting only to the clink of money. The present forces of society, by sanctioning the race for material attainment, deny man the human satisfactions gained through honor, pride, respect, truth and humility. Faulkner implies in the tragedy of

Yoknapatawpha County that through the disuse of his human capacities man is forfeiting the game of life in favor of the grasping Snopeses who are dehumanizing the Frenchman's Bends and Jeffersons of the world.

The evil of modern times can also be interpreted in terms of the fear-emotion that motivates Faulkner's characters to flight or violence. Fear in primitive times existed to warn man of a physical danger to his survival--to prepare him for fight or flight as the case warranted. Modern civilization has conspired against man by counterfeiting fear into abnormal anxieties and doubts, obsessions, phobias and perversions, all of which undermine his emotional stability and physical health to produce lust, murder and suicide. Fear has become a misleading emotion because there is no longer an honest survival of the fittest, for which man was equipped with fear. To survive in modern times, man feels impelled not only to keep up with his neighbor but to get ahead of him in terms of the latest cars and television sets. The drive to make money transforms man into an unscrupulous animal devoid of human feelings, called a Snopes by Faulkner. The Quentins and Chicks who cannot conscientiously thrive on this unnatural competition must find constructive solutions for the fear which civilization has falsified, or they will, as Quentin did, sublimate their frustration in negative perversions that cause their suicide.

Faulkner infers that evil began when man committed the sin of pride--considering himself capable of God-like powers

to rule his fellow man and own the land. From this original mistake developed the slave system of plantation economy which destroyed the Southern aristocracy. Parallel with the growth of the immorality of the Southern noble, came the misplaced morality of the poor whites. Both the poor white and Southern gentleman maintained faulty codes of honor which succumbed to the parasitic growth of amorality, initiated by the Snopeses--a class of people devoid of human emotions, motivated only by their concern to make money. Having summarized the origin and development of evil in Faulkner's writing, I propose to theorize as to Faulkner's purpose in writing of evil.

If men were all Snopeses, unaware of the categories of right and wrong, Faulkner would have no purpose in writing of evil. In fact, Faulkner himself would be a Snopes, incapable of moral judgments. However, the Quentin Compsons and the Chicks are not Snopeses. They continue to bear the guilt of their inheritance, although they do not understand the cause of the guilt nor the antidote for it. Quentin, frustrated by his guilt complex, flees to the timelessness of death; but Chick chooses to stay and fight the human injustice of the Snopeses. It is in Chick's continued struggle that, Gavin Stevens points out, the hope of mankind rests.

In my opinion, Faulkner presents evil as he does in order to help the Chicks of our time understand the stakes of honor and humility that they must fight for, and comprehend

the enemy of grab-and-git materialism they must defeat. Faulkner does not state this in his fiction, but he does say in his Stockholm Address, delivered at the acceptance of the 1950 Nobel Prize: "The writer's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past .... I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail ... because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."[54] Faulkner's presentation of evil implies that if man can become aware of the evil and good in his heritage, man will be able to correct the wrong and relearn the values of pride, honor and humility which, for Faulkner, are the absolute verities forming the basis of human morality and allowing men to fulfill their manhood.

Although the function of this essay is not to evaluate the critics' treatment of Faulkner's concern with evil, it may be of interest to note briefly some of the conclusions of recent critics.

George Marion O'Donnell divides Faulkner's mythology into two dichotomies: the Sartoris world and the Snopes world, or traditionalism versus modern antitraditionalism,

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[54] William Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," taken for the use of this essay from the paper cover of <u>William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism</u>, ed. F. J. Hoffman & Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing, Michigan, 1951).

or antagonists versus protagonists.[55] According to my analysis, O'Donnell has fallen into the error of distorting pieces to fit a preconceived pattern. He labels Joe Christmas a Snopes character, in the same category as the amoral Lucas Burch, blaming Faulkner for the inconsistency that changes Christmas from antagonist to protagonist. In my opinion, it is O'Donnell who makes the mistake when he assigns a Snopesist slot to Christmas, who is neither a Snopes nor a Sartoris. Neither does As I Lay Dying fit O'Donnell's handy arrangement of Snopesist amorality versus Sartoris traditionalism. The poor whites manifest a human dignity of their own which, although not accepted by conventional society, is not amoral. The Bundrens' actions result from a guileless acceptance of their economic level--not from a deliberate self-grasping nature which characterizes the Snopeses' violence.

Robert Penn Warren comes closer to an understanding of Faulkner's theme of evil. Warren equates Faulkner's characters with their attitude toward nature.[56] Popeye, of the Snopes school, tries to gain ownership of nature in order to exploit it. On the other hand, Isaac McCaslin repudiates ownership of nature in order to love God's creation. Lust over nature Warren equates with rape of man. The fallacy which will eventually defeat man and cause him

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[55] George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," Two Decades of Criticism, pp. 49-62.

[56] Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," Ibid, pp. 82-101

to punish himself, as indicated in the last page of "Delta Autumn," is that man can never gain ownership of the land or rule his fellow man because man, limited by his flesh boundaries, will always be less than God.

Warren also points out O'Donnell's mistake of labelling the poor whites Snopeses, and neither, Warren says, can Ratliff of The Hamlet and his small-farmer customers be called Snopeses. Warren paraphrases Faulkner's legend as a record of human effort to rise above the "mechanical process of life, the pride to endure ...."[57] He evaluates the Faulknerian theme of evil and violence as one of moral judgment on the world. This is in direct opposition to the earlier "cult of cruelty" school, which labelled Faulkner a nihilist.

The French critic Nabi avoids the pitfall of categorizing Faulkner by stating that Faulkner's purpose is to reveal the great complexity of modern society, and to do this Faulkner, of necessity, must be vague.[58] Nabi feels that words are inadequate measures to record the sensations, thoughts and actions of man--a reflection of Addie Bundren's reasoning in As I Lay Dying. This is the reason, in Nabi's opinion, that Faulkner employs an ungrammatical, back-tracking style, forcing the reader to recreate for himself the complexity of the world.

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[57] Ibid, p. 86

[58] Nabi, "Faulkner and the Exiled Generation," Ibid, pp. 118-138.

For Rabi, Faulkner's tragedies are a constant reliving by man of his original fall from Paradise. In choosing evil man cursed himself, damning all his future acts to absurdity, such as Horace Benbow's futile attempt to bring justice in Sanctuary. Rabi sees Faulkner's children as the only reminders of a previous hope, and they, too, grow into a doomed adulthood.

Rabi in the shroud of his continental pessimism seems to ignore American optimism which is a part of Faulkner's own heritage. Despite all this misdirected social complexity of which Rabi speaks, there still exist for Faulkner the fundamental absolutes of honor, pride, humility and respect. In my opinion, it is man's struggle in refinding these values by unraveling civilization's web of evil that Faulkner is most concerned in portraying.

Man in the beginning committed the sin of pride by establishing himself master over his brother, a violation of the conditions of humility set down by God. From this beginning evil developed until man forgot even that God had created, until man thought of himself as God and created his own mechanical world in which human qualities of life are ceasing to exist because man, being always less than God, cannot create life. The evil which has resulted can be undone only if man can be made to recognize the nature of his sin so that he can repudiate his original choice of wrong. This, I believe, is Faulkner's purpose in writing of violence: to strip bare the covering of evil for man to see it in its own shameful nudeness.

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