

FAULKNER'S GOD & Other Perspectives

To My Brother Arne

"Memory believes before knowing remembers" –*Light in August*

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* For easier revision and reading, I have changed the format of the original book to Microsoft Word.

PREFACE

"With *Soldiers' Pay* [his first novel] I found out writing was fun," Faulkner remarked in his *Paris Review* interview. "But I found out afterward that not only each book had to have a design but the whole output or sum of an artist's work had to have a design." In the following pages I have sought to illuminate that larger design of Faulkner's art by placing the whole canon within successive frames of thought provided by various sources, influences, and affinities: Holy Writ, music, biopsychology, religion, Freud/Marx, William James. In the end, I hope these essays may thereby contribute toward revealing in Faulkner's work what Henry James, in "The Figure in the Carpet," spoke of as "the primal plan; some thing like a complex figure in a Persian carpet It's the very string . . . my pearls are strung upon.... It stretches ... from book to book."

I wish to acknowledge my debt to William J. Sowder for his discussion of the "Sartrean stare" in "Colonel Thomas Sutpen as Existentialist Hero" in *American Literature* (January 1962); to James B. Meriwether for defining Faulkner's Golden Book in "The Novel Faulkner Never Wrote: His Golden Book or Doomsday Book" (*American Literature*, March, 1970); to Joseph Blotner for his indispensable *Faulkner. A Biography*; and to my former student Marsha Kuhn Scherbel for her penetrating insights, especially regarding *As I Lay Dying*. Three of these studies have appeared in magazine form previously, though they have undergone revision: "Holy Writ: The Principle of Inversion" in *The Sewanee Review*, "Faulkner's Symbols of Identity" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, and "Faulkner's God" in *Faulkner Studies*; a fourth essay, "Transition: From Freud to Marx" was to have appeared in *The Southern Review*, which

kindly permitted me to withdraw it in favor of earlier publication in this book. All six essays appeared in a book published by the Kennikat Press in 1981 titled *A Faulkner Overview: Six Perspectives*.

For the sake of economy, I have listed my sources in the back of the book (complete with page references) in lieu of footnotes. In the case of a few texts that I have cited with exceptional frequency, I have included page references parenthetically within my main text.

1.

HOLY WRIT: The Principle of Inversion

"Every year I read Don Quixote, the Bible, an hour of Dickens. . . ."

I.

Western civilization has a Greek mind, a Roman body, and a Jewish soul. That statement, which I recall from an otherwise forgotten review in the *New York Times* many years ago, implies both a chronological sequence and an ascending order of importance, with the impact of Hebrew scripture being more significant to us than either the Hellenistic enlightenment or the Latin empire whose geographic remains became the site of Christendom. In his obituary on William Faulkner, Allen Tate favored the Greek influence as paramount, seeing the central theme of Faulkner's work as "the Greco-Trojan myth (Northerners as the upstart Greeks, Southerners as the older, more civilized Trojans)." This idea has its evidence and its uses, most certainly, but I believe our *Times* reviewer's order of importance finds profound confirmation in the writings of William Faulkner. Hellenic as he was in his use of names and legends, and envious as he was of classical antiquity in his early years, in his mature work this man who claimed he read the Bible every year displayed the Jewish soul of his civilization by virtue of a deeply biblical method and vision.

The particular biblical method I have in mind is the principle of inversion, the technique of offering one's followers the absolute antithesis of what reason and experience would predicate. From the very beginning of the human

experiment, God repeatedly seems to delight in using the most unlikely and incredible instrumentality to work His inscrutable will. The patriarchs offer vivid illustration of this: whom shall God choose to procreate His Chosen People, to found many nations? Whom else but Abraham, a childless wanderer whose wife has passed menopause and who himself is so skeptical about the prophecy that he foolishly tries to help the project along by fathering an illicit son, Ishmael. After whom shall the Chosen People be named? Not, as you would think, after Abraham or Isaac, the gentlemanly, respectable sort, but after Jacob--the scheming, unscrupulous cheat and liar, even at his dying father's bedside. *He* gets the honor, the new nature, and the new name: Israel. Who will save Jacob's house from famine? Who indeed but Joseph--the outcast and dreamer, who by all odds ought to have rotted to death in an Egyptian prison. Who will lead God's people out of Egypt? He of the Egyptian royal household, to be sure: that Moses whose very name derives from Israel's slave masters. Let no one say that the Old Testament God lacks either a sense of humor or a sense of drama.

In the New Testament the principle of inversion is, if anything, even more emphatic. How will the, Messiah come? Not in power and glory, as orthodoxy fondly expected, but humble and poor: born not of royalty, but of a common carpenter's house. And how will He save mankind from the Fall? Not by simple supernatural edict, alas, but by dying a natural death as the enemy of the people. And so too with God's Church. Whom shall God send to disseminate the new religion? Whom else but Saul of Tarsus, the most rabidly fanatic hater and persecutor of Christians to be found anywhere. He of all people was the chosen instrument of the propagation of Christianity.

That was in another country and two thousand years ago, but Mr. Faulkner surely learned as much from this source as from Mr. Tate's other country three thousand years ago. And most certainly and magnificently, Mr. Faulkner learned the principle of inversion. Inversion indeed is often at the very heart of his work: in the Faulknerian beatitude which says, blessed be the Lena Groves, for they shall inherit the earth; in the admiration that tenders a rose for Emily, a murderess whom the townspeople consider a crazy old party; in the insight that transmutes a deathwatch for a "nigger dopefiend whore" baby-killer into a requiem for a nun.

Everywhere we look, that same generous spirit may be witnessed performing its unorthodox ablutions. So the ethnic outcasts of "Ad Astra," the German and subadar, are chosen to realize the possibility that "all men are brothers" even while ethnic friction explodes into violence among the "Allied" soldiers around them. So also a moron, a whore, and a murderer--Tommy, Ruby, and Goodwin --monopolize whatever strength and virtue exist in *Sanctuary*, that darkest of all Faulkner's expressions of outrage; so too the lowest, most shiftless and cowardly scum in the Faulkner canon, Wash Jones, rises with rusty scythe in hand to achieve what the Southern aristocracy, the Yankee army, and apparently even God were unable to achieve in *Absalom, Absalom!*--bringing down in righteous wrath the house of Sutpen; and so at last that downtrodden, half-witted epitome of the tenant farmer, Mink Snopes, emerges from prison after forty years (which is nearly the time Faulkner took to write the Snopes trilogy) to effect final justice upon his cousin and then ascend, in one of Faulkner's finest tributes, to his place betwixt Helen and the bishops as the trilogy closes.

And then there is the supreme inversion: Faulkner's idiots. Although Mr. Faulkner may not have thought much of the Church Militant, he most firmly ascribed to belief in the Idiot Triumphant. After the caste system based on race, class, and wealth meets its rightful apotheosis in the burning of Sutpen's mansion, the Idiot Triumphant is Jim Bond, the final product and sole survivor of Sutpen's grand design. That this moaning and slobbering, half-breed imbecile comprises an ironic-tragic judgment on the Southern past is true enough, as many a reader has duly noted. That Bond also holds forth promise for the future may not be so evident, but from the perspective of Faulkner's inversion, Jim Bond's prospective conquest of the Western Hemisphere in two thousand years might not at all be a bad thing, compared to what its conquest by the Sutpens and McCaslins and more recently the Snopeses has led to. Can anyone doubt that the old biblical/Faulknerian verities will be nearer at hand when this humble, peaceable, unacquisitive figure becomes representative of our larger race, his mulatto heritage prefiguring the time when God shall have made all the earth of one blood and I who regard you will have sprung from the loins of African kings?

In *The Hamlet*, Ike Snopes is the character who reminds us that, while men look upon the outward appearance, Faulkner--like God--looks upon the heart. Ostensibly, this stricken creature would appear beyond the pale of even Faulkner's vast redemptive powers, his animal buggery a matter of open display, his face beshitten with cow excrement, his whole condition leading Houston to call God "the prime maniacal Risibility." To the conventional eye, this is something to disgust and appall beyond all limits of decency. But Faulkner cares nothing for the outward man; drawn into the inward man, the story behind every brow, he finds in this bugging idiot so transcendent an innocence and

beauty as to merit the finest lyrical tour de force of the novel, placing Ike's romance with the cow high above the book's eight or ten other romances for its pure and selfless ardor. This hymn to spiritual beauty also evokes that supreme Faulknerian tribute, connection with Helen and the bishops, as well as a Miltonic analogue to Adam's dalliance with Eve before man's fall:

He rises. The swale is constant with random and erratic fireflies. There is the one fierce evening star.... Blond too in that gathered last light, he owns no dimension against the lambent and undimensional grass. But she is there, solid amid the abstract earth. He walks lightly upon it, returning, treading lightly that frail inextricable canopy of the subterrene slumber --Helen and the bishops, the kings and graceless seraphim. When he reaches her, she has already begun to lie down ... lowering herself in two distinct stages into the spent ebb of evening, nestling back into the nest-form of sleep, the mammalian attar. They lie down together.

In *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner's inversion brings on Benjy as the idiot who not only endures but prevails; the intellectual suicides in the Family can do neither. And it is Benjy who leads us into catharsis: first into pity and horror--"Ben wailed again, hopeless and prolonged.... It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets." And then into final, imperturbable calm: "Ben hushed ... and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place." So reads the last word, the judgment which is Benjy's. All evidence to the contrary, life is not a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing. Such are the high rewards of inversion.

But the price of inversion also comes high. Isolation, neglect, and even outright hostility may long attend the prophet outcast. For the most part, Faulkner appeared willing to pay the price in manly silence. While Sinclair Lewis was charting a route to Stockholm with his *Babbitts* and *Arrowsmiths*, the simple good-guys-versus-bad-guys gambit, Faulkner without acclaim worked out his subtle Snopes mythology. While Scott Fitzgerald was dazzling the Flapper Era with winter dreams full of rich men and mysterious, radiant lovelies, Faulkner offered the ignoble image of Temple Drake. While Ernest Hemingway was stooping to conquer with fantasies of libidinous wish-fulfillment, Faulkner resolutely stuck by his Emily Grierson, a romantic heroine distinguished not only for her act of murder but by her appearance: "a small, fat woman in black ... [with] eyes lost in the fatty ridges of her face. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water. . . ."

Rather than ape the obvious success formula, in short, Faulkner continued to invert it with ever increasing obstinacy and emphasis. He even went so far as to extend his idiot triumphant doctrine into the animal kingdom. The hero of *The Bear* is a dog idiot, a creature "possessing that bravery which had long since stopped being courage and had become foolhardiness." The buildup toward anticlimax begins with this description of an ordinary dog's response to the bear: "He looked down at the hound, trembling faintly and steadily against the boy's knee. From the raked shoulder a few drops of fresh blood oozed and clung. Too big. We ain't got the dog yet. But maybe someday." Years pass until that someday arrives. And what kind of epic wolfhound finally sweeps onstage as the worthy antagonist of the legendary monster Bear? A "little dog ... grown, yet weighing less than six pounds," of course! "He had the dog ... a mongrel of

the sort called by negroes a fyce, a ratter, itself not much bigger than a rat."

It's biblical inversion again-David and Goliath transmuted into the animal kingdom, the challenger incredibly coming through: "The bear turned without even running, as if in surprised amazement at the shrill and frantic uproar of the released fyce, turning at bay against the trunk of a tree, on its hind feet." Let Hemingway have his brave bulls and lions. Faulkner's six-pound pup will take them on, each and all, and somehow make it stick--the dog-idiot triumphant. So Faulkner went his own way, willful even unto oblivion. By the war's end, his main works were unread and out of print.

There were times, to be sure, when, for all his pose of indifference, bitterness broke to the surface. When the author of *The Good Earth* won the Nobel Prize, for example, Faulkner couldn't help leaning out of his obscurity to call her "China hand Buck." And the easy popularity of *A Farewell to Arms* was galling enough to draw a retort in the title and plot of *The Wild Palms*. But aside from a few such aberrations, Faulkner cheerfully went on inverting in solitude. And biding his time.

And in the end he made of his life the master inversion. After the decades of neglect and anonymity, his kingly will prevailed: the world had to come to his door, bearing Prizes.

II.

The Jewish soul pervades modern civilization perhaps most of all because the Bible is a Book of Justice, its chronicles and prophecies alike depicting a God

who will slay the oppressor and lift up the righteous either in this life or the hereafter. No matter how secularized, and no matter how badly caricatured by its contemporary manifestations, that ancient Hebrew dream of a just society is still attested in the leading ideologies of the modern age--Marxism, socialism, democracy. So far as modern literature is concerned, even Ernest Hemingway, that fervent non-ideologist, declared that "A writer without a sense of justice and injustice would be better off editing a school yearbook ... than writing novels."

This circumstance is what gives the principle of inversion its central place in both the biblical and Faulknerian chronicles, making justice appear actually realizable in a world that now, as two thousand years ago, seems largely given over to the Prince of Darkness. That the last shall be first may seem no more credible in the shadow of Auschwitz than it was in the time of Nero, but the writer's job, Faulkner has said, is to lift man's heart. We have already seen how he achieved that unlikely objective in a number of his works; now I would like to examine two further instances of Faulkner's inversion in closer detail.

The first of these is the meteoric ascendancy of the Negro in Faulkner's work. (To avoid anachronism, I use the word "Negro" as the polite term that prevailed during Faulkner's lifetime.) The Negro's progress from comic buffoon in *Flags in the Dust* to martyred outcast in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and even to heroic dimensions in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Intruder in the Dust* comprises a routine example of Faulkner's inversion, a natural result of his genius ripening into deeper maturity. But in 1942, a year when Hitler's Aryan theories were threatening the world order, Faulkner went so far as to proclaim his region's most oppressed and impoverished people the true

Master Race, as measured by the old verities of the heart:

Because they will endure. They are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them ... [while their virtues are] their own. Endurance ... and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children ... whether their own or not or black or not....

In uttering these sentiments, Ike McCaslin doubtless represents less than the whole of his maker's mind, but he does evoke the prophetic faculty somewhat as Jim Bond had done in *Absalom!*: "It will be long. I have never said otherwise. But it will be all right because they will endure. . . ."

In *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner treats inversion as a historic process that will enable a noble ethos to prevail over a lesser one in the long travail of human destiny. But Ike McCaslin's view of history as a moral drama extends finally to the metaphysical plane of perception. For our final and most elaborate study in Faulkner's inversion, let us consider the mystic experience that--vouchsafed again to the Negroes, as the principle of inversion would have it--is transmitted through Pastor Shegog's sermon in *The Sound and the Fury*.

Here we have several modes of inversion dovetailing into a totality that gives the scene much of its compelling power. First of all, the setting is exactly in contrast to what we might think suitable as a backdrop or inspiration for mystic vision. On the way to the church Dilsey and her party walk downhill through

. . . a broad flat dotted with small cabins ... set in small grassless plots littered with broken things, bricks, planks, crockery, things of a once utilitarian value. What growth there was consisted of rank weeds and the trees were mulberries and locusts and sycamores--trees that partook also of the foul desiccation.

The church building itself would seem perfectly consistent with these surroundings:

Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard. . . .

A second and more obvious inversion applies to the parson's appearance. First, the false buildup: "Revun Shegog gwine preach today....He fum Saint Looley,' Frony said. 'Dat big preacher.'" Then the ironic letdown:

. . . when they saw the man who had preceded their minister e it still ahead of him an indescribable sound went up, a sigh, a sound of astonishment and disappointment.

The visitor was undersized, in a shabby alpaca coat. He had a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey. And all the while that the choir sang... they watched the insignificant looking man sitting dwarfed and countrified by the minister's imposing bulk ... with consternation and unbelief....

"En dey brung dat all de way fum Saint Looley," Frony whispered.

But this ironic letdown is itself ironically inverted. The shabby, monkey-faced one is a compelling, brilliant orator, so facile and learned in the artistry of rhetoric as to be comparable to a tightrope performer:

When the visitor rose to speak he sounded like a white man. His voice was level and cold. . . . They began to watch him as they would a man on a tight rope. They even forgot his insignificant appearance in the virtuosity with which he ran and poised and swooped upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice....

And now the third inversion. For all the parson's hypnotic mastery of the language, making him sound like a white man, seem like a tightrope artist, it is not his formal sermon which evokes Dilsey's mystic vision. Rather, the vision is imparted in an unprepared, spontaneous after-sermon that cuts in just as the choir is about to begin its concluding hymn:

the congregation . . . sighed as if it waked from a collective dream and moved a little in its seats. Behind the pulpit the choir fanned steadily. Dilsey whispered, "Hush, now. Dey fixin to sing in a minute."

Then a voice said, "Brethren!"

So the white man's-tightrope walker's artistry of language was a false lead too. The true vision and glory are bodied forth not in a white man's "cold inflectionless" voice but in an intonation and dialect which is Negroid, "as different as day and dark from his former tone. . . ." It is as though the speaker

were seized bodily by the Pentecostal tongues of fire, the spontaneous outpouring of language so intense that

With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And ... the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words....

And now, to make sure we do not miss the point, the author himself briefly intrudes as explicator of inversion: "his monkey face [was] lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment. . . ."

Guided by that brief editorial comment, we are now ready to receive the supreme vision of this visionary final chapter. But before giving us orthodox Christianity as a counterweight to seeing life as a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, Parson Shegog first parades before us, in a few simple words, the way of life of each main character in the story.

"When de long, cold-Oh, I tells you, breddren, when de long, cold. . Dey passed away in Egypt, de swingin chariots; de generations passed away."

Is this not Quentin's great obsession with time and death, his sense ultimate futility? Three generations of Compsons are set forth in the main part of the novel, and the Appendix tells of others past. Those still alive are in varying degrees of degeneration, and Quentin himself has succumbed so completely to

the concept of death as the permanent extinction of the self as to take his own futile life at last. The Reverend Shegog sees and understands this point of view: "De generations passed away."

"Was a rich man...." Here Jason Compson comes to view for a moment, he who laid up treasures that the moth could corrupt or the thief steal in the night. "Whar he now . . . ?" is a richly ironic question in light of what has just taken place in the Compson house and of what is about to befall Jason in Mottson. At almost this very moment in the sermon, in fact, Faulkner for an instant turns the camera outside the church where "A car passed along the road outside, laboring in the sand, died away." Speaking of inversion, could that be Jason out there, laboring to regain his stolen hoard, blind with "unbearable fury"?

"Was a po man: whar he now ... ?" Mr. Compson, unlike his namesake son, Jason IV, saw the love of money as an object of ridicule ("Watching pennies has healed more scars than jesus"). But the growing poverty of the Compson family, marked by the shrinking of Compson property to a pitiful, ramshackle cluster of buildings (like the shrinking of Sutpen's Hundred to a crossroads store), forms a powerful and necessary backdrop for the novel's tragedy. In the absence of any transcendent vision, the lack of money oppressively influenced both Quentin and his father with a sense of family ruin, until at last they both went to the realm where rich and poor have no distinction.

The climax of the sermon comes with the analogue to Dilsey and Benjy Madonna and Child:

"Breddren! Look at dem little chillen settin dar. Jesus wus like dat once He

mammy suffered de glory en de pangs. Sometimes maybe she helt him at de nightfall, whilst de angels singin him to sleep; maybe she look out de do' en see de Roman police passin."

At this point Benjy, sitting "rapt in his sweet blue gaze," more closely resembles the Christ child than at any other point in the novel. "He mammy," Dilsey, had indeed protected him and sung him to sleep. Her presence alone prevented Jason, the Herod, Judas, and "Roman police" of the tale, from sending Benjy to the asylum in Jackson. And she was to wage her uneven battle until bereft of her last weapon at the death of Jason's mother.

Following up his reference to Jesus, Parson Shegog presents orthodox Christianity as the only alternative to Quentin's dark hopelessness. First, he sees Christ's ordeal in painfully sensory detail:

"I sees hit, breddren! I sees hit! Sees de blastin, blindin sight! I sees Calvary... I hears de weepin en de cryin en de turnt-away face of God: dey done kilt Jesus..."

At this darkest of all moments, Shegog succumbs momentarily to Quentin's naturalism: ". . . I sees de whelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlastin upon de generations." (The "whelmin flood" is especially pertinent in view of Quentin's death by water). Immediately, however, he sees beyond Quentin's naturalism into a supernatural glory. Christian mysticism imparts an ultimate meaning that prevails over "de death everlastin" of eternal nothingness:

"Den, lo! Breddren! . . . Whut I see? Whut I see, 0 sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die."

And thus on to the Apocalypse, the final redemption of the human experiment: ". . . 0 breddren! I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead. . . ."

Seen thus, time is an arrow pointing upwards; history is the march to Zion. So efficacious is the vision to Dilsey that all loss is redeemed and all sacrifice justified: "I've seed de first en de last.... I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin." The tale told by an idiot does signify something, does have a happy ending, after all. Or, to return to biblical inversion, it is the Isaianic vision: the last shall be first. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain shall be made low. Thus, modern realism gives way to the Hebrew insistence on ultimate justice, based on the reversal of things as they are. Perhaps, indeed, Faulkner thereby endangers his credibility in this finale to *The Sound and the Fury*, exalting the good and the innocent while visiting retribution upon the wicked on Easter Sunday. But it is all done in the service of Faulkner's inversion, a grand design meant to be worthy of its biblical analogues.

Her superior vision distinguishes Dilsey from the other characters of the novel and renders her life alone truly meaningful. In contrast to her ultimate perception is Jason's Chamber of Commerce vision, summarized in the sign he observes: "Keep your eye on Mottson." As against this electric, inhuman eye that sees nothing, Dilsey's spiritual eye sees everything, all time and eternity. In a final inversion, Faulkner gives Dilsey her greatest tribute in the Appendix,

added seventeen years after the novel proper, where her spiritual vision is the opposite of her physical limitation. Implicit in the total blindness of her old age is an epic comparison with Oedipus and Tiresias and Saul of Tarsus--with all those ancient figures, in short, whose canonization to another world depended upon their seeing beyond this one.

To conclude the matter, Faulkner the modern experimenter garnered much from the writings of antiquity, both in method and vision. As a student of inversion, Faulkner learned it well. As a writer, he taught it well. And in his career, he lived it without peer in his time.

Music: Faulkner's "Eroica"

"I must try to express clumsily in words what . . . pure music would have done better."

Over the years a goodly amount of evidence has appeared confirming Faulkner's love of music and his use of musical techniques in his literary compositions. In his *Paris Review* interview of 1956, Faulkner declared that "music is the easiest means in which to express, since it came first in man's experience and history." Here he also cites the interweaving of two novellas in *The Wild Palms* [now titled *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*] as his way of providing "emphasis, something to lift it like counterpoint in music." In the 6 May, 1957 session of *Faulkner in the University*, he likewise spoke of the disparate styles in *Requiem for a Nun* as "necessary to give it the contrapuntal effect which comes in orchestration," and in Joseph Blotner's massive biography we find Faulkner, at the age of twenty-three, admiring Conrad Aiken's *The House of Dust* (1920) for its "three dimensional verse patterned on polyphonic music form."

By the time he wrote *The Sound and the Fury* in the late 1920s, Faulkner clearly had decided to try his own hand at "polyphonic music form." The result was a book remarkable not only for its intricate contrapuntal design, but also for its resemblance to a specific Beethoven symphony. Faulkner's lifelong affinity for the music of Beethoven, we should add at this point, is a matter of record in the Blotner biography. During his good will trip to Brazil in 1956, Faulkner

enumerated his three favorite composers as Beethoven, Mozart, and Prokofiev. Four decades earlier, as a youth still in his teens, he had disclosed just how rapt he had become in the spell of the great composer:

Selecting a record from the collection . . . , he would place it on the Victrola turntable. Then, after he had cranked up the machine and placed the needle in the groove, he would extinguish the lights and seat himself to listen. "Even light can be too much distraction when music is being played," he told his profoundly impressed friend. Bill Faulkner's favorite choices were the symphonies of Beethoven. Occasionally, moved by their harmonies and power, he might make a brief comment. "Listen to those horns of triumph and joy," he remarked once, "crying their golden sounds in a great twilight of sorrow."

Given this background, the resemblance between *The Sound and the Fury* and Beethoven's Third, or "Eroica" ("Heroic"), Symphony seems far too striking and extensive to be merely coincidental. First of all, the four movements of the symphony correspond perfectly with sections of Faulkner's novel. Sections One and Four of both symphony and novel are given over to an exposition of the heroic theme, which in Faulkner's case centers upon the two characters who endure against the sound and fury that vanquishes all the others. That these two characters, Benjy and Dilsey, are an idiot and an illiterate cook makes no difference whatever to Faulkner's heroic conception, which, with the fall of the aristocratic dynasties like the Compsons and Sartoris, came to rely almost exclusively on the low-born or outcasts as exemplars of the heroic spirit --characters like Wash Jones and Lena Grove and Nancy Mannigoe and the convict in *Old Man*, to name a few. On behalf of such lowly or even criminal

heroes, Faulkner went so far as to jeopardize his standing as a tragic realist. Certainly the uplifting of Benjy into perfect order and serenity at the end of sections One and Four gives the book an emotional catharsis more commonly found in a symphony's finale than in realistic modern literature, especially when we add to it the mystic transcendence of Dilsey juxtaposed against Jason's terminal loss and rage.

If sections One and Four represent Faulkner's exposition of heroic endurance on Dilsey's part and triumph on Benjy's, sections Two and Three of the novel also correspond perfectly to the second and third movements of Beethoven's "Eroica." Beethoven's Second movement, which is entitled "Funeral March," is slow, stately, and mournfully meditative--almost, to borrow Faulkner's phrasing, as though "all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of the planets." A better musical analogue to Quentin's section would be hard to find. For the third movement of his Heroic Symphony, Beethoven invented a new form--the scherzo, an Italian word meaning "joke." Galloping along in triple time, this movement effectively provided a change of pace and a mood-lightener between the sorrowful profundities of the "Funeral March" and the heroic grandeur of the finale. In Faulkner's book, Jason's section again corresponds perfectly with this movement of Beethoven's. Swiftly paced and brimming with comic spirit--both because of Jason's acid wit and because of Faulkner's satiric treatment of Jason's futile and meaningless scurrings about town--section Three of *The Sound and the Fury* may very properly be called the book's scherzo, or joke section, interposed like Beethoven's Scherzo between the funeral march of Quentin and the spiritual exaltation of Benjy and Dilsey on Easter Sunday.

To undergird this overall symphonic design, moreover, *The Sound and the Fury* is the most contrapuntal of all Faulkner's books. One might well suspect that he learned from the poetry of his favorite modern masters--Aiken, Pound, and Eliot--the principles that Eliot would later expound in "The Music of Poetry" (1942):

The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter. It is in the concert room ... that the germ of a poem may be quickened.

From the beginning, critics of *The Sound and the Fury* have remarked upon the immense richness of its contrapuntal texture, amid which the following recurrent motifs might be briefly listed: the four journeys in search of order (Benjy's journey to the graveyard; Quentin's along the Charles River; Jason's in pursuit of his niece; Dilsey's to church); the four differing perspectives on time (and eternity); the four responses to nature (and a possible supernature); the four applications of the Easter Week framework (with Quentin's being a somewhat misplaced Maundy Thursday); the varying emphases on the five senses (Benjy, smell; Quentin, hearing; Jason, taste; Caddy, touch; Dilsey, vision); the correlations between the Compson brothers and the passage in *Macbeth*.

In addition to such recurrent motifs, counterpoint of a different type figures in the plot, which Faulkner sometimes manipulates with a truly symphonic

mastery. During the Easter sermon, for example, we see the two protagonists lifted into transcendence by the Reverend Shegog's preaching, Benjy sitting "rapt in his sweet blue gaze" and Dilsey "crying quietly and rigidly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered lamb." (Shegog's apocalyptic vision, we venture in passing, is not at all a bad description of what the more secular-minded Beethoven aficionado may find in the master's musical thunder: "I sees de doom crack en de golden horns shoutin down de glory ... !") To keep us mindful of his polyphonic plot, however, Faulkner tucks into the middle of this cathartic scene a reminder of Jason's simultaneous trial by fury: "A long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: 'Yes, Jesus!' . . . A car passed along the road outside, laboring in the sand, died away. Dilsey sat bolt upright, her hand on Benjy's knee. . . ." That suggestion of Jason's car, roaring off in vain pursuit of his stolen hoard, anticipates by an hour or two yet another contrapuntal effect when he would sit immobilized in his new car between towns, missing Easter dinner as well as breakfast, while his idiot brother was about to begin his triumphant ride in the broken-down wagon.

Turning from the comparative mechanics of these works to the biography of their makers, we again find some striking correlations. By coincidence, both artists were about the same age--the early thirties--when composing these masterworks; not so coincidentally, both were writing out of intense personal crises. For Beethoven, emotional catastrophe arrived in double-barreled fashion, involving a loss in love and the trauma of approaching deafness. The broken love affair is a matter of biographical controversy, but there is a letter of 1801 in which the composer wrote to a friend about "a dear sweet girl who loves me and whom I love"; this woman is thought to have been his pupil, the countess Giulietta Guicciardi, who married another man in 1803. About the approaching

deafness there is no controversy. The Heiligenstadt Testament, written in the village of that name where in 1802 Beethoven was working on the *Sinfonia Eroica*, describes the loss of hearing as a social and artistic ordeal of near-suicidal magnitude: "[It] brought me to the verge of despair. I might easily have put an end to my life. Only one thing, Art, held me back. Oh, it seemed impossible to me to leave this world before I had produced all that I felt capable of producing."

Despite these afflictions, the year 1804 saw completion of the Eroica Symphony, "regarded by most biographers as a landmark in Beethoven's development. It is the answer to the 'Heiligenstadt Testament': a symphony on an unprecedented scale and at the same time a prodigious assertion in art of the human will." "I will seize fate by the throat," was Beethoven's assertion to his friend, F. G. Wegeler.

For Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* likewise represented a triumph of artistic effort over two crushing personal disasters, one being the prospect of a failed career and the other being his successive rejections by two women he loved, Estelle Oldham and Helen Baird, who married other men. "[I had] written my guts into *The Sound and the Fury*," Faulkner later declared, even though his three earlier novels and a book of poems had made such a small and diminishing splash that "I believed then that I would never be published again. I had stopped thinking of myself in publishing terms." (His previous novel, *Sartoris*, later published as *Flags in the Dust*, had in fact been rejected by many publishers). The debacle of his love life was probably an even greater source of pain and humiliation. The loss of his childhood sweetheart to a man of greater wealth and social status had been rankling for nearly a decade at the

time he composed *The Sound and the Fury*. Meanwhile, his passion for Helen Baird, to whom he had dedicated *Mosquitoes* in 1926--originally with the epithet "Beautiful and Wise"--proved equally frustrating, for she married Guy Lyman in the spring of 1927 and later gave Faulkner's love letters to a collector. Faulkner's part-time misogyny, expressed in characters like Narcissa Benbow and Temple Drake and Eula Varner, may have originated in this double draft of bitterness, which also evidently produced a wry Faulknerian parallel to the Heiligenstadt Testament: "You don't commit suicide when you are disappointed in love. You write a book." That the book in this instance was *The Sound and the Fury* is implied in Faulkner's cryptic comment to the French translator of this work, that he wrote the novel at a time when he was struggling with difficulties of an intimate nature. ("Ecrit alors que l'auteur se debattait dans des difficultes d'ordre intime.")

To conclude our biographical comparison, it is noteworthy that both of the works in question represented a crucial turning point in the careers of their respective makers. After his great breakthrough in the Third Symphony, where for the first time his original genius was extended to its fullest power, Beethoven went on to write the greatest works of the Romantic Period in the heroic mode, culminating in the "Ode to Joy" in the Ninth Symphony. "Whoever succeeds in grasping it [my music] shall be absolved from all the misery that bows down other men," the master was quoted as saying. For Faulkner, too, *The Sound and the Fury* represented not only a phenomenal tour de force of creative genius in its own right, it also marked a permanent turn toward the heroic in all his subsequent life's work. Like Beethoven's wish to absolve men from misery, Faulkner's grand purpose was "to uplift man's heart," as he stated in his Nobel Prize speech and again in his foreword to *The*

Faulkner Reader. So, in a consciously unheroic age, peopled largely by Prufrocks and Babbits and Homo boobiens, Faulkner exalted the old heroic truths, or "verities of the heart" as he called them--"courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice." Whereas his earlier books--*The Marble Faun*, *Soldiers' Pay*, and *Sartoris*--melded a young man's Weltschmerz with the death knell of the old order, Faulkner strove beyond the culmination of that death knell in Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury* and achieved in his own way what the critics ascribed to Beethoven: "a prodigious assertion in art of the human will."

It is true that the heroic will or heartlift sometimes seems overmastered by the tragic realism in Faulkner's works, but surely that is what is meant by the principle of counterpoint in his fiction: that in Faulkner's books as in Beethoven's symphonies we might hear the "horns of triumph and joy" more sharply defined against "a great twilight of sorrow." Even those books written out of their author's blackest mood of disgust, despair, or horror unfailingly evoke a contrapuntal heroic spirit, usually in the same text (the Lena Grove-Joe Christmas counterpoint in *Light in August*, for example) but sometimes in a sequel published years later. A time lag of some twenty years separates the bitter mood of *Sanctuary* from the redemptive force of *Requiem for a Nun*, to cite the most chronologically extended instance of such counterpoint, and a similar but less extreme time lag separates the heroically conceived Mink Snopes and Eula Varner of the later Snopes trilogy from their earlier incarnations. (The Blotner biography makes clear that the seeds of these later books were present from the beginning.)

What is most important in judging Faulkner's heroes is to ignore outward

appearances--the shabbiness, tragedy, and futility that leap to the eye everywhere from a deteriorating landscape--and to focus instead on "the story behind every brow," as Faulkner put it. From a writer whose two favorite books were *Moby-Dick* and *Don Quixote*, we should not be surprised to find behind each brow a mixture of Ahab and Quixote: the unvanquishable heroic will of the one bonded to the eccentric transcendent vision of the other. The resulting splendor of character, no matter how demented, dangerous, or futile their life and works, suffices to lift a Thomas or Judith Sutpen, a Wash Jones or Charles Bon or Dilsey or Ike McCaslin or Cash Bundren, to the heroic level.

A failure to grasp Faulkner's heroic conception of character has been the chief error of his detractors from the beginning. In 1938 Alfred Kazin, reviewing *The Unvanquished*, compared Faulkner to "a willful, sullen child in some gaseous world of his own, pouting in polysyllabics, stringing truncated paragraphs together like dirty wash, howling, stumbling, losing himself in verbal murk"; and in 1950 the Jackson (Mississippi) *Daily News* complained that "those who award the Nobel Prize are now laboring under the delusion that a novel, in order to be excellent, must also be nasty.... he is a propagandist of degradation and properly belongs in the privy school of literature." So accustomed was Faulkner to such attacks that when Professor Warren Beck published three essays in his defense (in 1941), Faulkner sent a letter of thanks to his admirer, saying "I have been writing all the time about honor, truth, pity, consideration, the capacity to endure well grief and misfortune and injustice and then endure again. . . ."

Where his critics went wrong was in refusing to allow Mr. Faulkner his existential premise, expressed by Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, that "every man is the arbiter of his own virtues." Once that premise is granted--

as it must be in an age when both religious and social sanctions have lost much of their power--then the heroic spirit that undergirds his people's admittedly quixotic fantasies becomes manifest, so that Thomas Sutpen's epic bravery outweighs the moral turpitude of his "design" and Emily Grierson's unyielding willfulness overrides the fact of her sexual pathology.

For this reason, characters like Wash Jones and Emily Grierson pose a test for Faulkner's readers. If they judge these characters with a conventional eye, seeing the one as a demented white trash coward and the other merely as a murderous necrophiliac, then they have failed the test and so cannot assimilate Faulkner's heroic vision. At a symposium once where a speaker linked Emily Grierson and Blanche DuBois as comparable figures, it struck me that the essence of Faulkner derives precisely from the contrast between these two ladies, rather than a comparison. There is nothing in all of Tennessee Williams that compares with the warrior metaphor (from the medieval battlefield) wherewith Faulkner describes Miss Emily's victory over the townspeople: "So she vanquished them, horse and foot." Having nothing more than her invincible will as a weapon, she put to rout the whole army--tax board, Baptist minister, people complaining about the smell, malevolent townsladies--throughout her whole lifespan despite their repeated would-be invasions. That, after her death, they pried into her little secret (she had vanquished time and death and loss of love, too, in her fashion) is more a reproach against their crude vulgarity than against Miss Emily's fantasy life.

Even when the Faulkner hero is utterly doomed and hapless, as in "Red Leaves," for example, the heroic note comes to prevail over the pathetic. In this story Faulkner dramatizes the theme he was to announce decades later, in the

1953 foreword to *The Faulkner Reader*—"saying No to death." Initially the runaway Negro accepts his imminent extinction--"Yao, I am dead"--and certainly his fellow slaves confirm that designation:

"Eat, and go. The dead may not consort with the living; thou knowest that."

"Yao. I know that."

Still, when struck by the rattler, he says No to death:

Then he said it again--'It's that I do not wish to die'--in a quiet tone, of slow and low amaze, as though it were something that. . . he had not known, or had not known the depth and extent of his desire."

Extending through seven days of flight, his No to death narrows to its final hours when, on the point of capture in the swamp, he sings a hymn to his last sunrise: "He was chanting something in his own language, his face lifted to the rising sun. His voice was clear, full, with a quality wild and sad. . . . 'Come,' the Indian said. 'You ran well. Do not be ashamed.'" And even now, while being led to his death like Christ in Gethsemane ("The Negro was the tallest there, his high, close, mud-caked head looming above them all'), he succeeds in saying No to death for a final few minutes, first by chewing bread ("Yes,' the Negro said. 'That's it. I want to eat'") and then by prolonging his final drink of water so as to live that many breaths longer:

Then the water stopped. "Come," Basket said.

"Wait," the Negro said. He dipped the gourd again and tilted it against

his face Again they watched his throat working and the unswallowed water... channeling his caked chest....

"Come," Basket said, taking the gourd from the Negro and hanging it back in the well.

Conversely, the heroic stance may involve accepting one's life rather than gladly dying, as Harry Wilbourne demonstrates in *The Wild Palms*. Ostensibly, Wilbourne's choice to go on living rather than commit suicide--"Yes, between grief and nothing I will take grief"--could as well be cowardice as heroism, but the immense power of Faulkner's original title points up the valor of Wilbourne's decision. *If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem*, the title Faulkner gave up because his editor thought it might arouse anti-Semitic feelings, is drawn from the same Psalm (number 137) that T. S. Eliot used in Part 3 of *The Waste Land*: "By the rivers of Babylon.... we wept, when we remembered Zion." Written to stave off some private heartbreak, Faulkner said, the book appeals to the fact that hardly a man or woman exists in the world who does not have a Zion toward which his heart yearns from its present captivity--a captivity objectified in the bungling abortionist's fifty-year prison sentence. To die would be sweet, then, but would leave Jerusalem unremembered:

So it is the old meat after all, no matter how old. Because if memory exists outside 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

To Harry, too, then, we might extend the Faulknerian encomium "He endured,"

sacrificing his death, as it were, to preserve the memory of a love that had been beautiful.

Following *The Sound and the Fury*, with its closing spectacle of the Idiot Triumphant and Dilsey Enduring, the heroic view of life moved permanently into the center of Faulkner's vision. The Appendix to this book, added some sixteen years later, stands as a coda that reaffirms the theme of man's heroic will embattled against time and loss and suffering. No matter that the Compson tradition, since the battle of Culloden, unfailingly puts the family on the losing side of every historic upheaval--a tradition that obtains, incredibly, even through World War 11 by virtue of Caddy's appearance beside a German staff officer. What matters is the family's heroic defiance of their ill fate, so that the loser at Culloden nonetheless named his son after the hapless prince he fought for, and Charles Stuart Compson in turn, though failing to become a classicist schoolteacher, named his son Jason Lycurgus Compson in a similar gesture of undefeat.

It is a serious loss to literature that Faulkner never lived to tell the story of little Quentin after she eloped with the man in the red tie, as he had wanted to, so as to mark the conclusion of this pattern. Nonetheless, the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* suffices to recapitulate the heroic mood of the whole work, not only in its concluding tribute to Dilsey ("They endured") but in its presentation of a new heroic figure, Melissa Meek, the "mousesized mousecolored spinster" (characteristically!) who, moved by the old verities, entered the dragon's lair, Jason's office, "striding on through that gloomy cavern which only men ever entered" in her vain effort to "save" Caddy.

In sum, then, the four-part design of the book, its numerous contrapuntal effects, and most of all its heroic view of life drawn against a backdrop of profound personal and literary sorrow mark *The Sound and the Fury* as Faulkner's Eroica, a heroic symphony not unworthy of comparison to the similar handiwork of the novelist's favorite composer. Neither artist, by his own admission, was satisfied with this or any other part of his massive canon. "The true artist has no pride," Beethoven declared. "Even while others may be admiring him, he mourns his failure to attain that end which his better genius illuminates like a distant sun." Faulkner, in his elder statesman years, echoed those sentiments in declaring that, "In my opinion, my work has all failed, it ain't good enough." Far down from Olympus, a grateful musical and literary public is unlikely ever to accept either judgment. For us the Third Symphony and *The Sound and the Fury* are not only good enough, they represent both a great pinnacle of artistic success and a permanent turning point into an illustrious later career.

LIEBESTOD: *The Lessons of Eros*

"The Great Illusion ... [is] that you can seduce women. Which you can't. They just elect you."

William Faulkner began his career in fiction as a writer of romances. In *Soldiers' Pay* he juxtaposes the tragic romance between a young war widow and a dying soldier against the comic satyr-play of Januarius Jones, the faun figure carried over from Faulkner's failed career as a poet (in which *The Marble Faun* had been his major opus). His second novel, *Mosquitoes*, establishes its mode of erotic comedy in its opening sentence, where the chief sexual buffoon of the work declares, "The sex instinct ... is quite strong in me." And his third novel, *Flags in the Dust (Sartoris)*, ramifies the theme of romance toward a Shakespearean breadth and complexity. Here the romantic heroine's three suitors permit Faulkner to indulge his similarly Shakespearean class biases. The young aristocrat comes wooing with a moonlight serenade, the middle class doctor with parlor protocol (flowers and candy), and the lower class Snopes with anonymous obscene letters and secret voyeurism. (Horace's adulterous romance with Belle and old Simon's dalliance with Meloney produce yet more variations on the erotic theme.) Still another book begun in the 1920s--though not published until 1940--is *The Hamlet*, an elaborate parody of romance that reaches up a long ladder of sexual affinities: from Ike Snopes and his cow to Mink and his nymphomaniac wife to I. O. Snopes's bigamies and sexual blackmail to Houston and his concubine and later his wife, and above all to Eula Snopes and her suitors: McCarron, Labove, Flem. And the tradition of the

romance figures importantly in many other books by Faulkner, including major opera like *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down, Moses*, and *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*.

Through all these works there notably persists a common theme: the perversity of erotic love, ironically and often tragically visiting frustration, humiliation, or loss upon its manifold victims. The seekers, of both sexes, are rarely finders in the Faulkner canon; or if finders they shortly become losers. Joe Gilligan never gets the war widow, who disappears, now twice-widowed, at the end of *Soldiers' Pay*; nor does anyone save (briefly) Pete fulfill his erotic needs in *Mosquitoes*; Narcissa, thinking of the long and happy marriage she might have had with her husband's twin, is left contemplating "the blind tragedy of human events" in *Flags in the Dust*. Those unions that are happy are short-lived--Houston's in *The Hamlet*, Wilbourne's in *The Wild Palms*--while those that are unhappy last interminably: the Compsons', the Bundrens', the Flem Snopeses'. And the couples who survive most compatibly appear to be those who have outlasted their sexuality: Cora and Vernon Tull in *As I Lay Dying*; Mr. and Mrs. Will Varner in *The Hamlet* (his sexual interest has been transferred to the wife of a tenant); the doctor and his Medusa wife in *The Wild Palms*.

Then, too, there are the pathetic multitude of sexual failures, losers and misfits in Faulkner's work: embittered and even psychopathic old maids like Rosa Coldfield and Emily Grierson; husbands condemned to lives of celibate loneliness, like Ike McCashn and Gail Hightower; and youths like Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren, whose psychic disintegration derives largely from sexual agony, to say nothing of the young women whose lives are threatened or

ruined by sexual mishap: Caddy and her daughter, Dewey Dell, Charlotte Rittenmeyer, Joanna Burden, Temple Drake (both victim and victimizer), and Judith Sutpen, among others. To be sure, Faulkner sometimes made high comedy or satire of the sexual theme; nonetheless, his dramatization of sexual tragedy is deep and pervasive.

Why all this sexual suffering and perversity? In part, the explanation involves Faulkner's assimilation of concepts like Bergson's creative evolution (with Faulkner conceiving of sex as *the* life force) and Schopenhauer's notion of sex as a blind, amoral force emanating from the Cosmic Will. But part of the answer also derives from Faulkner's experience and observation, important elements of which have become available to us in books like Joseph Blotner's biography and Meta Carpenter's reminiscence, *A Loving Gentleman*. And, in addition, Faulkner's genius appears to have advanced beyond Bergson's creative evolution to apprehend broadly biological phenomena that have given rise to the "science" of biopsychology. Drawing from these various areas of knowledge and resorting at times to certain other artists for extra clarification of ideas, the following meditation on Faulkner and Eros will begin with some speculations relating to sexual biopsychology, following which we may consider the manifestations of these axioms in the life and work of the artist.

To begin, sexuality, biologically speaking, exists for the sole purpose of accelerating the process of evolution. The geologic record shows that, at the end of the billion or so years during which our single-celled ancestors reproduced themselves asexually through fission, life produced no new forms worth reckoning. Once the principle of sexual selection came into force, however, the upward march of life from microbe to mankind became possible, though at a

great price: sex brought death into the world, sacrificing the individual life to the gene pool of a species, whereas fission had permitted the individual life form at least a demi-immortality. ("SEX AND DEATH: the front door and the back door of the world," Faulkner had written in *Soldiers' Pay*--but in fact they are the same door.) And in our human world, nature's law of sexual selection has resulted in the firefly whirl of pickers and choosers, winners and losers, that to a regrettably large extent defines the relation between the sexes.

At bottom, biopsychology infers a possibly irremediable incompatibility of the sexes from two contrasting biological facts. First is the wastrel profligacy of the male's progenerative equipment, capable of geysering billions of potential human souls into the world week after week, as compared to the female's parsimonious release of one prospective incarnation per month. Second is the happenstance that the male's sperm is generated fresh and new throughout his lifetime, so that it creates life as viably in his seventies as in his twenties, whereas the female is given her lifelong allotment of viable eggs at birth, and they age at the same pace as her own body. The first of these facts is the biological basis of the double standard, which in most cultures throughout historical times has sanctioned promiscuous sexuality on the part of males while enjoining strict selectivity--usually to the point of monogamy--on the part of females. The second of these facts accounts for the sometimes tragic lack of synchronization in the marriage timetable of the two sexes, the female being moved by implacable biological as well as social pressure to marry and get offspring in her twenties, when her eggs are in their prime condition, whereas a man of that age seldom has had time to define and establish himself and so become really top-notch husband material.

This latter phenomenon explains biologically why romance so often blooms between older men and younger women, and so seldom vice versa (a key feature of Faulkner's romantic life, as we shall shortly consider it). It is the decree of nature that woman's beauty serves a biological function, that of arousing a man's libido, of--in the vernacular--making him hard; and it is characteristic of nature to decree also that for many women this function coincides largely with their peak childbearing years, the decade of their twenties, plus a half decade or so before and after. As a younger woman's beauty serves Nature's procreative intentions, so the older man's wealth and status enhance--from the woman's standpoint--the nurturing of children. Thus the biological rationale for the December-May marriages of public figures like Senator Strom Thurmond and *Playboy's* Hugh Hefner to beautiful young women.

Unions such as this imply that, had Sigmund Freud been capable of regarding his one-time disciple Alfred Adler more objectively, he need never have made his bewildered outcry, What--in the name of God--does Woman want? Adler's formulation that a striving for superiority is inherent in all life was meant to apply to both sexes, but in fact it applies most crucially to the human male, precisely because What Woman Wants is a superior male, his superiority to other males being defined by his success in life at whatever enterprise he chooses. To attract and capture a superior male is, biologically speaking, the woman's way of affirming her status as a superior female.

By intuition, a fair number of writers have arrived at this sexual insight, leaving Freud adrift with his question unanswered by his "reason" or "science." In *Sister Carrie* Dreiser pinpoints exactly this feature of female sexual

psychology in Carrie's emotional alterations: giving herself first to Drouet, the most prosperous male she has met, then precipitously dropping him in favor of Hurstwood, who is obviously superior by reason of his opulent living standard, only to lose interest in him in exact measure with his decline from the prosperous, "successful male" category. It would be a mistake to regard Carrie's fickleness merely as a callous instance of female materialism. To her, Hurstwood's ensconcement within "a really swell saloon" represents not merely the promise of creature comforts but the badge of superior male identity--a fact borne out later when she rejects him although no longer in need of any creature comforts whatever.

Another lady having no need of any creature comforts whatever is Daisy Fay Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, who weeps copiously into Gatsby's fine shirts not from any material interest but solely because the shirts symbolize Gatsby's ascension into the ranks of the Superior Male, a man equal or maybe even superior to her well-born husband and therefore (temporarily, at least) worthy of her renewed love and admiration. Myrtle Wilson's awareness of having married an Inferior Male arrived, in counterpoint with Daisy's ecstasy over the shirts, when a man came to claim the suit her husband had borrowed to get married in: "'Oh, is that your suit?' I said. . . and then I lay down and cried to beat the band all afternoon." ("I married him because I thought he was a gentleman," she said finally. 'I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe.") Later Tom Buchanan's "dress suit and patent leather shoes" would largely anneal her injury, at once establishing her future lover within the Superior Male category. Somewhere between Daisy's free aristocratic choice and Myrtle's plebeian doom is Mrs. McKee, who recounts her narrow escape from Inferior Maledom (here defined ethnically rather than economically): "I

almost made a mistake, too.... I almost married a little kike who'd been after me for years. I knew he was below me. Everybody kept saying to me: 'Lucille, that man's way below you!' But if I hadn't met Chester, he'd of got me sure."

Faulkner's roll call of Inferior Males ranged from comic (Byron Bunch) to tragic (Quentin Compson) to satiric (Byron Snopes), but probably his purest rendering of the type is Anse Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. Workless, ambitionless, parasitic, accepted only as the desperate last hope of an old maid schoolteacher, Anse violates the first imperative for sexual attractiveness in either gender: stand up straight! Addie's first impression of the man, as he drove past her school house, was "how he was beginning to hump--a tall man and young--so that he looked already like a tall bird hunched in the cold weather"; and her first words to him were, "If you've got any womenfolks, why in the world don't they... make you hold your shoulders up?" That such a man would become a cuckold is perhaps not too surprising; what is interesting is that he is cuckolded by the local minister, which is to say the one clearly Superior Male that a mentally superior woman might find in such an impoverished and illiterate community. (As in *The Scarlet Letter*, the forbidden fruit taboo also appears to have heightened the minister's desirability, together with the competitive thrill of having the man prefer her to his relationship with God.)

To Faulkner the biopsychology of sex seemed most forcefully expressed through animal imagery, associating fertile women with cows (Dewey Dell, the Snopes girls), married men with domesticated animals like dogs or mules (Anse Bundren and Vernon Tull), and Superior Males with wild or imperfectly tamed horses (Jewel Bundren, Thomas Sutpen). Thus Houston's wild stallion "represented [its owner's] polygamous and bitless masculinity" in *The Hamlet*

(like the spotted ponies that run wild later in that novel), whereas domesticated men, useful plug horses that they are, head into the stall at evening. For some, like Bayard Sartoris (who rides a wild stallion in one episode), the horse is replaced by a car, but the Male Principle of power, violence, and freedom remains symbolically apt in such cases, as Bayard's bride recognizes in her futile attempt to domesticate her bridegroom: "'And you wont [sic] drive that car fast anymore?' she persisted from the dusk. 'No,' he answered." Given their absolute independence and willfulness, Faulkner's Superior Males can be captured only fleetingly, if at all, by a female, as Bayard goes on to demonstrate (together with many others: Dalton Ames and Gerald Bland; Gordon, the sculptor in *Mosquitoes*; Joe Christmas; Labove). Even so, the male struggle for superiority may trace back to the need to impress a woman after all. Ikkemotubbe's seizure of chieftain status in "A Justice," requiring the murders of his uncle and cousin, turns out in "Red Leaves" to have just such a motive: in New Orleans he had passed himself off as The Man, and now that the white woman who is carrying his child is pursuing him into Indian territory, he must make good his pretension. And in *Mosquitoes* sexual competition is described as the underlying motive of the literary artist: "I believe that he's always writing it for some woman, that he fondly believes he's stealing a march on some brute bigger or richer [two keenly felt vulnerabilities of Faulkner himself] or handsomer than he is; I believe that every word a writing man writes is put down with the ultimate intention of impressing some woman...."

Turning from fiction to fact, we find ample confirmation of this principle of sexual psychology in the authors' lives. Dreiser's endless procession of lovers, whom he inevitably betrayed and treated abominably, is more of a testament to his need to repair ego damage (relating to his ugly appearance and the poverty

of his youth) than to any surfeit of passion in the man. And Fitzgerald, initially rejected by both publisher and girl friend, obviously learned much about the Superior Male phenomenon when Zelda changed her mind and agreed to marry him shortly after the publisher changed *his* mind and accepted Fitzgerald's first novel a year after the original debacle. For that matter, both Hemingway's machismo stance and his "lost generation" mood may be traced as much to his loss in love as to any loss of ideology: back before his writing career gave proof of superior malehood, his intended (the Red Cross nurse) dismissed him as a youth without prospects, fixing her attention instead upon an Italian aristocrat.

Faulkner's experience of inferior malehood was double-barreled and exceptionally humiliating. First, he watched his childhood sweetheart get married to a man of superior wealth and breeding the very same year that he reached his majority without family status, money, or visible prospects of success in a profession. Like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, he longed to recreate his identity as a war hero, and he tried to cover the futility of this enterprise by inventing bogus adventures and even a war wound (a fake limp that he sometimes forgot to affect) to impress his civilian friends. In his later twenties, as his career was shifting from its false start of poetry writing, he was rejected again by a woman he wanted, who gave his love letters to a collector shortly before she married someone else. When he married his original sweetheart a few years later, after her divorce from the wealthy playboy who had won her hand a decade earlier, one motive we may reasonably infer was--like Fitzgerald's--his need to repair ego damage by compelling the same woman who had rejected him to acknowledge his ascension, via his blossoming artistic career, into the Superior Male category.

As many a first wife has learned, a husband's emergence into the Superior Male category may both elevate and threaten her own sexual identity as (who knows how many?) covetous female eyes fix upon him. For Estelle Oldham Faulkner the threat materialized most alarmingly in the figure of Meta Carpenter, the Hollywood script girl who--according to her book, *A Loving Gentleman*--very nearly pried him loose from his lawfully wedded spouse. For the man the attraction lay chiefly in the woman's youth, beauty, and passion; for Ms. Carpenter the key to the relationship was the man's Superior Male status, which she projected into a favorite fantasy: "In it, I stepped off trains with Bill as vast throngs cheered and people extended books to him for his signature" (pp. 63-64). Since Faulkner had no such public standing in America at this time in their romance--the 1930s--she shifted the fantasy's setting to "the dream landscapes of France and Germany, where his novels and short-story collections had never gone out of print and where he was recognized even then as one of the great writers of the day." Her other favorite fantasy, needless to say, was that of being married to him. Inevitably the one-time Count No-Account became the object of a savage struggle between wife and mistress, a combat capable of bearing out the assertion in *Absalom, Absalom!* that "women will show pride and honor about almost anything except love":

Estelle sat listening [so Meta describes their first encounter] with head angled oddly on her neck.... dress lacking in distinction, hair stringy and uncontrollable, the splotch of rouge and layering of powder on her face giving her a pasty look.... She was not, I made the judgment, an interesting person.... I caught the suffering on Bill's face before he turned his head from her.... Let him go, Estelle. I can grow with him. You can't. I'm younger. Prettier. I can hold him, grace his life, keep him from alcohol,

slake his passion.... [178-801]

Fortunately for Ms. Carpenter, when it finally became clear that Faulkner could not bring himself to leave his wife and daughter, another Superior Male was waiting in the wings with a wedding proposal: one Wolfgang Rebner, who, though short of Faulkner's supernal caliber of genius, nonetheless won her esteem as a major artist figure-"the great virtuoso, seated at the piano, fingers flexed for the fire and the beauty he would draw from the keyboard" [188].

By the 1950s, having achieved Nobel Prize status, Faulkner reaped the affection of several other young women, one of whom--Joan Williams--rather ungraciously discounted Meta Carpenter's effect upon *The Wild Palms* by writing the *New York Times* that about *her* (Williams) Faulkner wrote *two* books, *The Town* and *The Mansion*, wherein Gavin Stevens's "capacity to stay 19 years old the rest of his life" suggests Ms. Williams' rejuvenating effect upon the middle-aged artist. In tracing the sequence backward from girl friend (Williams) to girl friend (Carpenter) to wife, we find that the nub of animosity is the attempt by each woman in turn to expunge her successor from the life of the great man, so that Joan Williams is never mentioned in Meta Carpenter's book, for example, though she does occasion an oblique reference to the writer's "brief, twilight love affair" (p. 127), while Estelle Faulkner threw Joseph Blotner off Meta's trail by giving her rival a false name ("Mrs. Ernest Pascal") that he would never be able to track down. (The phony name is affixed to a photograph showing Meta and Faulkner together in Hollywood--Blotner, p. 932; the same photograph, with name corrected, appears in *A Loving Gentleman*, pp. 96-97.) Both Meta's book and Joan Williams' letter to the *New York Times* manifest the same impulse to resist this expunging of identity. Both

convey the same message: Oh no you don't! You're not going to leave *me* out of this man's emotional history, in which my claim is superior to yours.

So Faulkner's women bear out the old truism that a woman gets her identity chiefly from her relationship to a man, and the measure of her worth is how much the man will sacrifice to have her. For most women, a man's sacrifice of his freedom in marriage will suffice to confirm her value to him, but it is noteworthy that our greatest love myths propound male sacrifice far beyond this convention. Milton's Adam, for example, in the interim when Eve has eaten the fruit but he has not, must decide whether God or Eve is more important in his life; and her cry of ecstasy that greets his choice--"O glorious trial of exceeding love!"--leaves little doubt that for her it will be a fortunate Fall indeed for disclosing exactly how much she means to him. Turning from biblical to classical myth, we find in Cleopatra an even more striking example of the same principle, with no infernal serpent to share the blame for woman's perversity. In drawing her ships away from Antony's battle, Cleopatra exploited her one big chance to find out whether she meant more to her lover than the Roman Empire did, and, like Eve, she counted the world well lost as compared to this glorious proof of her worth to him.

As Meta Carpenter portrays it, Faulkner came to the verge of giving up his world for his sweetheart, being pushed to that decision, she says by a telephone call to Meta from his rival, Wolfgang Rebner (p. 181) Somewhat like Charlotte Rittenmeyer, whose story he was inventing at that time in *The Wild Palms*, he decided that for Meta he would give up his spouse, his home town respectability, and even his darling daughter Jill. But when the two women reached for their heaviest weaponry, the wife prevailed by posing a sacrifice the

artist could not make for any woman: by using the courts to pauperize him, she would reduce him to a Hollywood hack permanently, his talent forever subdued to the need to grind out alimony. Or so at least Meta was given to understand; and if Faulkner shaded the facts a bit in telling her this, as any man might, he did so for the gentle purpose of allowing his mistress to preserve as high as possible a sense of her own worth.

In reading Meta Carpenter's account of the romance, one cannot doubt that Faulkner really loved the young woman, a fact that shines through the distorting shimmer of sadness, bitterness, and frustration in Ms. Carpenter's narrative, and that outweighs as well Faulkner's cool disclaimer many years later that he wrote *The Wild Palms* while suffering "what I thought was heart-break." One can even believe that he wanted to marry Meta, and tried to get a divorce to do so. But the end of the romance was foreseeable years before its actual demise in a vignette she recalled from the most passionate phase of their relationship, a time that summoned forth his Joycean lyrical strain: "Meta who soft keeps ... love's long girl's body, sweet to fuck," "Meta, my heart, my jasmine garden, my April and May cunt ..." (pp. 75-76). She was twenty-nine at the time; he was nearing forty:

The age difference between us no longer existed for me, who had restored his youth and his sense of fun, but for Bill it had strangely widened. Although he made love to me as a man to a woman, there were times when he saw me as being far younger than I was. A girl-child. With one flourish of his mental blue pencil, he would edit out all the facts of my life since Memphis--my birthdays, my marriage, my work --and behave toward me as if I were just out of high school. I don't remember making an effort to

play my assigned part at these times, for, if anything, I was confounded by his need to turn me into a sweet, tremulous girl.

One day he presented me with a box in which there was a ribbon for my hair.

"I can't afford presents for you," he apologized, "but I couldn't resist this."

Although I thanked him and wore it, I was troubled by his choice of gift. The idealization of me as a girl far too young for him was to last for a number of years and to appear in some of his letters to me. I never protested, and my acceptance of his vision of me as a maiden nourished his fantasy. [77-78].

Had Ms. Carpenter looked attentively at *Mosquitoes*, she might have found further hints as to what nourished her lover's fantasy. Here the young girl's "taut simple body, almost breastless and with the fleeting hips of a boy, was an ecstasy in golden marble"--and a prototype of many a nymph or nymphet to come: Caddy Compson, Temple Drake, Charlotte Rittenmeyer, the aviatrix in *Pylon*. Here too a recurrent motif describes the book's middle-aged love seeker standing next to a young creature who "seemed to envelope him, giving him to think of himself surrounded, enclosed by the sweet cloudy fire of her thighs, as young girls can."

What nourished Ms. Carpenter's fantasy were weekends together at Miramar which "intensified my own feeling that I was actually married to Bill" (p. 78).

But gradually, in both partners, fantasy yielded to the reality principle--she demanding marriage in fact, and he, as the years slipped by, finding that his "April and May cunt" had sadly diminished to July and August. By the time his daughter had reached puberty, the age when he had told Meta he could seriously move for divorce, Meta was in her late thirties and Faulkner was writing to his editor, Malcolm Cowley, "It's a dull life here. I need some new people, above and probably a new young woman" (*Letters*, p. 245).

Eventually he found the new young woman in Joan Williams, a twenty-one-year-old would-be writer with whom he attempted to share the authorship of *Requiem for a Nun* and to whom he suggested a fruitful literary subject:

I have an idea for you.... A young woman, senior at school, a man of fifty, famous--could be artist. . . . He has come up to spend the day with her. She does not know why, until after he has gone. They talk, about everything.... She is more than just flattered that a man of fame has come up to see her; she likes him ... ; maybe he will of a sudden talk of love to her.... Then she finds why he came, what he wanted, and that he got it. She knows it the next day; she receives a telegram that he is dead, heart; she realizes that he knew it was going to happen, and that what he wanted was to walk in April again for a day, an hour.

[Letters, p. 307--dated 29 September 1950]

A retrospect of the life unveils at least one such April per decade: Estelle in the 1910s, Helen Baird in the 1920s, Meta Carpenter in the 1930s, Joan Williams in the late 1940s, and Jean Stein in the 1950s. That lifelong hunger for the youthful sweetheart may help explain why Faulkner defended Hemingway's

Across the River and into the Trees, with its flaming romance between fifty-year-old Colonel Cantwell and a nineteen-year-old girl, more generously than seems reasonable. (Blotner notes that this novel was published the same month that Faulkner wrote the above letter). Unlike Hemingway, however, Faulkner was shrewd enough to see his marriage as a useful protective device, as he explained to Malcolm Cowley:

I'll write to Hemingway. Poor bloke, to have to marry three times to find out that marriage is a failure, and the only way to get any peace out of it is (if you are fool enough to marry at all) keep the first one and stay as far away from her as much as you can, with the hope of some day outliving her. At least you will be safe then from any other one marrying you--which is bound to happen if you ever divorce her.

[Letters p. 203-dated 20 September 1945]

This skepticism toward marriage carried over into the novel Faulkner was working on at that time, *Intruder in the Dust* where the author's persona, Gavin Stevens, editorializes about the sexlessness of modern matrimony. "The automobile has become our national sex symbol," he says, with the American husband "spending all Sunday morning washing and polishing and waxing it because in doing that he is caressing the body of the woman who has long since now denied him her bed." Of the American woman, he says, "My experience was that few of them were interested in love or sex either. They wanted to be married."

By contrast, Faulkner often portrays free sexuality as more attractive than the wedded state. Here arises another consideration by way of sexual

biopsychology. The presumption that a woman elects a male and thereby confers Superior Male status upon him lies behind some of our most abusive sexual epithets. A dirty old man or a "leech," for example, is apt to be an inferior male aspiring beyond his level of electability, and the word "whore" is an interesting instance of a noun whose precise meaning depends upon the sex of the speaker. The term as used by a man conveys his resentment that the woman in question, because of her non-selectivity, did not (could not) designate her sex partner a Superior Male, elected above all others. As used by a woman, the word commonly expresses resentment over unfair competition, or in some instances disdain for any woman not clever enough to require adequate male sacrifice for her favors.

Faulkner's typical independence of judgment concerning this question shows up in his generally favorable and often admiring treatment of the "loose" woman: Caddy Compson, Ruby Lamar in *Sanctuary*, the aviatrix in *Pylon*, the octoroon in *Absalom, Absalom!* ("No, not whores. Sometimes I believe that they are the only true chaste women ... in America"), Houston's mistress and Mink's wife in *The Hamlet*, Nancy Mannigo--the nun" in *Requiem for a Nun*--and Everbe Corinthia in his terminal novel, *The Reivers*. Although both Meta Carpenter and the Blotner biography aver that Faulkner was too fastidious to actually consort with professional sex partners, he may in fact have done so before his artistic success, by elevating him to Superior Male status, rendered any such recourse superfluous. Stark Young, Faulkner's close friend since youth, recalled that Faulkner returned to Mississippi from New York City because "They charged too much for tail in New York."

What married women (or cohabitant lovers) charge for "tail" is not cheap

either, in Faulkner's rueful rendering of this motif. It is fair to surmise that the artist's loss of his childhood sweetheart to a wealthier man contributed something to Horace Benbow's romantic disillusion in *Flags in the Dust*:

For a moment, with her body still against his, she held his face in her two hands and stared at him with intent questioning eyes. "Have you plenty of money, Horace?" And "Yes," he had answered immediately. "Of course I have." And then Belle again, enveloping him like a rich and fatal drug. . . .

Another innocent male who learned too late the correlation between love and wealth is Ike McCaslin in *The Bear*, whose bride repudiated him the moment he repudiated his ancestral legacy; but perhaps the most striking such instance in all of Faulkner's writing is that of Wilbourne in *The Wild Palms*, whose romance vanishes instantly upon his confession of poverty:

"Listen. Tell me again you haven't got any money. Say it.... Come on. Say it."

"I have no money."

"Don't you touch me!" she whispered in a kind of tense fury. "Don't you touch me!"

Faulkner's reliance upon an incredible turn of plot to get the romance going again (Harry happens upon \$1,278 in a public trash bin) indicates how important he considered this insight, being willing to sacrifice artistic realism for it.

Faulkner's gradual ascension from the status of sexual reject to that of

Superior Male eventually spared him the kind of anguish he visited upon Wilbourne--"Oh, you pauper, you damned pauper, you transparent fool"--but in winning the love of several beautiful young women, he discovered for himself the tragic insight that he ascribes to Charlotte in the same novel: "that love and suffering are the same thing... ." What made love and suffering the same thing in the artist's life was the irremediable incompatibility of the sexes we have discussed earlier. For the Superior Male, one capable of attracting a crowd of desirable women, the biological instinct runs toward sexual freedom; for the female, battling off rivals for this man's attention, the need is for security--meaning total, permanent, and exclusive possession of him, which is to say marriage. On the one hand is the premise, voiced by Denis de Rougemont and—a generation later--by John Updike, that (for the male) marriage and passion are incompatible. On the other is the principle, also put forward Updike, that (for the female) a romance must eventually lead to marriage, or else the romance will end in failure. (Updike observed that this is true "in America"; elsewhere the social acceptance or even dignity accorded to mistresses may put a different light upon the matter.)

In the letter that Faulkner wrote about Hemingway's marriages, agreement with the Updike-de Rougemont thesis on marriage versus passion is very clear, and it is a thesis he enlarges upon in his fiction. "I had turned into a husband," Wilbourne says in *The Wild Palms*, apropos of his revulsion against domesticity: "exactly like any husband with his Saturday pay envelope and his suburban bungalow... --the doomed worm blind to all passion and dead to all hope and not even knowing it. . . ." But at the same time he was writing those words, Faulkner's sweetheart was in the process of illustrating the female imperative that romance must lead to marriage or be terminated. The crux of

their cross purposes materialized the evening when, after being moved toward getting a divorce by his rival's pursuit of Meta, he reported that the divorce would be "a long, long time" in coming:

Bill left me that night in the blind, stubborn expectation that somehow we would go on as before.... I made no sign that anything had changed, but later as I wrestled with sleeplessness, I knew that I was coming to the end of my love alliance with William Faulkner... [186]

So their love alliance reached the last of the four stages that Robert Penn Warren describes in *A Place to Come To*. "There is a natural history of love affairs, as of trees, men, and revolutions," he writes, "and there are clearly defined stages. The motto of Stage I of any love affair ... is *carpe diem*--or *carpe noctem*, as the case may be--. . . for the moment is all, no past and no future." Stage II, he goes *on* to say, "has its motto: "*in contemptu mundi*... The lovers are not of this world. Each is the other's hermitage, and the world falls away. . . ." There follows Stage III--"But the world survives all contempt, even that of lovers. It ... seeps into a room like smoke under a door or through the keyhole, it rises like water silently creeping up the cellar stairs"--and subsequently, "the conflict with the world, raised to a new level and intensity, leads to a conflict between lovers: i.e., Stage IV." "Inevitably," the Warren persona declares, "as in all cases, the first conflict of wills between [my beloved] and me concerned our relation to the world outside our closed orbit."

Before the night had ended--the same night that began with William Faulkner's report on his divorce prospects--Stages I and II had hopelessly succumbed to Stages III and IV in Meta Carpenter's deliberations:

I could not [sic] longer cope with the situation. I could not handle subterfuge, play games, deceive, live in the Back Street, as we called it then, of a married man's life.... I could not wait the ten years until Jill might or might not tell a kindly judge that it was her father she chose to live with, not her mother. I would be past my middle thirties, forty only a blink away, and it would be difficult for me, impossible perhaps, to bear healthy children at that age.... By morning I had made my decision to break off with Bill. [187]

Having made that decision, Ms. Carpenter went on to illustrate another striking discrepancy in the psychology of the sexes. While it might be said that both sexes compartmentalize their romantic relationships, Faulkner--like many another Superior Male--compartmentalized his life spatially: he might have happily gone on forever dividing his emotional map between Hollywood and Oxford (and, as increasing fame added to his attractiveness, a few other places), whereas Ms. Carpenter compartmentalized her life in terms of a sequence of time, investing her entire emotional capital in the Faulkner connection and then slamming and locking the door behind her, moving everything she had into the new compartment of Wolfgang Rebner, rather like the octoroon in *Absalom, Absalom!* ("not ... carrying along with her all the old accumulated rubbish-years which we call memory, the recognizable I, but changing from phase to phase as the butterfly changes once the cocoon is cleared, carrying nothing of what was into what is ... but eliding complete and intact and unresisting into the next avatar"):

As I put space between myself and my need for Bill, I began to open up

emotionally to Wolfgang Rebner. . . His declarations of love and adoration lifted me like a dancer in an adagio turn. Whole areas of my heart were liberated....In September, I received my first proposal of marriage from Wolfgang. [188]

Thereafter Faulkner became witness to a further discrepancy: men play games for fun; women play for keeps. Great genius though he was, Faulkner learned this particular old verity of the (female) heart only as any other man would do, through the battering of painful experience:

"I'm not going to sleep with you anymore."

He looked beseechingly into my eyes.

"I mean it, Bill. I'm engaged to Wolfgang. I'm going to marry him.

"Can we see each other as friends?"

"Of course. . . ."

Bill patiently played the hobbled lover for a tick over a week, then exploded. The forbearance I demanded of him was too severe. Wolfgang and I were not married yet. Only a married man could be cuckolded, didn't I know that? How could I hold him off that way? He was not a monk.... Why wouldn't I let him make love to me again? Why couldn't we go to my place or to a hotel ... anywhere? It was then I realized that I must have my Aunt Ione with me until I was married. I appealed to her to take the first train to Los Angeles.... [191-193]

With the arrival of Aunt Ione--one can imagine the impact of such a move on a Southern Gentleman--the game was over, and (so Meta captions a photograph of her and Wolfgang) "I had closed Faulkner out of my life." Perhaps the

highest wisdom to be distilled from the end of the affair is the theme dramatized in another novel by Robert Penn Warren, *Night Rider*.-- love must become part of something larger than itself, or it dies. Meta Carpenter appeared to realize this truism almost from the start, when Faulkner was holding out for the *in contemptu mundi* attitude:

"Why, dear one, exactly why?" [why meet with her closest friends?] ... Bill asked the question in a voice that was stiff with unconcealed irritation.

"Because ... if you had your way, we would never see anyone. You'd let nothing intrude on us. We would live suspended in the world."

"I don't need anyone but you, Carpenter." [59]

Though greatly in awe of his genius, the young woman held fast to her superior insight in this instance:

He flung out his hands in bewilderment. "Then why do we have to accommodate to others? Why can't we go on just as we have been'?"

I was on the point of giving in ... [but], activated by the fear of what we were coming to, I stood my crumbling ground. I had to. We were consuming each other in our self-isolation... Bill had placed us in a bubble and we were using up the air in it; one day we would not be able to breathe.... We needed others to impinge on us, others to relate to. [67]

That their love benefited from this reaching out toward something larger than itself is amply evident, but in the end that process of making larger connections came to imply the necessity of marriage, a prospect that contradicted the sexual biochemistry of the man. "His sexual key was the image of a young woman,

fresh and fragrant beneath her summer cotton dress, tremblingly responsive to his desire," Ms. Carpenter observed concerning the early phase of their love relationship (127). A decade later, when marriage with him appeared really attainable, she seemed to forget that this aspect of her lover's nature could pose grave risks for a bride nearing her forties. In their brief reunion of this period, she turned bitter:

He had promised that when Jill was old enough--she was twelve now--he would move for a divorce.... But Bill had forgotten his promise. I could not forgive him that. When he reached for me in the night, I pushed him away.
[311-312]

Although her book has a clear ring of sincerity in telling the truths of her heart, she proved less willing to fathom the truths of his so far as her sexual competitors were concerned. Drawing upon the old supposition that repressed sexuality improves non-sexual performance, she claimed that Faulkner "for long periods by sheer exercise of will purged himself of the tickle of physical passion and consciously used the accruing power to feed his genius" (126-27). (Hemingway reportedly did likewise, holding that sexual and artistic performance "operate on the same motor.") Less believably, even in the limited fight that filters through the authorized biography and the *Letters*, Ms. Carpenter claims a virtually lifelong monopoly over Faulkner's libido, his Superior Male status notwithstanding:

He could not complete the act of love after the first years of marriage with his drunken, quarrelsome wife or at the nearby bawdy houses.... When his fame. . . made him a magnet to women everywhere ... he remained, except

for one brief, twilight love affair, more self-denying than voracious. Sensualist, yes, as some of the drawings he made for me and his letters confirm. Womanizer not at all" [127].

Throughout his work, Faulkner wrote of the need in every man to mythologize his existence, letting his life be subsumed within an overbelief that could give his life its meaning. Bayard Sartoris, Quentin Compson, Darl Bundren, Wash Jones, Ike McCaslin--any number of Faulkner's most haunting characters show either an absence or a collapse of some such myth to live by or a life-search for the same. For Meta Carpenter the belief "that I had loved and been loved by a man for the ages" (127)--that, in fact, she had been his only profound love, as measured against his sexless wife and his "one brief, twilight affair"--became the grand myth that vindicated her existence. To the end, even after she had intuited—correctly--"that Bill and I would never meet again," she nurtured the fantasy that he would verify this sense of her worth to him:

Jill was married. Estelle was Estelle, with only familiarity's hold on him. Other men at his age had left wives of many years in a last breakout of passion for another woman. Might not Faulkner be tempted to throw over everything else, face scandal, criticism, in order to live with me? I wrote him after a few days and told him I could meet him in New York.... [330]

This was in the mid-1950s, when the artist, nearing his sixtieth year, was walking in April again with Jean Stein, a beautiful nineteen-year-old who had wangled an introduction to him just when he was losing Joan Williams to her future husband. (Thus far, Ms. Stein has maintained a discreet reticence about her connection to Faulkner, but both the Blotner biography and the *Letters*

indicate a close relationship. To help her career, Faulkner--devising the questions himself--granted her the *Paris Review* interview, considered by Joseph Blotner his best ever.)

For Faulkner the prime lesson of Eros was the theme that occasioned his most passionate novel, *The Wild Palms*, written "in order to try to stave off what I thought was heart-break" (*Letters*, 338). That theme--"between grief and nothing I will take grief"--became a virtual talisman of his affective life, recurring verbatim in his talking and writing to Meta (*A Loving Gentleman*, 230, 317), in his farewell to Joan Williams (Blotner, 1431), and in miscellaneous circumstances (e.g., a letter to Marjorie Lyons: *Letters*, 301). That the choice lay solely between grief and nothing appeared more and more certain as the cumulative experience of his late middle age attested. "Change in people," he wrote Meta, "saddest of all, division, separation, all left is the remembering, the dream, until you almost believe that anything beautiful is nothing else but dream" (326).

His foreknowledge that love would mean suffering surfaced also in his parting from Joan Williams--"It was serious with me; just because I knew all the time that the moment would come when I would have to anguish, does not make it easier"--and regarding her he lapsed for a moment from his heroic standard: "Not bitter: just damned sad, take the maestro's advice and never never never fall in love" (Blotner, 1477, 1430). Even his praise for Graham Greene's poignant *The End of the Affair*--"for me one of the best, most true and moving novels of my time, in anybody's language" (*Letters*, 327-28)--appears to draw upon some similar reservoir of personal melancholy.

The lessons of Eros lead inevitably, then, to the unsolvable problem of how to sustain losses--a problem that doubtless contributed its weight to Faulkner's occasional rumination of later years that life is not worth living, and never was. Yet, in the end, grief becomes the truest measure of value. To Meta Carpenter, Faulkner wrote:

... I know grief is the invictable part of it, the thing that makes it cohere; that grief is the only thing you are capable of sustaining, keeping; that what is valuable is what you have lost, since then you never had the chance to wear out and so lose it shabbily.... [317]

In effect, he had lived out the prophecy of his sculptor-persona, Gordon, away back in *Mosquitoes*—

Only an idiot has no grief; only a fool would forget it. What else is there in this world sharp enough to stick to your guts?

BETWEEN TRUTH AND FACT: *Faulkner's Symbols of Identity*

“ . . . the story behind every brow ”

When William Faulkner wrote to Malcolm Cowley that he did not care much for facts but only for truth, he was touching upon a discrepancy that is fundamental to his style, characterization, and sense of purpose in literature; for the conflict between the truth--that personal, subjective vision that every man privately lives by--and the facts, or objective realities of the outer world, is typically the essence of the predicament of Faulkner's characters. In simplest terms, the truth is how one appears to oneself; the facts are how one appears to others. In terms of style, Faulkner rendered this conflict most powerfully by combining the interior monologue form, which renders in full the truth of each speaker's life, with the technique of multiple narrators, thereby subjecting each of these "truths" to the uncomprehending--and often hostile--eye of outside observers.

In *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* (and *Absalom, Absalom!* too, in its own way), each character thus rolls from subject to object; from truth to fact; from being the center of almost infinite horizons of consciousness within his own monologue to becoming a mere spectacle in the eye of his neighboring speaker, who for the most part can see only the outer facts about his fellows. In the end, the psychological integrity of Faulkner's people depends upon their ability to construct a bridge, however fragile, that can mediate between the facts and the truth of their lives, thereby subserving each

character's central mode of identity.

This bridge, mediating between truth and fact, or subject and object, constitutes Faulkner's version of what T. S. Eliot called the objective correlative--a term Eliot had to stop and define by way of justifying his opinion that *Hamlet*, "so far from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, . . . is most certainly an artistic failure":

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion-, such that when the external facts ... are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

Hamlet's failure, Mr. Eliot wrote, consists in its lack of an understandable motivation for the main character's inflamed emotions:

This complete adequacy of the external to the emotion ... is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which . . . is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. . . . His disgust is occasioned by his mother, but . . . his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action.

(125).

The true emotional motivation for Hamlet, Eliot suspected, lay somewhere outside the play, most probably in the emotional catastrophe that evidently

befell Shakespeare himself in the Sonnets: "*Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art." (The "stuff" that Eliot cannot quite define is quite obviously the break-up of Shakespeare's great love affair with his Dark Lady and with his "golden boy," an emotional disaster that left its mark preeminently in the grand theme of betrayal over the next dozen years of Shakespeare's writing career.)

Mr. Eliot's formula, though stated as an aesthetic principle, describes with remarkable accuracy the personal psychology of Faulkner's people, whose objective correlatives, in providing "complete adequacy of the external to the emotion," bridge the gap between truth and fact. To illustrate, we might begin with a few symbols on the personal or idiosyncratic level, moving from there to the larger modes of identity such as sex, class, race, and culture. Faulkner's artist figures work mostly on this level of private symbolism, their handiwork comprising the visible object that manifests their inner truth to the outer world. Given sufficiently large obstacles to achievement, these artist figures may attain genuine comic-heroic status, as Cash Bundren does in beveling his mother's coffin in a cloudburst rather than ripping a few boards off the barn to finish the job, as Vernon Tull advises. Later he makes painstaking wooden plugs rather than putty over the holes Vardaman bored so his mother could breathe--never minding that this same coffin, a few days hence, will disappear from the eyes of men forever. The coffin, then, represents not only his affirmation of existential freedom --he could do this much for his mother, though he could do nothing about her dying--it is also the objective correlative for his craft as a carpenter, the central truth of his identity.

Another artist hero, the French architect in *Absalom, Absalom!*, invests his

identity in two objects: his plumed hat, representing his status as a Frenchman, and Sutpen's mansion, representing his artistry in architecture. Loss of the hat causes a memorable vignette of despair--"He ... flung the hat up in a gesture that Grandfather said you simply could not describe, that seemed to gather all misfortune and defeat that the human race ever suffered into a little pinch in his fingers like dust and fling it backward over his head" (257-5)--but the artist recoups by dint of his other identity symbol, "a house which he doubtless not only expected but firmly intended never to see again" (like Cash vis-à-vis the coffin). The art object in this case represents not only a manifestation of its maker's inner being but a stunning triumph--the only one in the book--over Thomas Sutpen's otherwise invincible will, as the latter's "dream of grim and castlelike magnificence" (38) submits to the Frenchman's stubborn craft.

A similar symbol of personal identity is Labove's diploma in *The Hamlet*, no mere instrument for upward mobility to him but a totem that objectifies, from his innermost being, "his hill-man's purely emotional and foundationless faith in education, the white magic of Latin degrees, which was an actual counterpart of the old monk's faith in his wooden cross." For Popeye too, in *Sanctuary*, a private symbolism compensates for an otherwise inadequate sense of identity. The absence of a father figure--Popeye's basic problem—calls forth as a substitute role model the 1920s image of the Italian-American gangster (Popeye's name is Vitelli), whom he emulates in every particular of dress (a tight black suit, grooming (hair with brilliantine), mannerism (smoking without use of fingers, holding his head at a wary angle), and code (the tough witticisms, the omerta code of silence unto death when in the hands of the law). And by developing masterly skill with gun and car in this role, Popeye symbolically compensates for his lack of male potency. To complete this brief

catalogue of private symbols, the final entry would have to be Benjy's slipper, again a palpable object that, when rubbed like Aladdin's lamp, magically bridges the chasm between fact, the barrenness of time present, and truth, the paradisiacal time past when he was Maury, not Benjy, and was surrounded by people who loved him.

In turning from these private symbols to the larger modes of identity, we again find in every instance a gap between inner truth and external reality that must be bridged by "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events" peculiar to the character in question. With respect to sexual identity, both the male and female principles offer a rich study in this psychology. Because they lack the male initiative, Faulkner's women face the worse plight concerning sexual identity, and their facts-versus-truth predicament is the more intractable. With their identity as females dependent upon acquiring a lover/husband and children, Faulkner's old maids must resort largely to fantasy in order to have a satisfactory identity. Yet, in every case, the Faulkner old maid reposes her fantasy, and her identity with it, upon some actual object in the outer world, charging it with her private emotional integrity. The facts in Judith Sutpen's life, for example, are that she is a virgin spinster; the truth of her heart, however, is that she is Charles Bon's wedded bride; and the tangible object that bridges between fact and truth is the wedding dress that she and her female helpers somehow sewed from scraps and stitches during the grinding privation of the Civil War.

For Rosa Coldfield the schism between truth and facts is all the more striking. The facts declare that she too is a virginal old maid and, unlike Judith Sutpen, one who hates and fears all men because of her mother's death in

childbirth and what she interprets to be her sister's murder at the hands of that devil figure, Thomas Sutpen. Her truth, however, is that she too has acquired a betrothed and prospective husband--and it does not matter that he is that same devil figure whom she hates and loathes above all men. What bridges the chasm between truth and fact in her case are the words that Sutpen has factually uttered, his casual and impersonal invitation to marry. When Sutpen later qualifies his offer, so that he will marry her only after she gives birth to living male issue, her towering bitterness rises not so much against Sutpen's offense to Southern gentility as against his crime in destroying her bridge between fact and truth, thereby leaving both fantasy and identity in permanent ruins.

A yet more striking case is that of Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily." The facts in her instance are that she is a murderous necrophiliac; her truth is that she is a romantic heroine who, having yielded up her father to time and death and townspeople (it took three days to persuade her to give up the body), would never make that mistake again, and so maintained her lover against time, death, townspeople, and the lover's imminent desertion, all together. Crazed though she is, it suits my thesis that even Emily cannot live by fantasy alone; she too requires an objective correlative, an actual, tangible object in the real world that might confirm her inner truth--the object being, in her case, the bridal chamber in the attic complete with rose and silver trimmings and skeletal bridegroom.

Among Faulkner's unmarried women, as our final example, Joanna Burden requires an objective correlative of special complexity to serve her double identity as secret sexual tigress and public benefactress of the Negro. Her bridge between these truths and their opposing facts--that she has reached menopause

and is subtly a racist--is her sexual and philanthropic relationship with Joe Christmas, whose identity as a "Negro" male nicely complements her need for both sexual and racial connection until his decision to leave her precipitates their final crisis.

Normally the Female Principle finds its objective correlative in love, child, and marriage contract, but one of Faulkner's great achievements in literature is his apprehension of the women's liberation psychology a generation ahead of its time. A statement by Anais Nin, "We are engaged in the task of peeling off the false selves, the programmed selves, the selves created by our families, our culture, our religions," nicely corroborates the truth-versus-fact dilemma that Faulkner portrayed decades earlier in rebellious females like Caddie Compson, Charlotte Rittenmeyer, and the girl parachutist in *Pylon*. Intense, tragic, doomed and damned from the start, these free spirits drew forth instances of their author's most impassioned rhetoric.

The most tragic victim of them all, it seems fair to say--because the most terribly trapped and alone--is Addie Bundren of *As I Lay Dying*, whose truth/facts dichotomy is totally intractable. The facts in her case are the marriage and children that devolved from her decision, years ago, to accept as husband a slobbish nincompoop, infinitely her inferior, rather than live on as an old maid schoolteacher. Her rage at having to make such a terrible choice, literally the only choice open to a woman in her social position, has turned into hatred of her husband and children; but at least once she did have an opposing truth to live by: her feeling of transcendence in the illicit affair with the preacher Whitfield. Subsequently, the visible object that mediates between the facts and her truth is her son Jewel, so named because she loves him alone of

her five children, not because he resembles her (it is obviously Darl who resembles her most in his keen intelligence), but solely because he was born of the illicit affair and so can objectify her secret rebellion against the awful entrapment of the marriage.

By contrast with the Female Principle, Faulkner's men have a great advantage in that their expression of sexual identity is free from the terrible female dependency on other people. Indeed, the male's identity does not even require the existence of the opposite sex, much less its cooperation, since the Male Principle manifests itself through competition with male rivals, much in the mode of Alfred Adler's individual psychology: "A thorough-going study has taught us as our *most general pre-supposition*, that the psyche has as its objective the goal of *superiority*" (emphasis Adler's). The male's disadvantage is that he has got to be brave, braver and stronger than the rival who himself is seeking the goal of superiority.

For this reason, although Faulkner's objectification of the Male Principle may sometimes take symbolic form (like Jewel's and Houston's untamable stallions in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* or like Ikkemotubbe's steamboat), in most cases the object that mediates between the inner truth of a man's superiority and the outer world of fact-minded skepticism is the heroic deed or act that compels recognition from other males. Jewel's rescue of his mother's coffin from flood and fire is one such bridge between truth and fact; and another is Labove's invincible play in football and basketball, which leads to the valley conference championship in *The Hamlet*. Towering over them all is the awesome figure of Thomas Sutpen, the Male Principle in pristine form and the single-handed victor over a slave rebellion ("He put the musket down and went

out and subdued them") and the Ku Klux Klan (to "This may mean war, Sutpen," he answered, "I am used to it" [*Absalom!*, 254, 162]). In Sutpen's case, a handwritten letter from General Lee saying "This man is brave" objectifies the essential nature of the man but, in general, the Male Principle operates through what Eliot called "a situation, a chain of events," rather than through a "set of objects." In either case, however, the principle of the objective correlative remains functional.

In moving from sexual to social identity, the terms of the objective correlative become greatly more various and subtle. For this reason, it will be useful to pause for a moment and draw upon the psychology of William James and Jean-Paul Sartre in so far as they illuminate Faulkner's thinking. From James we learn that the matrix of identity--in all its modes--is the body:

The world experienced--otherwise called 'the field of consciousness'--comes at all times with our body as its center. . . . Everything circles around it, and is felt from its point of view. The word 'I,' then, is primarily a noun of position, like 'this' and 'here.'

From Sartre we learn that the psychic consequence attending this constraint of one's identity within its cylinder of flesh is nausea. Writing in the Victorian era, Professor James was too genteel to press this point, but Sartre, with characteristic unpleasantness, seems rather to relish his humiliating realization:

A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness.... We must realize that it is on the foundation of this nausea that all concrete and empirical nauseas (nausea caused by spoiled meat,

fresh blood, excrement, etc.) are produced and make us vomit.

In terms of our truth/facts dichotomy, then, consciousness is the truth we live by; the body, with its blood, vomit, excrement (Faulkner's "old meat"), is its opposing fact; and nausea is the connecting bridge between them. Supporting Sartre's system, two literary cognates that come immediately to mind are T. S. Eliot's Prufrock and Lil (of "The Fire Sermon"), whose amorous intentions (truth) succumb hopelessly to the facts of bodily decrepitude--thin hair and physique, and rotten teeth, respectively. (Occasionally, as in Kafka, the reverse is true--perfect physical health being at odds with a fatal spiritual disease--but nausea is still the predominant feeling.)

Although more subtly than is true of race, sex, or age, social identity also operates around the matrix of the body. Here a further linkup between William James and Sartre will prove directly relevant to Faulkner's rendering of the subject. We begin with Professor James's classic formulation concerning the social self: "*A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any of these images is to wound him*" (emphasis James's). By way of pointing out just where this image of self may most readily be wounded, James added--perhaps with a nod to Carlyle and Dickens--a bit of clothes philosophy to his discussion: "The old saying that the human person is composed of three parts--soul, body, and clothes--is more than a joke. We ... appropriate our clothes and identify ourselves with them. . . ."

Sartre's refinement of this psychology consists of the Sartrean look or stare, which--again reminding us of Prufrock ("eyes that fix you in a formulated

phrase") and Lil ("I swear, I can't bear to look at you")--confers an unacceptable identity upon its victim:

What does *being seen* mean for me?

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. . . . I am a pure consciousness of things. . . . But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! ... I shudder as a wave of shame sweeps over me... Now shame ... is shame of *self*; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. . . . Thus in the shock which seizes me when I apprehend the Other's look, this happens--that suddenly I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities.

In this sudden shift from seer to thing seen, from subjective consciousness to being an object of the Other's judgment, Sartre's peeper at the keyhole nicely paradigms the mirror analogues of Faulkner's fiction. With respect to Faulkner's rendering of social identity, Thomas Sutpen must stand as both the chief victim and chief perpetrator of the Jamesian/ Sartrean dilemma. Invincible though he is as champion of the Male Principle, Sutpen learns in moving from hillbilly to tidewater country that "there was a difference between ... men, not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink and then get up and walk out of the room" (*Absalom!*, 226). The Sartrean stare that mortally wounds Sutpen's social self comes from the elegant Negro butler who, after a glance at Sutpen's clothes and grooming, orders him away from the mansion's front door and around to the kitchen:

And now he stood there before that white door with the monkey nigger barring it and looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes, and I don't reckon he had even ever experimented with a comb. . . . He had never thought about his own hair or clothes or anybody else's hair or clothes until he saw that monkey nigger . . . looking at them and . . . the nigger told him, even before he had had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back. [Absalom!, 232]

From this moment on, for Sutpen as for Sartre, hell is other people; and he must invest the whole of his works and days trying to bridge the facts of his social identity (white trash) with his inner truth (I'm as good as any man). Tragically, the objective correlative that Sutpen chooses, his "design" of an aristocratic dynasty, fatally clashes with the identity-needs of his various psychic dependents; so that he can sustain his bridge between fact and truth only by destroying theirs. Among those dependents, Sutpen's victims make up a checklist of all the important modes of identity: racial (Eulalia Bon, "face filled with furious and almost unbearable unforgiving almost like fever" [*Absalom!*, 297]); filial (Charles Bon, "thinking *That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me ... lust as he will let me know ... I am his son*" [319]); sexual ("Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn't keep him" [168]); and class (Wash Jones, "thinking quietly, like in a dream: *I kaint have heard what I know I heard. . . . 'You said if she was a mare you could give her a decent stall in the stable*" [288]).

It is appropriate that this last bid of bridge-busting is Sutpen's last, breaking the most spectacularly far-reaching connection of them all between truth

(Wash's Bible-ordained supremacy to all Negroes and equality with all men of white skin) and fact--Wash's exceptionally degraded status at the bottom of the social heap, such that a Negro woman can even block his entrance to Sutpen's kitchen: "Stop right there, white man. Stop right where you is. You aint never crossed this door while Colonel was here and you aint going to cross it now" (281). In Wash's case, the objective correlative that visibly bridges this awful chasm is his infant great-granddaughter who, in being fathered by Thomas Sutpen, represents a miraculous confluence of blood lines between Wash's white trash family and that of the godlike aristocrat.

It is interesting that what calls forth Wash's instantaneous metamorphosis of character is a humiliation directed not at him personally but at his family--precisely the mode of identity that Sutpen has most grievously injured with respect to his own families. When Sutpen dismisses the infant he has sired, thereby causing Wash Jones to "see his whole life shredded from him ... like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire," Wash avenges his ruined social and family honor through recourse to something out of the Male Principle: the heroic act that says, "This man is brave." In rising, scythe in hand, against the transgressor and later against the whole posse of Sutpen's peers--"and now Wash was running ... straight into the lanterns and the gun barrels ... while de Spain ran backward before him, saying, 'Jones! Stop! Stop, or I'll kill you. Jones! Jones! Jones!'"--Wash displays what William James called "life's supreme mystery," involving an ultimate transformation of identity:

In heroism, we feel, life's supreme mystery is hidden. . . . No matter what a man's frailties otherwise may be, if he be willing to risk death, and still

more if he suffer it heroically, in the service he has chosen, the fact consecrates him forever. Inferior to ourselves in this or that way, if yet we cling to life, and he is able "to fling it away like a flower" as caring nothing for it, we account him in the deepest way our born superior.

So Wash, in losing his most cherished symbol of identity, becomes twice-born, in William James's phraseology. Thomas Sutpen's witness to some such transformation is evident in the type of Sartrean stare he fixes--in his last seconds of life--upon his erstwhile lackey:

His eyes widened and narrowed, almost like a man's fists flexing and shutting, as Wash began to advance toward him, stooping a little. Very astonishment kept Sutpen still for the moment, watching that man whom in twenty years he had no more known to make any motion save at command than he had the horse upon which he rode. Again his eyes narrowed and widened . . . "Stand back," he said suddenly and sharply. "Don't touch me."

"I'm going to tech you, Kernel," Wash said....

If class identity operates around the matrix of the body, with the Sartrean stare assigning a place according to one's grooming, clothing, and dental health, the principle holds true all the more obviously with respect to race. Unable to escape their inferior status through either the heroic deed or upward social mobility, Faulkner's racial scapegoats provoked their author's moral imagination most largely when mixed blood excluded a Joe Christmas or an Etienne de St. Velery Bon from their respective black and white communities. For Etienne, after his subjection to the Sartrean stare in the courtroom ("Every face in the

room turned toward the prisoner"--203), the object that conveys his identity to the world is the Negress he marries, a wholly symbolic wife chosen to represent his rage and defiance towards the South's ethnic hierarchy. Joe Christmas's choice of a black rather than white identity is objectified in his razor, the instrument in the end of his own gruesome murder and castration.

In these instances the scapegoat's loss of identity turns his objective correlative into a mere negative symbol, a weapon of hostility and defiance. Faulkner's fully socialized Negroes, however, affirm their identity through positive rituals and objects, like Bayard's host enjoying his Christmas in *Flags in the Dust* and Lucas Beauchamp reversing the white boy's largesse in *Intruder in the Dust*. We come finally to the broadest of all modes of identity, that of culture, where the truth/facts schism has its most ruinous impact. Historically, every culture begins with a perfect coalescence between and fact, so that no bridge is necessary between them. From Saint Paul through John Milton, we may say that the truths of Christian culture were regarded as facts, credible enough to sustain the innermost identity of the true believer. But with the rise of the Age of Reason, Christian truth parted from the facts of science, each going its own way in the eighteenth century and clashing head-on-via Darwin, Nietzsche, and company--in the nineteenth. By the early twentieth century Herman Hesse was saying, "Human life is reduced to real suffering, to hell, only when two ages, two cultures and religions overlap"; and Quentin Compson would shortly be watching Jesus walk down the long and lonely light rays.

Faulkner's most tragic and pathetic characters are thus his doomed intellectuals, like Quentin Compson and his father, Horace Benbow, and Gail

Hightower, who, unable to bridge the gulf between their genteel heritage and the total anarchy that confronts them, seek their various escapes in withdrawal, suicide, and alcohol. In a contrary way, because they are a generation ahead of their time rather attached to the past, Harry and Charlotte are also victims of the overlap of cultures in *The Wild Palms*. Here, too, there is no bridge to mediate between the lovers' truths--love, freedom, the search for transcendence--and the facts that oppose them: their need for money and society's definition of adultery, cohabitation, and abortion as crimes. So they, too, futilely seek escape rather than a bridge across the truth/facts schism. Henry Sutpen is also a victim of his culture, forced to choose between his truth, "*You [Charles Bon] are my brother,*" and the facts of his Old South heritage: '*No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me Henry*' (357). Various modes of identity converge in this scene--sexual, racial, familial--but it is the cultural taboo against miscegenation that finally forces Henry's hand against his brother, after the lesser taboos of bigamy and incest had failed of this effect.

It is a terrible thing to be torn, like Henry Sutpen, between truth and fact, but more terrible still is the state of having facts with no truth to live by. Faulkner's most striking victim of this condition would have to be Darl Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. A clairvoyant seer of facts--he intuited his brother's bastardom, his sister's pregnancy, and his mother's hatred of her children—Darl is the most alienated of the Bundrens because he totally lacks any truth to live by. Darl's truth, like Charles Bon's, would have inhered in his sense of family had his parents not been so totally inadequate. For both Darl and Charles Bon, the missing symbol of identity is best defined (perhaps) in a sentence from Thomas Wolfe:

The deepest search in life, it seemed to me, the thing that in one way or another was central to all living was man's search to find a father, not merely the father of his flesh, not merely the lost father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger.

Thomas Sutpen, by a glance, could have filled this need: Anse Bundren is something else again.

Faulkner's social philosophy, and most notably his quarrel with the Law, turned very largely upon the truth/facts schism. The trouble with the Law is that it deals solely in facts, not in truth, and so it treats uncomprehendingly at best and unjustly at worst a long series of characters whom Faulkner hales into the courtroom: Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, Goodwin in *Sanctuary*, Mink in the Snopes trilogy, Harry Wilbourne in *The Wild Palms*, the convict in *Old Man*, Charles Etienne de St. Velery Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*, Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun*. As one who sided with truth over fact, Faulkner was especially harsh on minor villains like the lawyer in *Absalom!*, legalistically computing the dollar value of incest and bigamy at Sutpen's Hundred. His own search for the truth behind the facts of murder, theft, arson, or whatever is nicely rendered in a comment by Mr. Compson in *Absalom!* [121]

Have you noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? The thief who steals

not for greed but for love, the murderer who kills not out of lust but pity?

Faulkner's treatment of history likewise prefers truth over fact, especially since the facts--"a few old mouth-to-mouth tales," "letters without salutation or signature"--are so thin as to leave it mostly to the imagination to conjure up "the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting" (100-101). The moral imagination in particular--which means the ability to lead other people's lives--provided Faulkner's own bridge between truth and fact. The facts, for Faulkner, meant mainly the sweep of time and change and loss such as we see in the "Domesday Book"--that authorial commentary on Yoknapatawpha history that runs from *The Bear* and the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* through *Requiem for a Nun* and the later Snopes trilogy. The reduction of the old Compson place to "row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individually owned demiurban bungalows," for example, and the destruction of the wilderness in *The Bear*, were facts that Faulkner accepted with the observation that, "No matter how fine anything seems, it can't endure, because once it stops, abandons motion, it is dead."

What sanctifies such facts is the "truth" of courage, sacrifice, and compassion that prevails in any age, from Indian times to our own. To spotlight those truths is to "create much better people than God can," as Faulkner claimed any writer worth his salt tries to do. Creating better people than God can is in turn to risk unrealism in fiction, mere romantic escapism. Greatly offsetting that risk, so as to make the old truths of the heart credible and efficacious for us, are Faulkner's symbols of identity that enable us to cross over from the facts to the truth of those wonderful Faulkner people, truly getting the story behind every brow.

TRANSITION: *From Freud to Marx*

“ . . . the only alternative to change and progress is death. . . ”

"Freud I'm not familiar with," Faulkner says in *Faulkner in the University*, a disclaimer that he amplifies elsewhere in the same book: "The writer don't have to know Freud to have written things which anyone who does know Freud can divine and reduce into symbols." Yet, in *Mosquitoes* Faulkner mentions "this park of dark and rootless trees which Dr. Ellis and your Germans have recently thrown open to the public," and, concerning the most eminent of those "Germans," he modulates the metaphor:

“...There are rooms, dark rooms, that they [literary masters of the past] didn't know anything about at all. Freud and these other--”

"Discovered them just in time to supply our shelterless literati with free sleeping quarters....”

What Freud discovered in those dark rooms--the immense power of sexuality and of family life in shaping human personality--obviously affected Faulkner's sexual comedies such as *Mosquitoes* and his family tragedies like *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*; yet Faulkner never succumbed, as Eugene O'Neill did, for example, in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, to any doctrinaire use of Freudian influence. Rather, he blended some of the great psychologist's insights so smoothly into his own vision as to make them strictly subserve his artistic purpose.

Faulkner's comment to Jean Stein, that "Everybody talked about Freud when I lived in New Orleans, but I have never read him," indicates that he acquired his Freudian insights from the generally Freudianized intellectual atmosphere of the times. (Freud's *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*--hereafter abbreviated GI--had been published in America by Horace Liveright in 1920.) Whether or not he did read Freud's work, several Freudian concepts did figure importantly in the novel he was writing--his first, *Soldiers' Pay*--at the time psychoanalysis was an ubiquitous subject within Faulkner's New Orleans circle. Of major importance among those concepts is the pleasure principle, defined in Freud's *General Introduction* as the motive for all human behavior: "It seems that our entire psychical activity is bent upon *procuring pleasure* and *avoiding pain*, that it is automatically regulated by the PLEASURE PRINCIPLE" (GI, p. 365--Freud's emphases). Freud's further linkage between the pleasure principle and sex--"the most intense pleasure of which man is capable, the pleasure in the performance of the sexual act"--completes the definition of a type that Faulkner characterizes almost to the point of allegory in Januarius Jones, the faunlike pleasure-seeker in *Soldiers' Pay*. "A man could very well spend all his time eating and sleeping and procreating, Jones believed"--and his compulsive sexual pursuits plainly place first in that triad. Clearly, Faulkner need not have read Freud in order to conjure up such a character; still, it is notable that the pleasure principle, related in varying degrees of comic or serious intensity to the sexual instinct, repeatedly finds embodiment in the books of Faulkner's earlier career, in characters ranging from Talliaferro and old Simon in *Mosquitoes* and *Sartoris* [later named *Flags in the Dust*] to Temple, Charlotte, and I. O. Snopes in *Sanctuary*, *The Wild Palms*, and *The Hamlet*.

The other most important Freudian concept in *Soldiers' Pay* is that of the trauma, which Freud derived from "patients [who] give the impression that they are *'fixed'* to a particular point in their past, that they do not know how to release themselves from it, and are consequently alienated from both present and future" (GI, p. 287). This general definition of the term evokes a number of Faulkner characters who are tragically fixed to a point in their past: Thomas Sutpen forever vindicating the boy confronting the closed door; Darl Bundren warped and arrested permanently by the revelation that Addie loved only her illegitimate son; Rosa Coldfield psychically immobilized for a half century by Sutpen's vulgar proposition; the three Compson brothers unable to free themselves from the losses--of virtue, of love, of a job in the bank--imposed by a vagrant sister.

Yet, these characters, though traumatized, are not necessarily deranged. "It does also happen ' " Freud says, "that persons may be brought to a complete standstill in life by a traumatic experience which has shaken the whole structure of their lives to the foundations, so that they give up all interest in the present and the future; but these unhappy persons do not necessarily become neurotic" (GI, p. 285). Traumatic neurosis, in contrast to these cases, occurs in Faulkner's parallel to Freud's "forms of [the] illness recently made so common by war . . . [caused by] terrifying experiences involving danger to life." Donald Mahon's extended hallucination as he verges into death in *Soldiers' Pay* exactly illustrates Freud's observations, as we see in the following juxtaposition:

The traumatic neuroses demonstrate very clearly that a fixation to the moment of the traumatic occurrence lies at their root. These patients regularly produce the traumatic situation in their dreams; in cases showing

attacks of an hysterical type it appears that the attack constitutes a complete reproduction of the situation. [GI, p. 286]

Donald Mahon lay quietly.... And suddenly he found that he was passing from the dark world in which he had lived for a time he could not remember, again into a day that had long passed, that had already been spent by those who lived and wept and died. . . .

I never knew I could carry this much petrol, he thought. . . , finding that the day, his own familiar day, was approaching noon. . . . With the quick skill of practice and habit he swept the horizon with a brief observing glance, casting a look above, banking slightly to see behind. All clear. The only craft in sight were far away to the left....

Then, suddenly, . . . the sun that had been full upon him had been brushed away as by a hand. In the moment of realizing this, cursing his stupidity, he dived steeply, slipping to the left. Five threads of vapor passed . . . , then he felt two distinct shocks at the base of his skull and vision was reft from him. . . .

Sight flickered on again, like a poorly made electrical contact, he watched holes pitting into the fabric near him. . . . Then he felt his hand, saw his glove burst, saw his bared bones. Then sight flashed off again and he felt himself lurch, falling until his belt caught him sharply across the abdomen, and he heard something gnawing through his frontal bone like mice....

To illustrate traumatic fixation in such meticulous detail, and then to repeat the motif with impressive force in *Sartoris*, could indicate an irresistible impulse to imitate Hemingway, whose *In Our Time* had set an uncommonly infectious example. A passage in Meta Carpenter's *A Loving Gentleman*, however, shows that the death of Faulkner's airmen expressed genuine dread grounded deeply within the author's own subconscious:

When I returned to the Normandie Village cottage [Meta Carpenter writes] ... the bag of groceries ... dropped out of my hands as I saw Bill huddled on one corner of the bed, hands stretched out, palms foremost, as if to ward off something menacing. His head was bent, eyes mercifully turned away from whatever it was that threatened him, and he moved as I observed him into a crouched position--knees up, shoulders sagging. The bottle of whiskey he had brought with him the night before was only a quarter empty....

"Bill," I called out, my stomach knotting in alarm and shock.

He looked up, no recognition whatever in his face, and screamed, "They're going to get me! Oh, Lordy, oh, Jesus!" He covered his head with hands that alternately flailed and supplicated, shouting over and over in a litany of dread, "They're coming down at me! Help me! Don't let them! They're coming at me! No! No!"

He was a man I no longer knew, and when I tried to touch him, he recoiled from me convulsively.

"Who?" I asked him. "Who's trying to hurt you?"

"They're diving down at me. Swooping. Oh, Lordy!"

"Faulkner, what are you talking about? Who's after you?"

He turned a face as white as library paste toward me. "The Jerries! Can't you see them?" Suddenly he was doubled over, trying to crawl into himself. "Here they come again! They're after me! They're trying to shoot me out of the sky. The goddamn Jerries, they're out to kill me. Oh, merciful Jesus!"

I held my own hands to my stomach, corseting myself against nausea, and groped for the telephone.... Bill's screams, now muffled by the sleeve he held to his mouth, continued in the bedroom....

Ironically, Faulkner's wild hysteria compares rather poorly with Donald Mahon's and Bayard Sartoris's more disciplined response to their traumatic ordeal. Though wholly imaginary, unlike Hemingway's experience, Faulkner's alcohol-induced brush with death nicely illustrates another Freudian principle, that in treating neuroses, "phantasy and reality are to be treated alike.... It is a fact that the patient has created these phantasies, and for the neurosis this fact is hardly less important than ... if he had really experienced what they contain. In contrast to material reality these phantasies possess psychical reality, and we gradually come to understand that in *the world of neurosis PSYCHICAL REALITY is the determining factor*" (GI, pp. 377-78--emphasis Freud's).

If, in general, followers of the pleasure principle and victims of trauma represent comic and tragic poles of Faulkner's art, another Freudian construction, narcissism, figures importantly in Faulkner's literature of social protest, which we might broadly classify within the literary mode of satire. Like Freud, Faulkner characterized narcissism both on the individual and societal levels, but its major importance lay in the social extensions of the ego that Freud related to narcissism in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*:

Closely related races keep one another at arm's length; the South German cannot endure the North German, the Englishman casts every kind of aspersion upon the Scotsman, the Spaniard despises the Portuguese. We are no longer astonished that greater differences should lead to an almost insuperable repugnance, such as the Gallic people feel for the German, the Aryan for the Semite, and the white races for the colored. . . . In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel toward strangers with whom they have to do we may recognize the expression of self-love, of narcissism.

[A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud, hereafter abbreviated GS, pp. 183-84]

So far as group psychology is concerned, Faulkner himself appears narcissistically inclined in *Flags in the Dust (Sartoris)*, where he ridicules his inferiors in race and class for aspiring toward his own culture group's supreme status. (Freud would have noted with interest that those aspirations are sexually objectified, in Byron Snopes's slaving hunger for Narcissa and in Caspey's "I got my white in France, and I'm gwine git it here, too.") Faulkner's intense

regret over the decline of his culture group produces a romanticized portrayal of Narcissa in this novel, which ends with the lovely young widow playing the piano: "Then she turned her head and without ceasing her hands, she smiled at Miss Jenny quietly, a little dreamily, with serene fond detachment.... Beyond the window evening was a windless lilac dream, foster-dam of quietude and peace."

But in his next novel, *Sanctuary*--the next to be written, though not the next published--this genteel image of Southern white ladyhood succumbs to the savage sarcasm which Faulkner mounts against the general psychological tendency implied by this character's name. "Living a life of serene vegetation . . . in a sheltered garden," her "stupid, serene face" is expressive of "that serene and stupid impregnability of heroic statuary,"

Narcissa obstructs her brother's helpfulness to strangers in an effort to ensconce her social image behind insurmountable walls of class, race, and family: "But to walk out [on your wife] just like a nigger.... And to mix yourself up with moonshiners and street-walkers." That his rejoinder—"Think of her, alone, with that baby"--means nothing to her serves to confirm Freud's contention that group consciousness

is as intolerant as it is obedient to authority. It...can only be slightly influenced by kindness, which it regards merely as a form of weakness.... Fundamentally it is entirely conservative, and it has a deep aversion from all innovations and advances and an unbounded respect for tradition. (GS, pp. 172-73).

In *Sanctuary* the motif of narcissism extends literally from the first to the

last page, from Horace at the spring ("the drinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking") to Temple in the Luxembourg Gardens ("she took out a compact and opened it upon a face in miniature sullen and discontented and sad"). Strung between these terminal points are numerous other instances of mirror imagery: Little Belle's "Pure dissimulation" being reflected to her stepfather; Van combing his hair "before a fragment of mirror" after fighting with Goodwin over Temple; and Temple studying her reflection almost incessantly--in the corncrib, in Popeye's car, in her room at the brothel. And Popeye takes the narcissistic absorption in his image to a pathological extreme with his affectation-unto-death of the gangster's dress, manner, and code, culminating in his final request concerning his appearance: "Fix my hair, Jack." ("Sure," the sheriff said. "I'll fix it for you"; springing the trap.")

Behind this profusion of narcissistic images lies another Freudian insight relating narcissism to the mentality of a child. To Freud the "primary infantile narcissism," or "the original narcissism in which the childish ego found its self-sufficiency" (GI, p. 436), finds an analogue in the regression of group consciousness toward the standards of a child. Citing William McDougall's opinion in *The Group Mind* that the group's "behavior is like that of an unruly child," Freud goes on to amplify that analogy:

Some of its [a group's] features--the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action--these and similar features . . . show an unmistakable picture of a regression of mental activity to an earlier stage

such as we are not surprised to find among savages or children.

[GS, pp. 174-175]

To be sure, in *The Future of an Illusion* Freud qualified this unflattering description by acknowledging that, when institutionalized by highly organized forms such as Church or Army, the group mind or group ideal can produce highly altruistic acts of self-sacrifice in its followers, for which reason "the most important item in the psychical inventory of a civilization ... consists in its religious ideas in the widest sense." In the more hopeful works of his later career, like *The Bear*, *Requiem for a Nun*, and *A Fable*, Faulkner did his best to refine that psychical inventory of religious ideas; but in his works of darkest mood, like *Sanctuary* and *Light in August*, the narcissistic regressions of group consciousness move Faulkner's people toward religious fanaticism, class and race conflict, and ultimately the lynch mob--expressive of features, Freud said, "such as we are not surprised to find among savages or children."

Further sustaining Faulkner's affinity with Freud, the motif of narcissism in *Sanctuary* finds abundant support in the book's central image of arrested development, that of the adult who regresses into or refuses to graduate out of mental childhood, which turns out to be the essential sanctuary of the book's title. Virtually the entire cast of characters in this novel are portrayed in terms of this image, excepting only the three martyrs of the tale--Goodwin, Ruby, and Tommy (ironically the most ostensibly childlike character, who is shot for assuming the adult role of protecting Temple from "them durn fellers").

Temple's behavior, none too adult to begin with, reverts to the infantile in the face of danger, devolving into baby talk ("if bad mans hurts Temple, us'll tell

the governor's soldiers, wont us?"), childlike manner ("that round, hopeless expression of a child"), and fetal posture ("she lay ... head and all beneath the covers"). Popeye, too, with his manner of "a sullen and sick child," bears out the prediction of the doctor who treated him in childhood that "he will never be a man, properly speaking.... he will never be any older than he is now." And the characters who represent social institutions--church (the townsladies), government (Clarence Snopes), the university (Gowan Stevens), the law (Horace)--ensure the failure of those "sanctuaries" through their own childlike irresponsibility or naivete. Narcissa's dismissal of Gowan Stevens' proposal ("She told him that one child was enough for her") and Goodwin's retort to Horace concerning "law, justice, civilization" ("What sort of men have you lived with all your life? In a nursery?") reduce the ideal of the gentleman to similar childlike status, leading Horace to exclaim at last, "My Lord, sometimes I believe that we are all children." That the actual baby, Ruby's doomed child, is a victim of all this narcissism and infantile regression is the book's final variation on a Freudian theme.

If everyone was talking about Freud in New Orleans while Faulkner was writing *Soldiers' Pay*, the intellectual atmosphere in New York was still more saturated with Freudian thought when Faulkner lived there in 1928 while writing *The Sound and the Fury*. Even critics who rightly resist reducing this masterpiece to a set of Freudian formulas will readily concede that the book reverberates with Freudian possibilities. There is the general correlation of the three brothers--Benjy, Jason, and Quentin--with (respectively) id, ego, and superego. There is the motif of incest, which Faulkner says (both in the novel proper and in the Appendix added in 1946) Quentin neither desired nor committed but which, recurring earlier in *Sartoris* (Horace-Narcissa) and later

in *Absalom, Absalom!* (Bon-Judith-Henry), evokes Freud's strong and repeated assertions on the subject: e.g., 'Psychoanalytic investigations have shown beyond the possibility of a doubt that an *incestuous love-choice* is in fact the first and the regular one...' (GI, p. 220--emphasis Freud's). There is Quentin's and Jason's rendition of Freud's precept--which would shortly recur in the Darl-Jewel rivalry of *As I Lay Dying*--that a son's sense of his own worth, and hence the integration of his psyche, may depend upon his ability to compete for his mother's favor. There is the compulsive repetition of a traumatic experience, the siblings' first encounter with sex and death, in Benjy's and Quentin's sections, together with the interior monologue form that permits deeper than usual scrutiny of mental states. And perhaps most important, there recurs in this novel the complex Freudian ideas we have already observed in *Sanctuary*: narcissism, arrested development, regression.

On the individual level, Benjy appears to epitomize these concepts with his narcissus flower and love of mirrors and eternal infancy; even his capacity to reciprocate love follows the Freudian definition of infantile egotism: "A child in his earliest years ... is just the person who frequently displays such egoism in boldest relief Even the people whom he seems to love from the outset are loved in the first instance because he needs them and cannot do without them --again therefore, from motives of egoism" (GI, p. 214).

Nonetheless, Freud goes on to observe that "the child learns how to love through his own egoism," and to the extent that Benjy has invested love in his sister, brother, and father, he gets a clean bill of health according to Freud's formulation: "The capacity for the radiation of libido towards other persons . . . must, of course, be ascribed to all normal people" (GI, p. 453). It is Jason who

actually fits Freud's classic definition of narcissism, a condition which caused Freud some professional despair ("our therapeutic efforts have no success in the narcissistic neuroses.... They...are inaccessible to our efforts, not to be cured by us" [GI, p. 455]): "We become slowly accustomed to the conception that the libido, which we find attached to certain objects . . . , can also abandon these objects and set the ego itself in their place.... The name for this utilization of the libido [is] NARCISSISM" (GI, p. 422).

As in *Sanctuary*, narcissism is manifested perhaps most importantly in the extensions of the ego that comprise the group psychology of *The Sound and the Fury*. Investment of ego in the family--in Mother's case, the Bascomb family--is the central expression of group psychology in the novel, bringing forth the conviction of personal superiority through membership in the group in which Freud saw "the expression of self-love-of narcissism" (GS, p. 184). Among the "undisguised antipathies and aversions ... towards strangers" that such group feeling evokes (to recall Freud's phrasing), the Compsons disrelish their fellow men in terms of class ("*It's not for kissing I slapped you.... It's for letting it be some dam town squirt I slapped you* "), race ("*Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy? Why must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods ... ?*"), and ethnic origin ("Land of the kike home of the wop"). Indeed, the tragedy of Quentin--the originator of these three quotations--is essentially a tragedy of misguided ego extension, in that the collapse of the family group into idiocy, alcoholism, promiscuity, and narcissistic selfishness leaves the young man no ego worth preserving.

Even Caddy's promiscuity, as an instrument for breaking away from the family enclosure, seems healthy in comparison to this unwholesome group

feeling. Of the Compson children, she comes closest to following Freud's prescription for good mental health in adolescence: "From the time of puberty onward the human individual must devote himself to the great task of *freeing himself from his parents*; and only after this detachment is accomplished can he cease to be a child and so become a member of the social community" (GI, pp. 345-46-emphasis Freud's). Admittedly, Caddy's precocious sex brings grief to herself, her child, and her family; but to Freud her untimely pregnancy would be a practical misfortune and not a matter of moral turpitude, while her radiation of libido from self toward others would be, in principle, a sign of healthy growth in a young woman.

While Caddy's erotic life leads her toward adulthood and graduation out of the family circle, her three brothers remain arrested in various forms of psychic stasis: Benjy in his infantile mentality, Jason in some terminal phase of narcissistic egoism, and Quentin in his fixation on the trauma of lost innocence. This latter motif evokes perhaps the most significant Freudian affinities in this book, centering upon the concept of regression. The first phase of regression is that which Faulkner portrays through his reworking of the Eden myth: the lapse into knowledge of sex and death that Caddy initiates when, on the same day, she muddies her drawers and climbs the tree of forbidden knowledge ("Your paw you to stay out that tree") to view the funeral rites for her grandmother.

Later that day, at bedtime, Quentin's lapsarian trauma registers upon his idiot brother's consciousness: "Quentin had his face turned away. 'What are you crying for,' Caddy said ... He turned his face to the wall." From this moment to the hour of his death, this trauma of lost innocence irrupts repeatedly into Quentin's thoughts, as expressed in recurring references to Eden (e.g., "*the*

voice that breathed oer eden"--that is, God telling Adam and Eve to leave) and to "that day" ("do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your drawers").

There being no re-entry to Eden, Quentin's sole recourse is to another regression that Freud thought even more basic, the instinct that Freud defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as "the most universal tendency of all living matter--to return to the peace of the inorganic world" (GS p. 166). So pervasive and compelling is Faulkner's rendering of this theme that it would be well, before proceeding further with it, to consider in closer detail Freud's rationale for this ultimate regressive yearning. His argument begins with the premise that "all organic instincts are conservative, historically acquired, and are directed towards regression, towards reinstatement of something earlier" (GS, p. 159). That something earlier, ultimately, would have to be the inorganic material that preceded the evolutionary infusion of life into matter:

But in the last resort it must have been the evolution of our earth, and its relation to the sun, that has left its imprint on the development of organisms.... They thus present the delusive appearance of forces striving after change and progress, while they are merely endeavoring to reach an old goal by ways both old and new. This final goal of all organic striving can be stated too. It would be counter to the conservative nature of instinct if the goal of life were a state never hitherto reached. It must rather be an ancient starting point, which the living being left long ago, and to which it harks back again by all the circuitous paths of development. If we may assume as an experience admitting of no exception that everything living dies from causes within itself, and returns to the inorganic, we can only say

"The goal of all life is death," and, casting back, "The inanimate was there before the animate. " [GS, pp. 159-601]

To be sure, Freud's conception of Eros qualified this discussion. "But we must bethink ourselves: this cannot be the whole truth," he observes. "The sexual instincts...lead us to quite another point of view... [The] reproductive cells, . . . after a given time, detach themselves from the parent organism... Thus these reproductive cells operate against the death of the living substance and are able to win for it what must seem to us to be a potential immortality" (GS, pp. 160-61). But even here Freud notes that perhaps this process "only means a lengthening of the path to death."

In Faulkner's early career we find many crucial instances of this struggle between Eros and Thanatos for possession of a character's psyche. In a sense the marriage of Margaret Powers and Donald Mahon (in *Soldiers' Pay*) dramatizes this conflict, as does the marriage of Narcissa and young Bayard in *Flags in the Dust*, where Bayard's role as procreator and husband lifts him only briefly above his love of death: "Three score and ten, the Bible said. Seventy years. And he was only twenty-six. Not much more than a third through it. Hell." *Light in August* bears a similar configuration, as menopause changes Joanna's role from one of volatile erotic force to that of an agent of Thanatos (she seeks and in effect causes the deaths of both lovers). And the marriage of Addie and Anse Bundren also shows Eros losing out to the death instinct, though here the usual sex roles are reversed so that it is the male who expresses the life force of Eros ("you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two") and the woman who, following her one erotic interlude with the minister, affirms the Freudian insight that the goal of all life is death: "My father said that

the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant.”

In Faulkner's most profound and brilliant rendering of the death wish, Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury*, Eros never gets even this momentary chance to contend with his ancient adversary. So averse to sex that some classmates think him gay ("Calling Shreve my husband"), Quentin never develops to the phase of Eros versus Thanatos; instead, as the novel's Appendix characterizes him, he reserves for death itself his deepest erotic yearning: "who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves ... the waiting willing friendly tender body of his beloved. . . ."

Here in Quentin's section the Freudian longing "to return to the peace of the inorganic world" summons up the author's most lyrical effects of style, rhythm, and imagery--the latter suggestive of both Freudian dream symbolism and Jungian archetypes. "For dying we have setting out upon a *journey or traveling* by train," Freud says in his lecture "Symbolism in Dreams" (GI, p. 160)--an image that Quentin evokes not only in his last trolley ride but also in many ancillary images of transition: "the road going on under the twilight, into twilight and the sense of water peaceful and swift beyond," "looking down a long corridor of grey halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical," "The bridge ... arching slow and high into space, between silence and nothingness," "*I will sleep fast when I door Door door.*"

At the end of the journey the peace of the inorganic lures the traveler in imagery that traces back from this novel through Faulkner's earlier writings

with something like Freud's "repetition-compulsion" effect. Quentin's rendering of death in a dead language--"The peacefulest words. *Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum*"--is a recurrence from the short story "Beyond." His exact vision of joining the inorganic world--"and I may knock my bones together and together . . . in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea tumbling peacefully to the wavering tides"--is lifted almost unchanged from several repetitions of the motif in "Carcassonne" (written in 1926): "It's better to be bones knocking together to the ... tides in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea ... tumbling peacefully to the wavering echoes of the tides." And another of Quentin's inviting images of extinction--"like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly out along the cool eternal dark"--evokes the mood and tone of Horace's death wish in *Sanctuary*: "And I too; thinking how that were the only solution. Removed, cauterised out of the old and tragic flank of the world.... thinking of a gentle dark wind blowing in the long corridor of sleep; of lying beneath a low cozy roof under the long sound of the rain: the evil, the injustice, the tears."

In "Mourning and Melancholia," a work that preceded *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud offers several further insights concerning this "overthrow, psychologically very remarkable, of that instinct which constrains every living thing to cling to life" (GS, p. 128). Both mourning and melancholia, he observes, begin as a "reaction to the loss of a loved person [young Bayard in *Flags in the Dust*, Houston in *The Hamlet*], or to the loss of some abstraction . . . such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal [Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson] It may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position," Freud goes on to say; consequently, "profound mourning," involving "loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love, which would mean a replacing of the one mourned," consists of a struggle against the reality

principle: "The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object" (GS, pp. 125-26).

In healthy mourning, the "normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day," so that "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again." For the melancholiac it is precisely this liberation from grief that is unbearable to contemplate, as Quentin's father recognizes: "You cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this.... it is hard believing to think that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which matures willynilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time."

Quentin's refusal to "abandon his libido-position," to use Freud's term, is compounded by two further distinctions that Freud draws between mourning and melancholia: first, his impression "that melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss"; and second, his observation that "the melancholiac displays something else which is lacking in grief--an extraordinary fall in his self-esteem, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself which becomes poor and empty" (GS, p. 127). For Quentin these two factors, ego impoverishment and the unconscious loss of a love object, merge within his unhappy relationship with his mother, that figure whose spontaneous love is normally the main nutriment for any child's ego but who here has abandoned her son to psychic starvation: "*If I just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother.*"

The other unconscious (perhaps William James's word "subliminal" would be better) source of Quentin's "morbid pathological disposition," which is how Freud describes melancholia, relates to the theory of the superego that Freud was adumbrating in this essay. "Let us dwell for a moment on the view melancholia affords of the constitution of the ego," he says. "We see how in this condition one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, looks upon it as an object.... It is the mental faculty commonly called conscience that we are thus recognizing.... In the clinical picture of melancholia dissatisfaction with the self on moral grounds is far the most outstanding feature" (GS, p. 129).

To a conscience--or superego--sensitized to the highest ideals of the Southern Gentleman, Quentin's failure to "protect" his younger sister, his guilt toward his idiot brother ("I have sold Benjy's pasture and I can be dead in Harvard. . . tumbling peacefully to the wavering tides because Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound"), and--linking this book with *Absalom, Absalom!*--his complicity in the deaths by fire of Clytie and Henry Sutpen (who might have lived had Quentin not taken Miss Rosa out there) could easily suffice to place Quentin with Freud's melancholiac patient who "represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort, and morally despicable" (GS, p. 127).

Our final correlation between Freud and *The Sound and the Fury* involves *The Future of an Illusion*, a book that appeared in English translation the year Faulkner was writing his masterpiece in New York City (1928). Freud's thesis that "religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis" or even an infantile

regression (in that it restores the omnipotent Father of childhood Who provides for one's needs) compares with the leading motif of arrested development in *Sanctuary* and *The Sound and the Fury*. But Freud's hope that "mankind will surmount this neurotic phase, just as so many children grow out of their similar neurosis," finds no corroborating echo in Faulkner, even though he does allow himself some fun with the Southerner's image of God as not only a Father but a Gentleman, too. ("God is at least a gentleman" is stated by the Padre in "The Leg," an early story; by Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*; and by both Quentin Compson and his mother).

Indeed, Quentin's fall from childhood's grace, which involves loss of religious faith as well as knowledge of sex and death, precipitates just such an "education to reality" as Freud hoped would replace religion. Faulkner's aversion to this sort of education traces back to an early story, "Mistral," which says, "After all, there's nothing particularly profound about reality. Because when you reach reality, along about forty or fifty or sixty, you find it to be only six feet deep and eighteen feet square." It is interesting to observe how Quentin's regret for the lost faith ("down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking") contrasts with Freud's intellectual ideal in *The Future of an Illusion*:

I must contradict you when you . . . argue that men are completely unable to do without the consolation of the religious illusion, that without it they could not bear the troubles of life and the cruelties of reality. . . . They will, it is true, find themselves in a difficult situation. They will have to admit to themselves the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe; they can no longer be the

centre of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. But surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. Men cannot remain children forever; they must in the end go out into "hostile life." We may call this "*education to reality*." Need I confess to you that the sole purpose of my book is to point out the necessity for this forward step?

In *As I Lay Dying* it is Darl Bundren who inherits Quentin's burdensome education to reality, forced upon his consciousness by problems similar to Quentin's: a sister's problem pregnancy, Oedipal jealousy toward a younger brother, both financial and ideological poverty, and rupture of the one sibling relationship (with Cash) that had chiefly provided emotional security. From a Freudian point of view, Darl's clinical case of schizophrenia may be less significant than the wild laughter he emits while being carried off to the asylum. For one thing, his final monologue indicates, in its resemblance to Vardaman's style of speech ("Is that why you are laughing, Darl?. . . Darl is our brother, our brother Darl"), a regression into the childhood state as a sort of refuge from seeing too much of reality. And perhaps most important, he resorts, in his laughter, to what Freud considered the psyche's most effective defense against mental pain. "Defensive processes are the psychical correlative of the flight reflex," Freud states in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*; they "perform the task of preventing the generation of pain from internal [i.e., psychological rather than physical] sources. Humor can be regarded as the highest of these defense processes." Emily Dickinson said it earlier and better--"Mirth is the Mail of Anguish"--but Faulkner may be credited with being ahead of his time in incorporating this extreme instance of black humor in a book that

simultaneously exhibits the design of classical comedy (pointing to a wedding and a family feast), the mode of tragedy (a funeral, a psychic breakdown), and the theme of heroic affirmation (Jewel's courage, Cash's endurance) in the face of the absurd.

Of the remaining novels, perhaps *Absalom, Absalom!* furnishes the most interesting correlations between Faulkner's fiction and Freudian theory. Here Faulkner greatly intensified his earlier motif of incest, portraying in the Bon-Henry-Judith nexus something approximating the real thing, even as Freud reasserted his earlier contention with ever greater force in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: "The prohibition against an incestuous object-choice [is] perhaps the most maiming wound ever inflicted throughout the ages on the erotic life of man." Here too the narcissism of group psychology finds heightened expression in characters like Wash Jones and Rosa Coldfield. Wash's identification of himself with his aristocratic master, on the basis of the white skin they have in common, corresponds with Freud's social psychology in *The Future of an Illusion*:

The satisfaction which the ideal [Wash's image of Sutpen: "If God was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like"] offers to the participants in the culture is thus of a narcissistic nature; it rests on their pride in what has already been fully achieved ["Maybe I am not as big as he is and maybe I did not do any of the galloping. But at least I was drug along"]. . . . No doubt one is a wretched plebeian, harassed by debts and military service; but, to make up for it, one is a Roman citizen ["the Book said that all men were created in the image of God and so all men were the same in God's eyes anyway"] This

identification of the suppressed classes with the class who rules and exploits them is, however, only part of a larger whole; in spite of their hostility to them they may see in them their ideals; unless such relations of a fundamentally satisfying kind subsisted, it would be impossible to understand how a number of civilizations have survived so long in spite of the justifiable hostility of large human masses.

Working precisely in contrast to Wash Jones's fantasy of group identity, Rosa Coldfield's group consciousness provides narcissistic assurance of class distinction as well as racial superiority. "Take your hand off me, nigger!"--her address to Clytie—typically expresses the latter sentiment while the former is articulated concerning Wash Jones himself: "I had to . . . traverse those twelve miles ... beside that brute who until Ellen died was not even permitted to approach the house from the front.... Twelve miles ... I rode, beside an animal."

But Rosa's sexual identity is by no means so secure as her place in terms of class and race, and here again Freud's theories offer confirmation of Faulkner's characterization. Ostensibly, Rosa Coldfield is a sexless creature, undeveloped and infertile as a child--a fact that partly explains her resentment against Wash Jones, "that brute ... whose granddaughter was to supplant me, if not in my sister's house at least in my sister's bed to which (so they will tell you) I aspired." But though she is so sexually childlike as to lose her "fiancé" to this fifteen-year-old rival, this same child-status gives Rosa's sexual energy that peculiar undirected intensity which Freud saw as characteristic of childhood. "It is an untenable fallacy to suppose that the child has no sexual life and to assume that sexuality first makes its appearance at puberty, when the genital organs come to maturity," Freud stated. "On the contrary he has from the very

beginning a sexual life rich in content. . . ." (GI, p. 218). To Faulkner's child-woman this insight occurs in the metaphor of a flower:

and I (I was fourteen)--I will not insist on bloom, at whom no man had yet to look--nor would ever--twice, as not as child but less than even child; as not more child than woman but even as less than any female flesh. Nor do I say leaf--[or] ... any claim to green which might have ... given pause to the male predacious wasps and bees of later lust. But root and urge I do insist and claim.... Yes, urge I do: ... for who shall say what gnarled forgotten root might not bloom yet with some globed concentrate... ?

Miss Rosa's arrested sexuality in turn educes Freudian support for one of Faulkner's most notorious stylistic convolutions: the passage in which Rosa says that, in loving Charles Bon vicariously, "I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate." The two troublesome terms here, "polymath" and "androgynous," evoke two of Freud's corollaries concerning sexuality in children. "The child may be said then to be *polymorphously perverse*," Freud says (GI, p. 219) of the diffuse (non-genital) sexual sensibility such as Rosa exhibits in becoming love's polymath advocate, and her androgynous state corresponds to Freud's description--in discussing the Oedipus complex--of "the bisexuality originally present in children" (GS, p. 220). Having passed directly from childhood into old age without an intervening period of female fertility, Miss Rosa has in fact become love's androgynous advocate, with only the "root urge" of age fourteen marking a distinction between the bisexuality of childhood, when boys have high voices and girls flat chests, and of senescence, when the body shapes and glandular functions of men and women resume unisex tendencies.

The most significant correlation between Freudian thought and *Absalom, Absalom!* lies in the novel's appropriation of the psychoanalytic technique within its structure. As told to and synthesized by an outsider, Shreve--whose name implies the receiving of confession--the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* probes tentatively, in groping stages similar to an analyst's sessions, toward understanding of a guilt too profound to be apprehended in any but piecemeal fashion. Reconstructing Henry's act of fratricide in five of the book's nine chapter endings, Faulkner's narrators probe more deeply with each recurrence --like a Freudian attempt to make the unconscious conscious--until the ultimate motive of the crime is revealed at last in the penultimate chapter where ongoing racial-sexual ethos of the entire region is implicated in Henry Sutpen's decision:

"You are my brother. "

"No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry. "

In the aftermath to this climactic scene, where Shreve brings to consciousness Quentin's repressed hatred of the South ("*I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*"), we find much relevance to the closing chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a book written, Freud says, "to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the evolution of culture"--a problem complicated, he adds, by the great likelihood that (as in Quentin's case) "the sense of guilt produced by culture is not perceived as such and remains to a great extent unconscious, or comes to expression as a sort of uneasiness or discontent for which other motivations are sought."

Quentin's ambivalence toward the South touches upon Freud's speculation concerning "collective neuroses" that "many systems of civilization--or epochs of it--[may] ... have become 'neurotic' under the pressure of civilizing trends." A practical man, Freud doubted the wisdom of analyzing a whole culture thus victimized--"What would be the use of the most acute analysis of social neuroses, since no one possesses power to compel the community to adopt the therapy?"--but he predicted that "in spite of all these difficulties, we may expect that one day someone will venture upon this research into the pathology of civilized communities" (a prophecy that Faulkner surely fulfilled not only in *Absalom!* but in his other novels of bitter social protest, like *Sanctuary* and *Light in August*).

The figure of Jim Bond precipitates the white Southerner's dread and guilt in a manner of special interest from a Freudian point of view. Initially, Shreve's prediction that "in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere" appears to bear out Freud's contention that "at bottom the sense of guilt is nothing but a topographical variety of anxiety," with Bond's victory evoking both Quentin's racial guilt and its appropriate punishment. But Bond's conquest of the hemisphere, thousands of years hence, also corresponds to Freud's view of the ultimate direction of culture, subordinating individual identity to the vision of "humanity ... successfully united into one great whole," as opposed to the appalling moral anarchy and violence perpetrated by the fragmentation of humanity in our own epoch: "The fateful question of the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."

Years later, after the atomic bomb had given this question unprecedented urgency, Faulkner confronted it directly in *A Fable*. But meanwhile Jim Bond's predicted triumph at the end of *Absalom!*, with its corollary that "in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings," represents both a reversal of the exclusivist ethos in *Absalom!* (the source of all the book's suffering) and at the same time the final triumph of human culture, which, as Freud construed it, "in the service of Eros ... aims at binding together single human individuals, then families, then tribes, races, nations, into one great unity, that of humanity." That culture "can achieve this aim only by means of ... fomenting an ever-increasing sense of guilt" may prove tragic for lovers/haters of the South like Gail Hightower, Horace Benbow, Quentin ("thinking 'Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore'") and--behind them all--Faulkner himself. But in portraying guilt as his culture's major instrument for developing a higher social code, Faulkner gives assent to Freud's view that "the price of progress in civilization is paid in forfeiting happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt."

Because the theme, style, and structure of *Absalom!* comprise Faulkner's closest approximation to the psychoanalytic method, it is interesting to compare the novel with some of Freud's general strictures concerning his science. In the opening lecture of his *General Introduction* (pp. 19-22), Freud's stipulation to prospective patients uncannily resembles the kind of warning any knowledgeable reader of *Absalom!* would give a friend approaching the book for the first time: "We explain to him the difficulties of the method, its long duration, the trials and sacrifices which will be required of him; and, as to the

result, we tell him that we can make no definite promises, that success depends upon his endeavors, upon his understanding, his adaptability and his perseverance."

Defining psychoanalysis as "a method of medical treatment for those suffering from nervous disorders"--one would think of Rosa and Quentin as the two narrators most in need of this therapy--Freud goes on to point up another implicit resemblance between his professional craft and Faulkner's grand orchestration of voices and listeners: "In the psychoanalytic treatment nothing happens but an exchange of words between the patient and the physician. The patient [Rosa, Quentin] talks, tells of his past experiences and present impressions, complains, and expresses his wishes and his emotions. The physician [Shreve] listens, attempts to direct the patient's thought-processes, reminds him, forces his attention in certain directions, gives him explanations and observes the reactions of understanding or denial thus evoked." ("The patient's unenlightened relatives," Freud adds--and here we might think of an imperceptive reviewer like Clifton Fadiman, who called *Absalom!* "the most consistently boring novel by a reputable writer to come my way during the last decade"--"never omit to express their doubts of how 'mere talk can possibly cure anybody.'")

Here too Freud's theory of transference bears a general application to Faulkner's system of voices and listeners. The patient "will make the communications necessary to the analysis only under the conditions of a special affective relationship to the physician," Freud observes; "for these communications relate to all his most private thoughts and feelings, all that which as a socially independent person he must hide from others, all that which,

being foreign to his own conception of himself, he tries to conceal from himself." The Quentin-Shreve relationship seems implicated in this definition, though of course Faulkner differs from Freud in making that affective relationship a mutual investment of emotion, with listener (and reader) becoming increasingly absorbed into the narrative as it progresses. Such professional strictures aside, perhaps Freud encompasses a theory of fiction as well as of psychoanalysis in saying, "The transference arises spontaneously in all human relations. . . ; it is everywhere the especial bearer of therapeutic influences, and it works the stronger the less one knows of its presence" (GS, pp. 32-33).

Our list of Freud/Faulkner affinities will conclude with a look at *The Wild Palms* in the light of Freudian thought. The psychological wholesomeness of Charlotte's runaway romance, to begin with, is strongly vindicated by Freud's discourse against conventional morality:

If the conventional restrictions imposed by society have had a part in the privations forced upon the patient, the treatment could give him the courage and even directly advise him to defy these obstacles, and to seize satisfactions and health for himself at the cost of failing to achieve an ideal which, though highly esteemed, is after all often set at naught by the world. Health is to be won by "free living," then. [GI, p. 439]

More specifically concerning sexual morality, Freud goes on to say:

We have found it impossible to give our support to conventional sexual morality or to approve highly of the means by which society attempts to

arrange the practical problems of sexuality in life. We can demonstrate with ease that what the world calls its code of morals demands more sacrifices than it is worth, and that its behavior is neither dictated by honesty nor instituted with wisdom. [GI,p.441]

Nonetheless, Freud realized, in a manner paralleling the curve of plot in *The Wild Palms*, that the sufficiency of the lovers for one another would eventually pose an offense against group psychology, which is the basis of civilization. "Two people coming together for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, in so far as they seek for solitude, are making a demonstration against the herd instinct, the group feeling," Freud says in "Group Psychology." "The more they are in love, the more completely they suffice for each other" (GS, p. 206).

This fact, in turn, leads to "the conflict between civilization and sexuality" that Freud discusses in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a conflict "caused by the circumstance that sexual love is a relationship between two people, . . . whereas civilization is founded on relations between larger groups of persons." Even the abortion that gives *The Wild Palms* its tragic ending is somewhat adumbrated in Freud's analysis of the state of passion:

When a love-relationship is at its height no room is left for any interest in the surrounding world; the pair of lovers are sufficient unto themselves, do not even need the child they have in common to make them happy.

His sympathy for this emotional state leads Freud to "imagine that a civilized community could consist of pairs of individuals such as this, libidinally satisfied in each other, and linked to all the others by work and

common interests," but he goes on to observe that "such a desirable state of things does not exist and has never existed," owing to the way in which culture "exacts [from the lovers] a heavy toll of aim-inhibited libido in order to strengthen communities by bonds of friendship between the members."

In seeking the reasons why culture behaves in this way, Freud benefits from his scientific detachment. While Faulkner harshly disparages the deformations of law and morality that victimize his runaway lovers, implying that sexual envy plays an important role in all this, Freud looks for the ultimate causes of society's dictates, and he concludes that those causes are beyond our comprehension:

Restrictions upon sexual life are unavoidable if this object [community building] is to be attained. But we cannot see the necessity that forces culture along this path and gives rise to its antagonism to sexuality. It must be due to some disturbing influence not yet detected by us.

In ending this catalogue of Freud/Faulkner correlations, one must concede that the list could be vastly extended. So brief a work as "A Rose for Emily," for example, offers a rich brew of Oedipal fixation (Emily's father preventing her from growing out of her family circle), trauma (the death of her father), regression ("When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl"), narcissism (her total exclusion of the outer world), and sexual perversion (necrophilia). Likewise, Faulkner's social protest in *Light in August*, as illustrated in the Puritan sexual and religious code that misshapes Joe Christmas's boyhood, finds a close parallel in *The Future of an Illusion*. "Is it not true that the two main points in the programme for the education of children

today are retardation of sexual development and premature religious influence?" Freud asks, going on from there to highlight the identity crisis that --as in Faulkner's book--this warping of a child's nature exacerbates: "So long as a person's early years are influenced not only by a sexual inhibition of thought but also by a religious inhibition. . . , we cannot really tell what in fact he is like."

Concerning Ike McCaslin's celibacy in *Go Down, Moses*, Freud's theory of sexual abstinence appears irresistibly relevant. Speaking of "ways by which it is possible to endure lack of libidinal satisfaction without falling ill," Freud observes that one such way "has reached a particular significance in the development of culture. It consists in the ... adoption of a new aim--which ... can no longer be regarded as sexual, but must be called social in character. We call this process **SUBLIMATION**, by which we subscribe to the general standard which estimates social aims above sexual (ultimately selfish) aims" (GI, p. 354).

In the end, the paramount affinity between Freud and Faulkner centers upon the concept of the divided psyche. In so far as we ascribe our human vices to the laws of nature--cowardice to the survival instinct, for example, and racism to the instinct for tribal survival--we may infer that man's chief burden and glory is his struggle to contradict the laws of nature. That struggle, which produced the two ground themes Faulkner articulated in his Nobel Prize speech—"the heart in conflict with itself" and (on one side of that conflict) "the old verities of the heart"--also produced the Freudian paradigm of the ego striving to suppress the animal instincts of the id in order to realize the ideals of the superego. "One side of the personality stands for certain wishes, while

another part struggles against them and fends them off," Freud says in defining his most elementary idea: "There is no neurosis without such a conflict" (GI, p. 358).

There is no literature without such a conflict either, Faulkner maintained in telling his Nobel address audience about "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about." Inner schism, in turn, was for Freud the essence of human as distinct from animal nature. "Such a dissociation perhaps only exists in man, so that, taken all in all, his superiority over the other animals may come down to his capacity for neurosis," Freud theorizes (GI, p. 421); "his capacity for neurosis would merely be the obverse of his capacity for cultural development" (GI, p. 421). (John Updike has extended this idea to say that anyone *without* a neurosis is a mere animal: "I feel that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, is to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all-just an animal with clothes on.")

Cumulatively, the affinities between Freud's thought and Faulkner's art may appear so many-faceted as to put the artist's disclaimer--"Freud I'm not familiar with"--in the same register of doubt as his denial that he had read Joyce's *Ulysses* prior to composing *The Sound and the Fury*. But one need not argue a direct influence to say that Freudian theory illuminates the Faulkner canon. And it is possible to postulate an important reverse illumination, from artist to scientist. Perhaps, in this connection, the best way to regard the Freud/Faulkner relationship is the way Scott Fitzgerald, himself deeply affected by Freudian thought, described Racine's Freudian analogies after seeing Racine's *Phedre*: "All modern psychology is there! That man knew everything Freud discovered

later but much more clumsily."

Most readers of Faulkner will concede the presence of Freudian analogies; to concede a Marxist influence is something else again. Indeed, we may say that an additional common ground of Freud's and Faulkner's thought is their categorical rejection of the Marxist social model. A staunch individualist both in ideology and practice, Faulkner fulminated against even the mildly socialistic reforms of the New Deal, defining "the enemy of our freedom now" as the official "behind the alphabetical splatters on the doors of welfare and other bureaus of economic or industrial regimentation" who dispenses "the welfare, the relief, the compensation [as] ... nationally sponsored cash prizes for idleness and ineptitude."

For his part, Freud considered communism merely a new guise of Christianity's discreditable "command to love one's neighbor as oneself" --"nothing is so completely at variance with original human nature as this." Although sympathetic "towards the endeavors made to fight the economic inequality of men," Freud contended that "the communistic system ... is founded on an untenable illusion" because it cannot "change the nature of the [aggressive] instinct in any way" and because it contradicts the rule of nature ("nature began the injustice by the highly unequal way in which she endows individuals physically and mentally, for which there is no help").

Nonetheless, both Freud and Faulkner shared some quasi-Marxist attitudes. "At bottom society's motive is economic," Freud said (GI, p. 321), concerning the need for sexual repression in any civilization. Likewise, speaking of a

culture's "promises of a better future life," he declared it "unquestionable that an actual change in men's attitude to property would be of more help in this direction than any ethical commands." Faulkner, whose Ike McCaslin spent his life trying to change men's attitude toward property in *Go Down, Moses*, foreshadowed that theme with an image of economic exploitation in *The Hamlet* as powerful as anything in Marx's chapter "The Working Day":

It was dusk. He emerged from the bottom and looked up the slope of his meagre and sorry corn and saw it--the paintless two-room cabin with an open hallway between and a lean-to kitchen, which was not his, on which he paid rent but not taxes, paying almost as much in rent in one year as the house had cost to build; not old, yet the roof of which already leaked and the weather-stripping had already begun to rot away from the wall planks and which was just like the one he had been born in which had not belonged to his father either, and just like the one he would die in if he died indoors ... and it was just like the more than six others he had lived in since his marriage and like the twice that many more he knew he would live in before he did die and though he paid rent on this one he was unalterably convinced that his cousin [Flem Snopes] owned it and he knew that this was as near as he would ever come to owning the roof over his head.... He ... mounted through the yellow and stunted stand of his corn, yellow and stunted because he had had no money to buy fertilizer to put beneath it and owned neither the stock nor the tools to work it properly with and had had no one to help him with what he did own in order to gamble his physical strength and endurance against his body's livelihood.

Behind this portrait of Mink Snopes as proletarian victim lies, if not a direct Marxist influence, at least a decade of ideological ferment resulting in the diffusion of quasi-Marxist ideas across the American literary landscape. Some of the classic books of the time, ranging from Edmund Wilson's highbrow *To the Finland Station* (1940) to John Steinbeck's lowbrow *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), straddled a national or international setting, but a striking number of the landmark books then coming into print focused a fierce eye on the most hapless, squalid, socially impacted region within the nation, the Deep South. By the early 1940s Faulkner was writing in an intellectual atmosphere charged with the cumulative effects of books like James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *Kneel to the Rising Sun* (1935--about the time Faulkner rated Caldwell one of America's five best contemporary novelists), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941), W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941), Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944), and Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. This latter novel, widely acclaimed upon its appearance in 1940, includes speeches by a Marxist reformer that relate most tellingly to Faulkner's foregoing portrayal of Mink Snopes's economic desperation. In the following excerpt, Jake Blount's assertions must further be acknowledged as verifiable in the statistics of W. J. Cash:

. . . if you was to ask me to point out the most uncivilized area on the face of the globe I would point here.... Here. These thirteen states.... In my life I seen things that would make a man go crazy. At least one third of all Southerners live and die no better off than the lowest peasant in any European Fascist state. The average wage of a worker on a tenant farm is only seventy-three dollars per year. And mind you, that's the average! ...

just about ten cents for a full day's work. Everywhere there's pellagra and hookworm and anaemia. And just plain, pure starvation....

. . . Absentee ownership. In the village is one huge brick mill and maybe four or five hundred shanties. The houses aren't fit for human beings to live in.... Built with far less attention to needs than sties for pigs.... A young linthead begins working ... at such times as he can get himself employed. He marries. After the first child the woman must work in the mill also They buy food and clothes at a company-owned or dominated store With three or four younguns they are held down the same as if they had on chains. That is the whole principle of serfdom. Yet here in America we call ourselves free.

So it appears that in describing economic injustice Faulkner was writing with his times, rather than ahead of his time as he so often did in terms of technique, tone (the black humor in *As I Lay Dying*, for example), and theme (woman's sexual liberty in *The Wild Palms* and *Pylon*, racial equality in *Go Down, Moses* and *Intruder in the Dust*). In so far as it gives sex and money central and approximately equal status, *The Hamlet* may be regarded as Faulkner's transitional book with respect to the two chief prophets of our age, the (Freudian) sexual theme tracing back through the fifteen years of the novel's gestation to the drooling lust of Byron Snopes in the mid-1920s, while the (Marxist) economic theme looks ahead to the subversion of the property ethic in *Go Down, Moses* and later writings.

Although Faulkner never endorsed specific Marxian concepts like dialectical materialism or the surplus value theory of labor, his later books often describe

history as shaped by impersonal economic forces and relationships. Especially in those experimental run-on passages making up Faulkner's Golden Book (the Yoknapatawpha history chronicles) we find some curious analogues to Marxist thinking. Thus, in *The Bear*, he downgrades the Old Testament as "the tedious and shabby chronicle" of a violent land-grab, and he likens ancient Rome to the modern plantation as a mirror image of what Marx would call feudal capitalism, speaking of

the five hundred years during which half the known world and all it contained was chattel to one city as this plantation and all the life it contained was chattel and revokeless thrall to this commissary store and those ledgers yonder.

This concluding phrase has overtones of Marx's complaint that "No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer over, to the extent that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc."

So too in his next Golden Book fragment, the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner interprets the rush of history in terms of the economic dynamics that have changed the old Compson place into "row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individually owned demiurban bungalows" (and here he also fires a passing shot at "the owners of Chicago and New York sweatshops"). And in perhaps his finest Golden Book segment, the prose interludes of *Requiem for a Nun*, the affinities between Faulkner's and Marxist thought appear striking enough to deserve a bit of comparative analysis. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels acknowledged the awesome forces of

change unleashed within a century's time by what they termed bourgeois capitalism:

The bourgeoisie. . . has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals. . . . Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into the air...

In anchoring his vision to a local environment and product, as Marx and Engels did not, Faulkner differs from these predecessors, but his tone, pace, and perspective are otherwise comparable to theirs as he speaks of "Progress" whirling "the time, the land, the nation, the American earth . . . faster and faster toward the plunging precipice of its destiny":

That fast, that rapid: a commodity in the land now . . .--an economy: Cotton: a king: omnipotent and omnipresent: a destiny of which (obvious now) the plow and the axe had been merely the tools; not plow and axe which had effaced the wilderness, but Cotton: . . . not the rifle nor the plow which drove at last the bear and deer and panther into the last jungle fastnesses of the river bottoms, but Cotton; not the soaring cupola of the courthouse drawing people into the country, but that same white tide sweeping them in: . . . altering not just the face of the land, but the

complexion of the town too, creating its own parasitic aristocracy not only behind the columned Porticoes of the plantation houses, but in the countingrooms of merchants and bankers and the sanctums of lawyers....

Although dated a century apart, the two texts yield further parallel studies in the economic-technological theory of history. Here is Marx/Engels:

Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground--what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?

And here is Faulkner:

. . . an entire generation of farmers has vanished, not just from Yoknapatawpha's but from Mason and Dixon's earth: the self-consumer: the machine which displaced the man because the exodus of the man left no one to drive the mule ... both gone now: the [mule], to the last of the forty- and fifty- and sixty-acre hill farms inaccessible from unmarked dirt roads, the [man] to New York and Detroit and Chicago and Los Angeles ghettos, or nine out of ten of him that is, the tenth one mounting from the handles of a plow to the springless bucket seat of a tractor, dispossessing and displacing the other nine just as the tractor had dispossessed and displaced the ... mules.... still driving the tractor across the gradually diminishing fields between the long looping skeins of electric lines bringing electric

power from the Appalachian mountains, and the subterrene steel veins bringing the natural gas from the Western plains, to the little lost lonely farmhouses glittering and gleaming with automatic stoves and washing machines and television antennae....

Both texts depict a centripetal force in all this, such that (Marx says) a people become "lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier, and one customs tariff," and both Marx/Engels and Faulkner eventually reach for metaphor to show the process attaining a velocity of its own at last, beyond the control of its unsuspecting originators. "Modern bourgeois society," Marx and Engels declare, "a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells." Faulkner, more futuristic in his symbolism, depicts that frenzied thrust toward unity in the figure of a rocket launch:

One universe, one cosmos: contained in one America: one towering frantic edifice poised like a card-house over the abyss of the mortgaged generations; one boom, one peace: one swirling rocket-roar filling the glittering zenith . . . until the vast hollow sphere of his air ... is murmurous with his fears and terrors and disclaimers....

Ideologically, Faulkner's closest approach to Marxist polemics occurs in *The Bear*, whose protest against economic injustice might readily have found a niche in the original Marx/Engels canon. Wage slavery, for example, which drew Marx's contempt for the notion that workers are "free agents in the

disposal of the only property they possess--the labor of their hands and the sweat of their brows," brings forth a Faulknerian analogue about sharecropping: "ledgers [which] ... recorded the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on").

Even the Marx/Engels view of bourgeois marriage, as "the legally recognized form, the officially recognized cloak of prostitution," finds its analogue in the sexual repudiation Ike McCaslin suffers the moment his bride learns that he has given up his land for the ideal of communal ownership. (Echoing Engels's phrase, Faulkner declared Ike's bride "ethically a prostitute" in *Faulkner in the University*.) And this ideal of communal ownership of land, in turn, comprises Faulkner's nearest approach to orthodox Marxist thought. Ike's conception that man was meant "not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title forever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood" finds repeated expression in the *Communist Manifesto*: in the specific reforms this document calls for (the first in its list of ten demands being "Abolition of property in land"); in the general definition of what communism is ("the theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property"); and in the rationale for these measures ("in your existing society private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population").

In his 1888 emendation of the Communist Manifesto, Engels amplified the historical justification for communal land ownership: "Haxthausen discovered

common ownership of land in Russia, Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and ... village communities were ... the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland." Faulkner's best example of such a primitive community is the hillbilly country of Thomas Sutpen's origin in *Absalom, Absalom!*: "where he lived 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. . . ."

In addition to these Marxist affinities in Faulkner's later work, some engaging examples of earlier analogues deserve mention. In *Flags in the Dust* and *Ilium Falling* (the original Snopes manuscript), Faulkner's elegy for the Old Order (the feudal South, Marx would say) and his antipathy toward its conquerors--the bourgeois Snopeses--evoke comparison with a surprisingly sympathetic passage in Marx/Engels: "The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.'"

Likewise, Marx's disdain for "the idiocy of rural life" (nineteenth-century style, to be sure) finds artistic verification in *As I Lay Dying*, where a highlight of family adventure is going to town every year or two to eat bananas. Faulkner's defense of Whitfield's illicit romance with Addie rests essentially on this Marxist premise about rural life, according to *Faulkner in the University*: "He was the victim of his environment also, of land in which there wasn't much relief from the arduous hard work. . . . There was nothing to please the spirit--no music, no pictures, most of them couldn't read and when they could, the

books were not available, and so they took what relief they could. . . ."

There is, finally, Engels's unexpected subordination of economic theory to a larger view of life, which permits some further affinities between his writings and Faulkner's work as an artist. "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it," Engels remarks. What lies beyond economics is a conception of individual will resembling Judith Sutpen's "five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug." Indeed, Engels's statement could stand as a thematic summary of *Absalom, Absalom!*:

History is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. . . . For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed.

The ultimate force in history, as Engels goes on to describe it, turns out to be something similar to the Life Force that Henri Bergson later popularized, and to which Faulkner has stated adherence: "The ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted."

To conclude this study of Faulkner's Freudian and Marxist affinities, there remains Faulkner's treatment of "the Negro problem," which Ralph Ellison described as "that blind spot in our knowledge of society where Marx cries out

for Freud and Freud for Marx." Concerning Freud, Ellison doubtless had in mind the narcissism of group psychology, which Faulkner portrayed at its pathological worst in the castration of Joe Christmas: "Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. 'Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell,' he said." But Freud also remarked how "love for women breaks through the group ties of race, of national separation, and of the social class system" (GS, p. 207)--a concession to the powers of Eros that Faulkner dramatized in comic tones in "Red Leaves" and "A Justice" and with tragic force in the miscegenetic romances of *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses*.

The attraction of Marx to black intellectuals was a prevalent feature of twentieth-century world politics. Concerning American blacks, Marx observed in *Capital* how racial division obstructed progress by proletarians of either race: "In the United States of North America every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded."

Faulkner declared the economic basis of racism in various publications. One of his speeches attacked "[not racial] fear so much as the tawdry quality of the fear--fear not of the Negro as an individual nor even as a race, but as an economic class or stratum or factor, since what the Negro threatens is not the Southern white man's social system but the Southern white man's economic system." Even the white man's sexual fear finally reveals itself to be a flimsy rationalization for this economic motive of racism, Faulkner goes on to say: "It is our white man's shame that in our present economy the Negro must not have

economic equality; ... our triple shame that ... to justify our stand, we must becloud the issue with the bugaboo of miscegenation."

By combining the themes of sexual/racial guilt and economic injustice, *Go Down, Moses*--which Faulkner described as a book about racial relations--stands out as Faulkner's deepest venture into Ellison's blind spot in our culture "where Marx cries out for Freud and Freud for Marx." For his efforts here and in *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner earned Ellison's admiration as the writer who "has explored, perhaps more successfully than anyone else, either white or black, certain forms of Negro humanity." He explored new forms of white humanity too in changing Mink's role from Jason's accomplice in *The Sound and the Fury* ("Hit 'em, Mink!" I says ... and we went past her like a fire engine") to proletarian victim in *The Hamlet* and avenger in *The Mansion*--a making of amends that Faulkner extended to his sexual stereotypes by giving the Temple Drake of *Requiem for a Nun* and the Eula Varner of *The Town* an intelligence and dignity beyond the range of their original bitch and bovine status.

In shifting his emphasis from psychology to social-economic process between his earlier and later career--from Freud to Marx, we may say, in terms of general intellectual currents and affinities--Faulkner lost something of his original depth and complexity of characterization. With his increasingly overt call for social reform in *Go Down, Moses*, *Intruder in the Dust*, and *A Fable* (a book that recalls Marx/Engels's desire "to abolish countries and nationality"), he increasingly produced scenes and characters that are wooden, preachy, and allegorical (another word for preachy), a tendency that led Allen Tate to call *A Fable* Faulkner's only failure, and Hyatt Waggoner to describe *Requiem for a*

Nun as a work containing some of Faulkner's finest and poorest writing (the prose interludes and the play, respectively). But in his Golden Book fragments, which comprise his greatest innovation in form and his most powerful writing in his post-1940 work, Faulkner gains a prophetic breadth and majesty of vision to compensate for his flattening of character. In contrast to Hemingway, who never evolved beyond his stance and style of the 1920s and 1930s, Faulkner thereby achieved an essential revitalizing of his career and a new measure of relevance to the major intellectual currents of the age.

6.

FAULKNER'S GOD: A Jamesian Perspective

“ . . . no writing will be too successful without some conception of God.”

Though largely neglected in favor of Freud and Jung and their successors, William James's monumental synthesis of psychology, philosophy and religious inquiry remains capable of yielding valuable insights into modern literature. Even apart from James's acknowledged influence upon such literary classics as Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* and Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, and upon poets like Robert Frost and Hart Crane, James's omnivorous intellect evinces so vast a breadth and plausibility as to gather almost any serious writer under its purview. Especially for the American artist James has relevance because of the "radical empiricism" that underlay all his thinking. As a pragmatist, a pluralist, and an advocate of the varieties of experience, James shares the general affinity of the American artist for immediate experience in preference to any doctrinaire ideology by which experience may be interpreted. In his religious psychology, this empirical bent led to his announcement, concerning his upcoming Gifford lectures (later to be published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*), of two paramount objectives:

First, to defend . . . 'experience' against 'philosophy' as being the real backbone of the world's religious life ... ; and *second*, to make the reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function.

As a writer equally indifferent to orthodox creeds and theories, who in fact spoke of the leading Western faith as a fairy tale in *The Wild Palms* and *The Bear* and as a fable in his most allegorical novel (*A Fable*), William Faulkner is a writer significantly in the mold of Jamesian religious thought, one whose work bears out James's contention that the world's religious life--broadly defined—"is mankind's most important function." By correlating a number of specific Jamesian insights with Faulkner's artistic canon, we may arrive at a clearer view of Faulkner's stature as a religious writer.

I. THE SICK SOUL AND THE HEALTHY-MINDED

We begin, drawing upon *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, with James's two fundamental personality types: the healthy-minded, who can accept and enjoy their lives wholeheartedly; and the morbid-minded, whose eyes are fixed mostly upon the world's evil, dread, and suffering. Although the distinction between the two types may be partly a matter of inherent temperament, it also relates importantly to the prevailing ideology of any individual's culture. For the intelligentsia of the Western world, the ascendant ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was naturalism, a view of reality based on the assumption that nature is all that exists (there being no supernature) and that the truths about nature are revealed through the scientific method.

Somewhat prophetically, William James postulated an inevitable link between this ideology and the Sick Soul condition. "The purely naturalistic look at life, however enthusiastically it may begin, is sure to end in sadness," James

asserted, pointing to the obvious fact that nature does not fulfill the deepest needs of the human creature: "We need a life not correlated with death, a health not liable to illness, a kind of good that will not perish, a good in fact that flies beyond the Goods of nature" (121). By the time William Faulkner launched his career in the 1920s, the Sick Soul, complete with James's "pathological melancholy" (124) and his triad of anxieties ("the vanity of mortal things; the sense of sin; the fear of the universe"--136), was firmly fixed at the center of the literary scene, publicly magnified through the poetry of Eliot and fiction of Hemingway.

Faulkner's own expressions of morbid-mindedness, though expressly indebted to forerunners like Housman and Swinburne and the French Symbolists, clearly show the influence of Eliot's thought and even of Eliot's diction and imagery. His sickest of Sick Souls, Quentin Compson, borrows Gerontion's image of absorption into eternity ("gull tilting into the wind"), the Sybil's death wish and dead language ("*Fui. Non sum*"), Phlebas's death by water, and the metaphor of the Hollow Men ("men are ... dolls stuffed with sawdust"), to cite only a few obvious instances.

Faulkner's other Sick Souls often display a similar Eliotic flair, as we see in Horace Benbow's version of "April is the cruellest month" ("Spring does [last]. You'd almost think there was some purpose to it") and in Addie Bundren's version of the same passage, describing unsatisfied sexual desire: "In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild. . . ."

That other pathetically Sick Soul, Darl Bundren, also bespeaks his author's debt to *The Hollow Men*: "How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant ... in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls." And a section of *Pylon* carries the chapter title "Lovesong of J. A. Prufrock." Faulkner's original coinages in the Sick Soul temperament appear fully comparable in worth to any of these borrowings; one thinks of Quentin's watch as "the mausoleum of all hope and desire" or of Addie Bundren's rumination that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time." Even Dewey Dell's silent cry of the heart--"I believe in God, God. I believe in God"--manifests the Sick Soul condition, in response to which, James says, we develop a religious sensibility: "Here is the real core of the religious problem: Help! Help!" (137).

In William James's religious psychology, the usual answer to the Soul's dilemma is conversion, or psychic rebirth into a new ideology marked by a new, more hopeful view of existence. In Faulkner we occasionally witness this phenomenon, as in Hightower's transformation after helping Lena give birth in *Light in August*, but most of Faulkner's Sick Souls lack any resources that might permit conversion. Some, like Bayard Sartoris in *Flags the Dust* and Houston in *The Hamlet*, have suffered too traumatic a loss ever to countenance healing; others--intellectual types like Quentin and his father or Addie and Darl Bundren--are trapped beyond any possibility of escape within James's "crisis of belief" category:

Some persons ... never are, and possibly never could be, converted.... Their religious faculties may be checked in their natural tendency to expand, by beliefs about the world that are inhibitive, the pessimistic and

materialistic beliefs, for example, within which so many good souls ... find themselves nowadays, as it were, frozen. (168)

In so far as they represent "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself"--the only thing worth writing about," Faulkner said in his Nobel Prize address--Faulkner's characterizations bear out William James's definition of the Sick Soul as a "divided self," marked by "a certain discordancy ... in the native temperament, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution" (140-41). Faulkner's irremediably Sick Souls--like Quentin Compson, torn between love and hate of the South in *Absalom!*, and Darl Bundren, rendered clinically schizophrenic at the end of *As I Lay Dying*--have no power to resolve that inner schism, thus suffering a sickness unto death or madness.

Interestingly, Faulkner's other terminal case of the Sick Soul state, Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*, might represent a conversion of sorts--Faulkner's most successful instance, at that--if we accept Gavin Stevens as his more healthy-minded reincarnation in *Light in August*, liberated by his bachelorhood from Horace's dreadful women and capable of coping with the world's evil as Horace was not. It seems very likely that Horace's early retirement from the Faulkner canon and his immediate replacement by Gavin Stevens has this rationale behind it.

Profound and moving as his portraits of the Sick Soul are, it bespeaks Faulkner's greatness of scope that James's religion of healthy-mindedness also found ample expression in his works. Typically the effect is that of a split-level novel, with a Lena Grove or Cora Tull or Narcissa Benbow serenely inhabiting the upper sunlit level while Joe Christmas and Addie Bundren and Bayard

Sartoris sink terminally into nether darkness. For Faulkner the primary barrier to a healthy-minded view of life was the prevalence in the Western world of two rival ideologies, both of them profoundly morbid-minded: naturalism--which we have already touched upon--and Christianity, considered as a supernaturalist religion.

Denial of this world in favor of the otherworldly made Christianity, together with Buddhism, rank as a religion "in which the pessimistic elements are best developed," in William James's judgment (139). Faulkner's agreement on this point, and his disapproval of any faith that prefers another world to this one, repeatedly surfaces in his fiction. In *Light in August* Faulkner portrays Hightower's withdrawal from life in terms of a Buddha image ("Hightower sits again in the attitude of the eastern idol"); and he likewise excoriates Christianity not only for its perversions and hypocrisies in local practice but for its doctrinal negation of this life and this world. Thus he refers to Catholic worship as "a eunuch chanting in a language "[we do] not even need to not understand," and he describes Protestant worship as a grand death wish: "The music has still a quality stern implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demand in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music."

(Faulkner's much greater tolerance for black Christianity—one thinks of Dilsey's deeply moving Easter service--may be explained in terms of William James's notion of racial temperament. James noted (117) that "the Latin races"--like Faulkner's black Christians generally--appear less obsessed with evil in their religious worship than do Germanic races," who would be largely consanguine with Faulkner's white people: "Undoubtedly the northern tone in

religion has inclined to the more ... pessimistic persuasion.")

The inability of either naturalism or Christianity to sustain a healthy-minded view of life evidently led Faulkner to believe that he rightly belonged to an earlier age. "Mr. Percy--like alas! how many of us"--suffered the misfortune of having been born out of his time," Faulkner said in a review published when he was just twenty-three years old. The time Faulkner yearned after is indicated in the same review, which praises "the frank pagan beauty worship of the past" that he sees in Percy's poems. Again, William James offers a confirming insight. In his chapter on "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness," James (speaking of Whitman) traces the origin of this attitude back to its source in classical antiquity. The word "pagan," he says, "sometimes ... means a Greek or Roman with his own peculiar religious consciousness"; or, as nowadays, it "means sometimes the mere natural animal man without a sense of sin" (81-82).

Writing in the late Victorian period, James chose not to be too explicit about the sexual implications of this freedom from a sense of sin. He does, however, discreetly observe that "This integrity of the instinctive reactions, this freedom from all moral sophistry and strain, gives ... dignity to ancient pagan feeling." As though in contrast to this innocent, healthy-minded pagan hedonism, James notably imbues his Sick Souls with a lethal measure of Puritan sexual revulsion: Joe Christmas vomits after learning that women menstruate in *Light in August*; Quentin Compson jumps deep into the hogwallow, "the mud yellowed up to my waist stinking," after his petting session with Natalie in *The Sound and the Fury*; in the same spirit he pictures how "a man mutilated himself ... with a razor, sitting in a ditch . . . flinging them backward over his shoulder ... the jerked skein of blood"; and Darl Bundren's closing monologue in *As I Lay*

Dying contributes a graphic image of sexual revulsion to Darl's foaming madness: "Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face.... Is that why you are laughing, Darl?" Clearly, the religion of healthy-mindedness would have little chance to prosper in the face of this Puritan heritage, which traces back into the Old Testament, even if all other causes of the Sick Soul condition were to vanish. So Faulkner had all the more reason to juxtapose against the morbid-minded present time the serene cheerful figures of pagan antiquity.

Faulkner's early writings display a nearly obsessive abundance of pseudo-pagan motifs. Above all, that quintessence of pagan healthy-mindedness, the faun, dominated his imagination as an object of regret and envy. His first published work, apart from college writing, was "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faun" (*The New Republic*, 6 August 1919), which was followed in 1924 by *The Marble Faun*, a pastoral cycle of nineteen poems, and "The Faun," a poem published in *The Double Dealer* (April 1925). During this period he also wrote reviews praising Conrad Aiken for "completing a cycle back to the Greeks," as his other favorite poets--Keats, Swinburne, the French Symbolists, Housman (a classics professor)--had also been doing in some fashion. In his prose work, too, the faun increasingly engaged his attention over a span of about twenty years, at first tangentially in a piece like "The Hill" (1922)--"Here, in the dusk, nymphs and fauns might riot to a shrilling of thin pipes"--and in the end climactically in *The Wild Palms* (1939).

Leading up to Charlotte Rittenmeyer's assumption of the faun's role are a series of intermediate faun figures who evince, in William James's phrase, "sanguine healthy-mindedness . . . with its strange power of living in the

moment" (p. 121). Faulkner's early short story "Black Music" describes a man (an artist figure, at that) who, being "fortune's favorite," is "chosen of the gods" to live one day in his life as a faun--a condition he later justifies theologically "Because I know I ain't as evil to God as I guess I look to a lot of folks." In *Soldiers' Pay* Faulkner plays off the soul-sickness of the dying soldier against the healthy-mindedness of another faun figure, Januarius Jones, whose "face was a round mirror before which fauns and nymphs might have wantoned when the world was young." In his love of the classics ("a fellow of Latin in a small college"), his hedonistic creed ("A man could very well spend all his time eating and sleeping and procreating, Jones believed"), his appearance (corpulent, with "eyes [that] were clear and yellow, obscene and old in sin as a goat's"), and his guiltless if ineffectual promiscuity, Jones represents a quantum leap forward in Faulkner's use of the theme, this animated flesh being so much more engaging than the marble fauns of his poetic creation.

Mosquitoes sets a troop of fauns in pursuit of its nymph figure Jenny, ranging from the men on the bus who "watched her with the moist abjectness of hounds" to Talliaferro, the would-be faun who opens the novel saying, "The sex instinct ... is quite strong in me." The singular success of Pete in this amorous competition owes much to his superior faun-status, he alone having the indispensable "queer golden eyes" and Italian ancestry (which is juxtaposed against the "cold mad northern people with icewater in their veins" elsewhere in the novel).

In *Flags in the Dust* Horace Benbow, living with Narcissa "in a golden Arcadian drowse," displays a strong trace of the faun's role in his free sexual play with another man's wife and--after she has become his betrothed--with this

woman's sister, who resembles "a tiger watching him with yellow and lazy contemplation." (His decline into the Sick Soul state comes later, a result of his marriage and his encounter with the "Christians" of *Sanctuary*.) *Light in August* likewise connects its most serenely healthy-minded character, Lena Grove, with Greek antiquity; and the book's title, Faulkner said, refers to "that luminous lambent quality of an older light than ours," a light that seems "as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times. It might have been fauns and satyrs and the gods. . . ."

Doubtless Faulkner's most compelling treatment of this cultural conflict between healthy-minded pagan and morbid-minded Christian occurs in two books written in close succession, according to the Blotner biography: *The Wild Palms* and *The Hamlet*. *The Hamlet*'s comic treatment pits Labove, the grimly ascetic Puritan, in losing battle against Eula, whose "entire appearance suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysic times--honey in sunlight and bursting grapes ... beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof." In *The Wild Palms* the neo-pagan lovers fall tragically on the losing side of the same battle, the sexless Puritan doctor and his Medusa wife prevailing at the last in the name of law, respectability, and Christian morality.

Here we follow, in effect, the afternoon, twilight, and death of a faun in so far as Charlotte represents Faulkner's last and most serious treatment of that obsessive motif. With her manly ways--her nickname Charley, her men's pants (not ladies' slacks), her sexual aggressiveness and moral freedom--she is better suited than Harry for this role; and her "queer hard yellow eyes" are an obvious throwback to Faulkner's other major faun figure, Januarius Jones of *Soldiers' Pay* with his "fathomless yellow stare." Charlotte's "blank feral eyes," we

notice, deepen in their faun-like yellowness as she draws closer to sexual adventure. In sizing up Harry when they first meet each other at the party, "her eyes were not hazel but yellow, like a cat's, ... intent beyond mere boldness"; and when they meet for their first love tryst a few days later, she "came swiftly out of the cab.... her eyes extraordinarily yellow."

In Charlotte's case, this faun's role is mere prologue to something deeper and more moving: a commitment to passion that is doomed simply because, as Faulkner put it in another context, "no matter how fine anything is, it can't endure, because once it stops, abandons motion, it is dead." Charlotte herself recognizes this built-in evanescence when she says, "We have so little time. In twenty years I can't any more and in fifty years we'll both be dead." But her tale remains Faulkner's grandest expression of pagan healthy-mindedness, nonetheless. It is healthy-minded for finding transcendent meaning in the present moment, through Harry's "proof on the body of love and of passion and of life that he is not dead," and through Charlotte's demand that "it's got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies." And it is pagan because it sustains itself upon that great cult of classical antiquity, the worship of Aphrodite.

Harry realizes that this worship has attained religious sanctity for him when he thinks, "*I have accepted completely her ideas about love, I look upon love with the same boundless faith . . . as the Mississippi or Louisiana countryman, converted last week at a camp-meeting revival, looks upon religion.*" And he further realizes that, to Charlotte, he is merely an agent or instrument in the worship of love, a needed accessory: "So it's not me you believe in, put trust in; it's love. . . . Not just me, any man." [She answers him:] "Yes. It's love." Even

so, Harry finds this sacrifice of himself to the goddess preferable to the life without passion offered by the modern world: "If Venus returned [today] she would be a soiled man in a subway lavatory with a palm full of French post-cards." And in the end this book approximates the tragic grandeur of the classical model, as Thomas Mann, for example, defined it: "The myth is the legitimization of life; only through it and in it does life find self-awareness, sanction, consecration. Cleopatra fulfilled her Aphrodite character even unto death--and can one live and die more significantly or worthily than in the celebration of the myth?"

Charlotte, too, fulfilled her Aphrodite character even unto death, Faulkner's last a greatest expression of that neopagan theme. With Charlotte's death, the religion of healthy-mindedness "with strange power of living in the moment" fades away in Faulkner's work, the reason being, as William James said, that "healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality" (137). Though powerfully drawn to the theme of Eros in both comic and tragic manifestations (one thinks of Ike Snopes and his cow, of Joanna Burden, of the aviatrix in *Pylon*), Faulkner moved ahead all the while with his larger moral vision. For Faulkner the way of coping with the evil portion of reality lay neither in yielding to the Sick Soul condition nor escaping it in some transcendent vital passion. It lay rather in the most important element of his religious psychology, and that which displays his greatest affinity with William James, the concept of saintliness.

II. SAINTLINESS

Of all the effects of religious consciousness, good behavior is undoubtedly

the dullest. Virtuous character has ever been a most difficult theme for the literary artist to make credible and interesting, and even writers as pietistic as Dante and Milton wrote their most compelling verse about inhabitants of the infernal regions. Yet, for all its fascination with evil, serious literature has never departed radically from the heroic view of life that gave literature its birth in the epics and sacred writ of antiquity. Which is to say that, after three millennia of gradually changing mores, inclination and duty remain the axis and circumference of the human squirrel cage, to cite Faulkner's metaphor in *Mosquitoes*.

What does change is not the heroic impulse in literature but the terms of its conception. In his chapter "The Value of Saintliness," William James observed that "Nothing is more striking than the secular alteration that goes on in the moral and religious tone of men, as their insight into nature and their social relationships progressively develop" (257). For James and for modern religious thinkers at large, the otherworldly fixation of medieval sainthood has lost relevance to the need for social responsibility in this world: "To-day, rightly or wrongly, helpfulness in general human affairs is, in consequence of one of those secular mutations in moral sentiment of which I spoke, deemed an essential element of worth in character; and to be of some public or private use is also reckoned as a species of divine service" (275).

For Faulkner this secular mutation in religious consciousness required a redefinition of Christianity. In the classroom at the University of Virginia, when asked "What [do] you consider your relationship to the Christian religion?" Faulkner answered, "Within my own rights I feel that I'm a good Christian." In his *Paris Review* interview, however, he extended the communion of the faith to

include all of humanity. "No one is without Christianity, if we agree on what we mean by the word," Faulkner said. "It is every individual's code of behavior by means of which he makes himself a better human being than his nature wants to be, if he followed his nature only."

Essentially, this war between Christianity and one's nature produced the two central topics of Faulkner's work, according to his Nobel Prize address, the "heart in conflict with itself" ("the only thing worth writing about") and "the old verities of the heart." This latter theme in particular, which Faulkner restated emphatically in his foreword to *The Faulkner Reader* in 1953, links Faulkner to William James's concept of saintliness, for it defines Faulkner's purpose in literature as the old heroic one of uplifting man's 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."

Faulkner's earlier critics had fair reason for failing to grasp his heroic purpose. His first book was an elegaic exhalation of poems in a Keatsian tone and a French Symbolist manner; hence his title, *The Marble Faun*, after Mallarme's *L'Après-Midi d'un Faun*. His first important fiction, coming like a cosmic Big Bang in the later 1920s, dealt on one side with the collapse of the Old South and on the other with the rise of the Snopeses--neither theme evincing any ostensible heroic possibilities.

But the heroic spirit *was* there, if you knew where to look for it. Faulkner learned very early where not to look for it, in the proud but decaying aristocratic lineage of the Sartorises and Benbows and Compsons. Doomed and emasculated, self-pitying and self-absorbed, these old families had dwindled to

a shadow of their former splendor, leaving the true verities to reside in the opposite end of the social spectrum: in poor whites, Negroes, old maids, criminals, and outcasts of every description. Faulkner even extended this principle into the animal kingdom, elevating a little mongrel dog to heroic status in *The Bear* and rendering an epic digression in *Sartoris* (aka *Flags in the Dust*) on behalf of the noble mule.

But before Faulkner could produce his masterful exponents of courage both physical and moral, it was necessary for him to stop--in William James's words--"steeping myself in pure ancestral blindness." That is to say, the lingering hold of romantic nihilism had to be exorcised so as to clear the eyes for a new perception. For Faulkner the exorcism occurs in the closing paragraphs of *Sartoris* (or *Flags in the Dust*), which describe the aristocratic tradition as "a game outmoded and played with pawns shaped too late and to an old dead pattern."

Yet, the hold of the Sartoris legend (based on Faulkner family history) is strong with "a glamorous fatality, like silver pennons downrushing at sunset, or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux," and the Blotner biography confirms the elegiac mood of this early novel--a mood that carried over into *The Sound and the Fury*: ". . . nothing served but that I try by main strength to recreate between the covers of a book the world ... I was already preparing to lose and regret. . . ." What happened to Faulkner, turning him from the aristocracies to the likes of Wash Jones as an exemplar of the old verities, was a sort of revelation surprisingly parallel to that which William James attested in "What Makes a Life Significant":

I perceived, by a flash of insight, that I had been steeping myself in pure ancestral blindness.... Wishing for heroism and the spectacle of human nature on the rack, I had never noticed the great fields of heroism lying round about me, I had failed to see it present and alive. I could only think of it as dead and embalmed, labelled and costumed, as it is in the pages of romance. And yet there it was before me in the daily lives of the laboring classes....

As I awoke to all this unidealized heroic life around me, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes; and a wave of sympathy greater than anything I had ever before felt with the common life of common men began to fill my soul. It began to seem as if virtue with horny hands and dirty skin were the only virtue genuine and vital enough to take account of. Every other virtue poses; none is absolutely unconscious and simple, and unexpectant of decoration or recognition, like this.

In James's reading experience, only one author had satisfactorily captured this modern version of a heroic view of life: "If any of you have been readers of Tolstoi, you will see that I passed into a vein of feeling similar to his, with its . . . deification of the bravery, patience, kindness, and dumbness [a fair precursor of Faulkner's *Old Verities*] of the unconscious natural man." And this reference, in turn, leads James to a portentous rhetorical question: "Where now is our Tolstoi, I said, to bring the truth of all this home to our American bosoms, fill us with a better insight, and wean us away from that spurious literary romanticism on which our wretched culture--as it calls itself--is fed?" In 1899, the year this essay was published, William James could not have imagined that "our Tolstoy" was a two-year-old child just beginning to acquire grammatical forms, with a

Mississippi accent. But James did envision the literary program that in fact Faulkner's whole canon of fiction would some day realize:

Divinity lies all about us, and culture is too hide-bound to even suspect the fact.... And there I rested on that day, with a sense of widening of vision, and with what is surely fair to call an increase of religious insight into life. In God's eyes the differences of social position, of intellect, of culture, of cleanliness, of dress, which different men exhibit, and . . . on which they pin their pride, must be so small as practically quite to vanish; and all that should remain is the common fact that here we are, a countless multitude of vessels of life, each of us pent in peculiar difficulties, with which we must struggle by using whatever of fortitude and goodness we can summon up. The exercise of the courage, patience, and kindness, must be the significant portion of the whole business.... At this rate, the deepest human life is everywhere, is eternal.

A better paraphrase of Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, and of the fiction which the speech tried to crystallize, can hardly be attempted; nor can a clearer picture of either Faulkner's or James's concept of saintliness. The result, in both cases, is an inversion of the social order, so that the last shall be first; the lowest, highest; and vice versa. "Thus," James puts it--but it could as well be Faulkner--"are men's lives leveled up as well as leveled down--leveled up in their common inner meaning, leveled down in their outer gloriousness and show."

This James-Faulkner correlation shows up clearly in any roll call of Faulknerian heroes. A few of them, like Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary* and

Hightower in *Light in August*, are from the upper classes, but their heroism consists mainly in wanting to live by the code of a Christian gentleman; because they lack the crucial virtue, fortitude (the difference between wishing and willing, James says--212), they are ineffectual, like Quentin Compson and his father. If a few of their class are effectual, like Miss Jenny in *Sartoris* and Ike McCaslin in *The Bear*, that is because these characters have renounced James's ancestral blindness in judging their patrician legacy.

Meanwhile, Faulkner invested his low-life people with royal dignity, on a broad scale. In Faulkner's bitterest novel, *Sanctuary*, the moral putrefaction of conventional society is set off against the nobility of its criminal heroes, the prostitute Ruby Lamar and the murderer-moonshiner-exconvict Lee Goodwin. Faulkner's stage-managing of Goodwin's first entrance into the novel is a minor masterpiece in the mode of moral vignette:

As she was doing that [Ruby is setting the table], Goodwin entered.... He was leading by the arm an old man with a long white beard stained about the mouth. Benbow watched Goodwin seat the old man in a chair, where he sat obediently with that tentative and abject eagerness of a man who has but one pleasure left and whom the world can reach only through one sense, for he was both blind and deaf: a short man with a bald skull and a round, fullfleshed, rosy face in which his cataracted eyes looked like two clots of phlegm. Benbow watched him take a filthy rag from his pocket and regurgitate into the rag an almost colorless wad of what had once been chewing tobacco.... Then Benbow quit looking. When the meal was over, Goodwin led the old man out again. Benbow watched the two of them pass out the door and heard them go up the hall.

Faulkner's patrician witness duly absorbs moral strength and rectitude from his social inferiors: their example of care and ethical courage would do much to stimulate Benbow's own higher instincts during Goodwin's trial for murder.

That this sort of care "without stint or calculation of recompense" is a measure of saintliness is evident from Faulkner's obsessive repetition of the motif, often with religious overtones. Charles Bon's placing of his cloak around Henry ("Yes. Take it. . . ' Bon puts the cloak about Henry") is a nice case in point, occurring just after Henry has decided he will have to kill "the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister." Bon's mishandling of Judith's photograph, as his only way of saying "*I was no good; do not grieve for me*"; his defense of kept women ("No, not whores. Sometimes I believe that they are the only true chaste women. . . in America"); his refusal to renounce his octoroon wife and child so as to marry Judith; and his immolation at the age of thirty-three by Henry's hand--all this bespeaks a Christ-like quality befitting the man's name, Charles Good.

Faulkner's whole series of Christ figures, from the idiot Benjy to the private in *A Fable*, may be seen as having two essential functions. One is the role of scapegoat, in the style of the messianic profile of *Isaiah* 53--he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Characters like Benjy and Charles Bon and Joe Christmas serve that role powerfully enough to verify Faulkner's role as prophet, thundering damnation upon a godless society. But the other role, perhaps having an even deeper power, is the Jamesian one of affirming the efficacy and vicariousness of all suffering. No definition of saintliness, however orthodox or secular, can have more importance than this

"dark truth," as one of James's most unforgettable testimonies describes it:

I realized that in that half hour under ether I had served God more distinctly and purely than I had ever done in my life before.... I was the means of his achieving and revealing something, I know not what or to whom, and that, to the exact extent of my capacity for suffering.

While regaining consciousness, I wondered why, since I had gone so deep, I had seen nothing of what the saints call the *love* of God, nothing but his relentlessness. And then I heard an answer, which I could just catch, saying, 'Knowledge and Love are One, and the *measure* is suffering'-I give the words as they came to me.... If I had to formulate a few of the things I then caught a glimpse of, they would run somewhat as follows:

The eternal necessity of suffering and its eternal vicariousness. The veiled and incommunicable nature of the worst sufferings; ... finally, the excess of what the suffering 'seer' or genius pays over what his generation gains. . . . [p. 302n]

According to the Blotner biography, Faulkner's own role as a vicariously "suffering seer or genius" had much to do with both his art and his drinking problem. During his stay in New York in the spring of 1953, an especially serious alcoholic interlude led to nine sessions with Dr. S. Bernard Wortis, chairman of the psychiatry department at the New York State University medical school, who found in Faulkner "an intense responsiveness which was different from that of ordinary people. He has such receptiveness for others that their problems hurt him." Life must have been very painful for a man this

sensitive, Wortis concluded, so that "obviously, his alcoholism was a narcotizing device . . . [for] a man built to suffer, to be unhappy and to make his contribution partly because of this."

In Faulkner's work the vicariousness of suffering is indicated in the first and lowliest of all his Christ figures, the idiot Benjy whose wail "might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets." Or again, Benjy as the Man of Sorrows "bellowed slowly, abjectly, without tears; the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun." Such suffering may have seemed minimally efficacious in Faulkner's earlier fiction, especially that produced during his black mood of the early 1930s wherein the scapegoats--Joe Christmas, Lee Goodwin, and Charles Bon--predominated. But Faulkner's later Christ figures represent a quantum leap into the higher ranges of saintliness such that suffering becomes both vicarious and redemptive. Three figures in particular--Ike McCaslin in *The Bear*, Nancy Mannigoe in *Requiem for a Nun*, and the corporal in *A Fable*--evince a kind of religious psychology that represents, despite the apparent futility of their sacrifice, an avant-garde of the human conscience, willing to suffer ignominy as fool or criminal in their own time so as to remedy the future.

Nancy Mannigoe, as the simplest and most orthodox Christian of these portrayals, accepts her suffering--as "nigger, dopefiend, whore" and condemned murderess--with blind faith:

STEVENS "The salvation of the world is in man's suffering. Is that it?"

NANCY "Yes, Sir."

STEVENS "How?"

NANCY "I don't know."

Her assertions in the execution chamber, "I believes" and "Trust in Him," reflect William James's observation that the "abandonment of self-responsibility seems to be the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinguished from moral practice.... Christians who have it ... are never anxious about the future, nor worry about the outcome of the day" (229).

About the corporal in *A Fable* two Jamesian statements may apply. First, James observes in "The Value of Saintliness" that "history shows us that, as a rule, religious geniuses attract disciples, and produce groups of sympathizers" (261)--enough sympathizers in Faulkner's novel to shut down the entire French war machine during the great mutiny of 1917. The other statement, rendered world famous now by the bloodshed of this turbulent century, is James's comment in the same chapter that "What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war" (284).

In the pacifism of the corporal, Faulkner portrays not only the moral equivalent but the negation of war, a negation made necessary in Faulkner's judgment from the moment the news reached home about Hiroshima. (In his Nobel Prize speech, Faulkner complained that the question of "When will I be blown up?" had displaced the old verities of the heart; yet *A Fable* was written largely in the light of that question.) But in view of the general disappointment with *A Fable*--Allen Tate described it as its author's only failure--perhaps Faulkner's best conceived moral equivalent of war is that which William James himself went on to identify just after introducing the phrase:

I have often thought that in the old monkish poverty-worship ... there might be something like that moral equivalent of war which we are seeking.... And when one sees the way in which wealth-getting enters as an ideal into the very bone and marrow of our generation, one wonders whether a revival of the belief that poverty is a worthy religious vocation may not be "the transformation of military courage," and the spiritual reform which our time stands most in need of. [p. 284]

For Faulkner, Ike McCaslin became that Jamesian monk of poverty, renouncing his title to the ancestral estate in favor of a "communal anonymity of brotherhood" with respect to all land ownership. To his cousin who tries to persuade him of the folly of this move (and, later, to Ike's bride, who reacts much as Tolstoy's wife did on a similar occasion), Ike McCaslin already fits James's initial definition of sainthood: "These devotees have often laid their course so differently from other men that, judging them by worldly law, we might be tempted to call them monstrous aberrations from the path of nature" (208).

Ike's vision of human history as a series of dispossessions--from Eden to Canaan to Rome to the barbarians who "snarled ... over the old world's gnawed bones, blasphemous in His name"--parallels James's view that "the desire to gain wealth and the fear to lose it are our chief breeders of cowardice and propagators of corruption" (285). Writing *The Bear* in the early years of World War II, Faulkner had more reason than James did to conceive this view of all human history as a bloody struggle over control of land, and all the more reason therefore to espouse McCaslin's ideal of poverty. But James must have had some similar presentiment in saying, "It is certain that the prevalent fear of

poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers." We would have to surmise that the biblical insight about the love of money being the root of all evil is here updated to have something like a Marxist tone.

So James's moral equivalent of war is a freely chosen life of poverty. "Poverty," he says, is "felt at all times and under all creeds as one adornment of a saintly life.... Hindu fakirs, Buddhist monks, and Mohammed dervishes unite with Jesuits and Franciscans in idealizing poverty as the loftiest individual state." Neither Faulkner nor James, however, had a practical interest in these orthodox traditions concerning poverty. As pragmatists, their faces are set toward the future; and Ike McCaslin thereby serves as another model for the Jamesian principle of the changing of the gods. James's statement, we may remember, was that "Nothing is more striking than the secular alteration that goes on in the moral and religious tone of men, as their insight into nature and their social arrangements progressively develop. After an interval ... the mental climate proves unfavorable to notions of the deity which at an earlier date were perfectly satisfactory."

For Ike McCaslin this interior alchemy eventually required him to revise Holy Writ. Though reared as a fundamentalist Protestant, like any other man his class and region, and though he supports his case by citing scripture, Ike thus denies the truth of the Bible with respect to two crucial parts of his cousin's argument--the Bible's endorsement of landowning ("the tedious and shabby chronicle of His chosen sprung from Abraham") and of black slavery ("The sons of Ham. You who quote the Book: the sons of Ham").

Concerning this latter point, it may be recalled that Wash Jones rested his identity--like millions of Southern whites--very largely on the account in Genesis 9 concerning the curse on Ham: "Niggers . . . the Bible said had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin." But as a Faulknerian saint, Ike stands ready to amend God's Word in line with the verities of the heart: "There are some things He said in the Book, and some things reported of Him that He did not say. And I know what you will say now: That if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which is truth? You don't need to choose. The heart already knows."

There remains one final affinity between Faulkner's Ike McCaslin and William James's profile of saintliness. In "The Value of Saintliness" James refers to the saints as "torchbearers.... the tip of the wedge, the clearers of the darkness." "The world is not yet with them," James says, "so they often seem in the midst of the world's affairs to be preposterous." Yet, he continues, "the general function of his charity in social evolution is vital and essential. If things are ever to move upward, some one must be ready to take the first step, and assume the risk of it.... This practical proof that worldly wisdom may be safely transcended is the saint's magic gift to mankind.... He is an effective fermenter of goodness, a slow transmuter of the earthly into a more heavenly order" (277-278).

While this statement could be applied to almost any saintly portrait, Ike McCaslin would have to be its prime exemplar in the Faulknerian canon. In his debate with his cousin, Ike himself appears to conceive of his mission in this way:

[the cousin speaks first] "'Chosen, I suppose (I will concede it) out of all your time by Him.... And it took you fourteen years to reach that point.... And you are just one. How long, then? How long?' and he [Ike] 'It will be long. I have never said otherwise. But it will be all right because they [the blacks] will endure. . . .

We return in this fashion to the concept of courage, fortitude, or endurance as, among the old verities of the heart, the root virtue that makes of the others a reality. Among Faulkner's other books one might cite many a figure we have slighted--Cash Bundren for his endurance of pain in *As I Lay Dying*, Bayard Sartoris for breaking the revenge cycle in *The Unvanquished*, Mink Snopes for saintliness will be yet another figure with biblical overtones, Harry Wilbourne's tenacity in the Snopes trilogy--but our final Faulknerian portrait in *The Wild Palms*.

The biblical reference in this instance is to the title--perhaps Faulkner's finest ever--which his editor forced Faulkner to discard on the grounds (surely fallacious) that it might stir up anti-Semitic feelings. That title, *If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem*, refers to one of the most passionate of all the Psalms, number 137, composed during the Hebrews' captivity in Babylon. So far as any of the Israelites knew, Jerusalem had been sacked and laid waste forever; none of them in any case could ever hope to see it again. In the circumstances, to remember Jerusalem was to be suffused in grief and despair: "We wept, when we remembered Zion." This experience of memory as painful torment--another *Waste Land* motif: "April is the cruellest month.... [for] mixing/Memory and desire"--had led Horace Benbow to want to be dipped in Lethe every ten years; but as Horace admits in *Sanctuary*, "I lack courage: that was left out of me."

Harry Wilbourne, we might say, is Horace's opposite number. Like the Psalmist in Babylon, Harry in his prison cell chooses to remember Jerusalem--that fair time when he and his sweetheart lived their idyll together. Sentenced to fifty years at hard labor for performing the abortion that killed her, he rejects both the proffered escape--because there is no place he can escape her memory--and suicide, because his death, though sweet, would leave Jerusalem unremembered: "*When she became not then half of memory became not and if I become not then all of memory will cease to be.*" The Psalmist's will to suffer, to remember his paradise lost and even to "prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy," now becomes transmuted into one of Faulkner's most profound theme statements: "*Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief.*"

Charlotte's prophetic utterance about this theme--"that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it"--bears a striking resemblance to the Jamesian insight we have already cited, that "Knowledge and Love are One, and the *measure* is suffering." This fusion between knowing and loving and suffering becomes the substance of Harry's closing vision, first of his old age--"*the wheezing lungs, the troublesome guts incapable of pleasure*"--and then of his choice to remember: "But after all memory could live in the old wheezing entrails. . . *Not could. Will. I want to.... Because if memory exists outside of the flesh it wont be memory because it wont know what it remembers. . . .*" Because every investment of love--in a parent, child, friend, sweetheart, spouse, or pet--must involve loss and grief eventually, this emotional stance must be the most universally applicable among all Faulkner's heroic profiles,. excepting only the person of total emotional independence, such as Jason Compson.

For William James the religious function of literature was particularly efficacious in the area of the moral imagination: "Mankind is susceptible and suggestible in opposite directions, and the rivalry of influences is unsleeping. The saintly and the worldly ideal pursue their feud in literature as much as in real life" (287). The people of any age, James knew, look to literature as well as to history, both sacred and secular, for characters to emulate and ideals to live by, finding therein "a succession of such examples as ... [will make us] feel encouraged and uplifted and washed in better moral air" (207).

That Faulkner shared this purpose may have seemed inconceivable to early critics like the reviewers who called *Sanctuary* "putrid" and "a prime example of American sadism." But viewed now as a whole, Faulkner's career reveals a deepening commitment to the theme that William James called "The Value of Saintliness." Threading forth from that period of flux between Sick Soul and healthy-minded in his earlier work, the heroism in common life finally emerged as the prevailing theme of Faulkner's art, based on the Jamesian insight that "the deepest human life is everywhere, is eternal." With reference to Faulkner's figures of saintliness, a final Jamesian assertion seems appropriate: "The solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing--the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special [Ike McCaslin's ideal of poverty, Harry Wilbourne remembering Jerusalem], with some fidelity, courage, and endurance."

III. MYSTICISM

In beginning his discourse on mysticism, William James spoke of this part of

The Varieties of Religious Experience as "the vital chapter from which the other chapters get their light" (292). Probably the closest Faulkner ever came to claiming any mystic significance in his work was his phrase calling the interchapters in *Requiem for a Nun* "something that was a little mystical." Given a Jamesian breadth of definition, however, the term "mysticism" may have more relevance to Faulkner's art than Faulkner's modest phrase might indicate. In the end, Faulkner must be included among those writers who confirm James's judgment that "We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility" (295).

To amplify this subject, Faulkner's rather cryptic statements about God provide a good starting point. "I think that no writing will be too successful without some conception of God," Faulkner told his audience at the University of Virginia, proceeding thereupon to rank Proust, Stendhal, and Camus above Sartre on the grounds "That Sartre has denied God." Faulkner further rendered the judgment, surely inaccurate on any grounds other than theological, that Hemingway's "last book, *The Old Man and the Sea*, was the best because he discovered something which he had never found before, which was God." By the way of explanation, Faulkner commented that

Hemingway for years ... didn't deny God but he assumed, he functioned in a vacuum until his last book. In this last book there was--God made the great fish, God made the old man that had to catch the fish, God made the shark that had to eat the fish, and God loved all of them, and I think that Hemingway's work will get better, . . . but I think that Sartre will never be better.

Who, then, was Faulkner's God? This theological reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*, dated 16 May 1957, confirms that He was the same God Faulkner had defined some thirty years beforehand, in the words of the wisest and kindest clergyman he ever invented, the rector of his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*: "God is circumstance, Joe. God is in this life. We know nothing about the next." From an orthodox point of view, saying that God is circumstance, that He is in this life, is to reduce the divine to a mundane level. From a freethinking point of view, however—such as James's Pragmatism espouses--an opposite process may occur, investing our worldly reality with divine significance. (Like Faulkner's rector, William James grounded his theology in this life, regarding a next life as unknowable (395): "I have said nothing in my lectures about immortality or the belief therein, for to me it seems a secondary point ... Facts, I think, are yet lacking to prove 'spirit-return.'")

As the grand design of his career unfolded, the effect of this theology upon Faulkner's art became gradually evident through his choice of form and subject. If one seriously believes that God is in this life, then the subjects of time and nature and history may disclose at least some quasi-mystical potentiality; and if one maintains that God is circumstance, then an epic treatment of the artist's material becomes necessary--an ever-expanding scope that brings more and more of circumstance under the writer's purview, giving us as much as the human imagination (replacing faith as our primary religious faculty) can conceive of the God's-eye view in the end.

This breadth of view may, in turn, evoke the emotive--the truly mystical--dimension of religious consciousness, that which in *Soldiers' Pay* and *The*

Sound and the Fury Faulkner related to the Negroes, in their "shabby church with its canting travesty of a spire.... and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the dark race. It was nothing, it was everything; then it swelled to an ecstasy.... Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. All the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere."

Faulkner's chief answer to that longing was the most ambitious, far-reaching, and long-lasting effort of his literary career, the never completed (never completable) Golden Book, following which, he said, he could break the pencil and retire. Begun as a genealogy of his Yoknapatawpha people in 1932, it eventually expanded to include--as Professor James B. Meriwether has shown--the experimental part 4 of *The Bear* (1942), the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* (1946), the "something a little mystical" in *Requiem for a Nun* (1950), and the similarly written passages in *The Town* and *The Mansion* (1957, 1959). Here Faulkner tries to get the whole sweep of time and the human struggle into a single sentence, tying the individual's "*Listen, stranger; this was myself--this was I*" to the whole of reality (the "successive overlapping generations"; "that thin durable continuity"; the great web of circumstance; God).

Perhaps the best analogue is Hart Crane, making "a curveship" from "us lowliest ... to God" out of his belief that "the true idea of God is ... the identification of yourself with *all of life*" (emphasis Crane's). But William James also offers corroborations, quoting testimony about "what prayer really is: to return from the solitude of individuation into the consciousness of unity with all that is," and evoking (James quotes Walt Whitman here)

an intuition of the absolute balance, in time and space, of the whole of this multifariousness, this revel of fools, and . . . general unsettledness, we call *the world*; a soul-sight of that ... unseen thread which holds the whole congeries of things, all history and time, and all events, however trivial, however momentous, like a leashed dog in the hand of the hunter. (304).

Within his Golden Book writings, Faulkner's effort to transmit a Whitmanesque "soul-sight" of the "unseen thread" connecting "all history and time, and all events" culminated in his three *Requiem for a Nun* interchapters. In these hundred pages Faulkner strives to "redeem the time"--to use T. S. Eliot's phrase--by bearing out Gavin Stevens's contention (in the play proper) that "The past is never dead. It's not even past"; that, ultimately, "There's no such thing as past." If the imagination of past reality is intense enough--or "provided there is will enough," as Faulkner puts it in the following passage from "The Jail"--a townsman may find "Oneness with Something, somewhere" through apprehending

the images, the panorama not only of the town but of its days and years . . . , filled not only with its mutation and change from a haltingplace: to a community: to a village: to a town, but with the shapes and motions, the gestures of passion and hope and travail and endurance, of the men and women and children in their successive overlapping generations ... long vanished and replaced and again replaced, as when you stand say alone in a dim and empty room and believe, hypnotised beneath the vast weight of man's incredible and enduring Was, that perhaps by turning your head aside you will see from the corner of your eye the turn of a moving limb--a gleam of crinoline, a laced wrist, perhaps even a Cavalier plume--who

knows? provided there is will enough, perhaps even the face itself three hundred years after it was dust . . . saying no to death across twelve generations. . . .

It may be objected that Faulkner seldom displays the ecstatic mood traditionally associated with mystic experience, which may be true enough; but he does, in the *style* of his Golden Book fragments, attain a pitch of emotional intensity, of passion, that vindicates seriously his claim to "something a little mystical," evoking as well William James's judgment that "lyric poetry [lyric prose, in Faulkner's case] and music are alive and significant only in proportion as they fetch these vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit" (p. 295).

That style, it should be said, is not limited to the Golden Book. It appears wherever Faulkner struggles most mightily to "fetch these vague vistas of a life continuous with our own," as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where ghosts of that life seem most "beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding": "we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters ... in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection ... ; we see dimly ... the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting." Here too we glimpse something of Whitman's "unseen thread which holds the whole congeries of things." But the Golden Book comes closest to the mystic's cosmic consciousness, tracing that unseen thread from here and now (Jackson, Mississippi, A.D. 1950) back through the overlapping generations to the original Logos ("Beginning Was the Word") and the creation of life:

that one seethe one spawn one mother-womb, one furious tumescence, father-mother-one ... already fissionating in one boiling moil of litter from the celestial experimental Work Bench; that one spawning crawl and creep printing with three-toed mastodonic tracks the steamy-green swaddling clothes of the coal and the oil, above which the pea-brained reptilian heads curved the heavy leatherflapped air.

Faulkner's God now appears to be the deity behind the Life Force; and in fact Faulkner did tell a French interviewer in 1952 that he conceived "a deity very close to Bergson's"--"not ... a personified or a mechanical God, but a God who is the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests both in eternity and in the now." But before Faulkner could reach this level of "cosmic consciousness," he had to work his way through a Jamesian dilemma. "At bottom the whole concern of both morality and religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe," James says. "Do we accept it only in part and grudgingly, or heartily and altogether? Shall our protests against certain things in it be radical and unforgiving, or shall we think that, even with evil, there are ways of living that must lead to good?" (49).

In his earlier career, Faulkner's Sick Soul types emanate James's "radical and unforgiving" response to reality; their "protests against certain things in it" culminate in suicidal despair. To Bayard Sartoris and Quentin Compson and his father, and to Joe Christmas and Houston (in *The Hamlet*), God--Who is still defined as Circumstance, the Whole of Reality--appears as "the dark diceman," "the Player," and "the prime maniacal Risibility," that sinister force of destiny responsible, through its governance of history, for the world's sufferings: the collapse of the Old South, Joe's negritude, Ike Snopes's idiocy.

Once he worked past the black mood of the early 1930s, however--the period of *Sanctuary* and *Light in August* and the origin of *Absalom!*--Faulkner began to develop, in figures like Ike McCaslin and Nancy Mannigoe, a position notably like that of William James in "Pragmatism and Religion" and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. "Who knows whether the faithfulness of individuals here below to their own poor over-beliefs may not actually help God in turn to be more effectively faithful to his own greater tasks?" (391), James speculates; and again: "Suppose that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying, 'I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own level best.'" Ike McCaslin, "Chosen, I suppose (I will concede it) out of all your time by Him" (his cousin says), sees his life of lonely exemplary rectitude in this fashion. And Nancy Mannigoe's belief--sustained by Gavin Stevens--that "The salvation of the world is in man's suffering" is another version of "each several agent doing its level best."

As one of these agents, doing *his* level best, Faulkner conceived of his life work as a mission meriting religious analogies. The artist, he thought, is (like the orthodox priest or prophet) a point of contact between the divine and the human. Art, in being "man's most supreme expression," clearly subserves Faulkner's Bergsonian "God who is the most complete expression of mankind, a God who rests both in eternity and in the now." And, in this way, another analogy to religious orthodoxy ensues "[Art] is also the salvation of mankind."

To catch and transmit the saving vision, in turn, requires transcendent powers of insight and language comparable to those associated with the

tradition of mysticism. In his early career Faulkner rendered his hope and desire for this kind of power in imagery of supernatural fire like an artistic Pentecost, his artist's persona in "Carcassonne" riding *"the buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire ... right off into the high heaven of the world,"* and his writer in *Mosquitoes* awaiting "a time when it [his language] will be invested with a something not of this life, this world, at all. It's a kind of fire, you know." His sense that he *had* caught the divine fire came late in his career, as he told Joan Williams: "Now I realize for the first time what an amazing gift I had.... I don't know why God ... selected me to be the vessel."

Among the vessel's contents, so far as Faulkner's mysticism is concerned, lay a final priestly service: reconciling our living flesh to its mortality. This ultimate expression of the religious imagination was not easily come by, for Faulkner typically maintained toward death a stance of defiance, so much so that he defined the writer's final purpose in literature as that of "saying No to death." But he also said that the heart in conflict with itself is the only thing worth writing about, and one such conflict must consist of this defiance of death juxtaposed against our need to reconcile ourselves to this part of reality.

Innately this reconciliation is a religious theme, associated with the earliest origins of religion, and it is a theme most likely to summon up whatever a writer possesses of mystic consciousness. When in this mood, Faulkner saw death too as a "Oneness with Something, somewhere"--a transition from individual consciousness into union with the whole of Nature, conceived not as inanimate matter but as a living presence and process that goes on and on.

He was sometimes capable of startling originality in depicting this transformation, saying on the occasion of his mother's death that "Maybe each of us will become some sort of radio wave." But in his most lyrical and beautiful rendering of the experience he resorted, with original effect, to the age-old metaphor of death as sleep. In the following passages drawn from the early, middle, and late periods of his career we find that metaphor expanding with Whitmanesque efficacy to approximate, surely, what William James described as "the mystic state of consciousness. *It is on the whole pantheistic and optimistic*" (323), representing movement "from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from a smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from an unrest to a rest"--a "reconciling, unifying" state (319).

The first passage of this mystic import is the closing stanza of *A Green Bough*, Faulkner's cycle of forty-four poems published in 1933, which foresees his death as a sort of union with the whole of living Nature:

**But I shall sleep, for where is any death
While in these blue hills slumbrous overhead
I'm rooted like a tree? Though I be dead,
This earth that holds me fast will find me breath.**

A decade later, in the part of *Go Down, Moses* called "The Old People," Faulkner used McCaslin Edmonds to explain how the earth finds "breath" for the creatures it absorbs into its surface. The occasion of this vitalistic vision is Ike's glimpse of the phantom buck that Sam Fathers and Edmonds had also seen a generation earlier:

"Why not?" McCaslin said. "Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back into it.... And all that must be somewhere; all that could not have been invented and created just to be thrown away. . . . And the earth dont want to just keep things, hoard them; it wants to use them again. Look at the seed, the acorns, at what happens even to carrion when you try to bury it: it refuses too, seethes and struggles too until it reaches light and air again, hunting the sun still. And they--" the boy ... could see sky where the scoured and icy stars glittered"--they dont want it, need it. Besides, what would it want, itself, knocking about out there, when it never had enough time about the earth as it was, when there is plenty of room about the earth. . . ."

"But we want them," the boy said. "We want them too. There is plenty of room for us and them too."

"That's right," McCaslin said. "Suppose they dont have substance cant cast a shadow--"

"But I saw it!" the boy cried. "I saw him!"

"Steady," McCaslin said I know you did. So did L"

Later in *Go Down, Moses*, near the end of "The Bear," Faulkner conceives of death in yet stronger pantheistic and vitalistic tones. Here Ike's visit to the grave in the forest produces a Jamesian "reconciling, unifying" vision that

embraces hunter and hunted not into extinction but into a larger, living pulse of creation:

... quitting the knoll which was no abode of the dead because there was no death, not Lion and not Sam: not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undifferentiated of every myriad part, leaf and twig and particle, air and sun and rain and dew and night, acorn oak and leaf and acorn again, dark and dawn again in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one....

Our final passage is that which terminates the Yoknapatawpha series as a major enterprise (*The Reivers* being a minor addendum). Joseph Blotner, who appears to have studied every scrap of Faulkneriana, describes this passage --about Mink Snopes falling asleep at the end of *The Mansion* (1959)--as "one of the best set pieces he ever wrote," and traces its origin through three earlier versions dating back to 1922, which means that this vignette enclosed Faulkner's writing career at beginning and end. Here Faulkner reconciles his "No to death" (Mink fighting off the clutch of gravity) with the sense of death's benevolence.

Like death, Mink's sleep is passage out of time into eternity, out of individual consciousness into a larger collective identity, out of this life's anxiety and travail into final ease and serenity. This passage too, written in Faulkner's characteristic Golden Book style, may pass as "something a little mystical":

. . . it seemed to him he could feel the Mink Snopes that had had to spend

so much of his life just having unnecessary bother and trouble, beginning to creep, seep, flow easy as sleeping . . . following all the little grass blades and tiny roots, the little holes the worms made, down and down into the ground already full of the folks that had the trouble but were free now, ... leaving the folks themselves easy now, all mixed and jumbled up comfortable and easy so wouldn't nobody know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave, right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recording--Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim.

To unify Helen and the bishops, representative of conflicting ideologies back in the days of Faulkner's faun/Christian dichotomy, is itself a fine gesture of reconciliation among the specters making up this final collective identity. But to implant the weasel-eyed visage of Mink Snopes, with its one-inch spread between the hairline and the single elongated eyebrow, eternally beside the face of Trojan Helen is to wring some ultimate efficacy from Faulkner's broadly annealing eschatology. The long human recording offers very few images as generous as that, or as redemptive.

To conclude, Faulkner's achievement as a religious writer may be best understood through its correlations to the broad-reaching, empirical system of William James. The stages in Faulkner's career correspond largely to the Jamesian categories: his early works juxtaposing a series of Sick Souls against healthy-minded fauns and pagans, his middle career displaying an increasing

devotion to the profile of saintliness, and his final years falling under the "somewhat mystical" sway of the Golden Book and its grasp for the whole of reality. The final effect of his religious thought is to confirm William James's "invincible" belief that, "although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function."

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